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Soli Deo Gloria. To God alone be the glory.
Introduction

1.1 Preliminary: Research Motivation

This research is motivated by a debate in Malaysia, my home country, regarding the Christian use of the Arabic term “Allāh” to refer to the triune God. The tension came to a head in 2013, when the Malaysian government forbade non-Muslims to use the term “Allāh,” on the grounds that a non-Muslim use of the word would confuse the absolute oneness of “Allāh” that is taught in the Qur’ān. On a theological level, this political decision raises systematic questions regarding the relationship of unity and plurality in the concept of God. To begin to answer this question, we will explore the works of four selected thinkers from Muslim and Christian history (al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin), who

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2 The debate arising from the Malaysian Government’s stated policy (e.g., the Alkitab [Bahasa Malaysia translation of the Bible] has been prohibited in Christian publications by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 13 May 1982) and the highest court (dated: 23 June 2013) to prohibit Christians from using the word “Allāh” to refer to the One High God; the apparent rationale for the ban was that the term is used by the Muslim-majority nation. See “Malaysia Allah dispute: Top court rejects challenge,” BBC.com, June 23, 2014, under http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27970565 (accessed June 23, 2014). Indeed, “Allāh” is the standard Arabic word for “The God,” and has been used by Arab Christians since pre-Islamic times. In Malaysia, “Allāh” is used by both Muslims and Bumiputra Christians as a reference to God. Bumiputra Christians, who make up 60 per cent of Malaysia’s Christian population, use Bahasa Malaysia (the national language of Malaysia) in the church. The term “Allāh” is used in the Alkitab; i.e., Het H. Evangelium Beschreven Door Mattheum - Euangelium Ulkadus bersuratnja kapada Mattheum [the Gospel of Matthew] was first translated into Malay language by Albert Cornelius Ruyl [a Dutch translator] (Enkhuysen: Jan Jacobz, 1629), e.g., “Allāh Ibrahimī, Allāh Isakī, daan Allāh Iacubi” (the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob) in Matt. 22:32, and the first edition of the entire Malay Bible was printed in 1731 and 1733, in Roman characters. See also Thomas Hartwell Horne, M. A. An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: E. Littell, 1825), pp. 278-279 and Daud Soesilo, “Celebrating 400 years of Ruyl’s Malay Translation of Matthew’s Gospel.” The Bible Translator, vol. 64, no. 2 (August 2013): pp. 173-184, as well as in the liturgy, prayer, worship, sermons and religious education of the Bumiputra Christian community. This situation is not unique to Malaysia, however, as Soesilo also observed: “Allāh” is used by both Muslims and Christians to describe “God” in Indonesia, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and other parts of the Arabic-speaking world (see Soesilo, “Celebrating 400 years,” p. 178). In addition, “Allāh” is the name of God in the Old Arabic Bible and the Modern Arabic Bible (Today’s Arabic Version).

3 The effort of making a comparative study in its own tradition is enlightened by Sidney H. Griffith, “Doing Christian Theology in Islamic Terms: Unity and Trinity of God in Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” in Thinking the Divine in Interreligious Encount, ed. Norbert Hintersteiner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012): pp. 147-174. With regard to achieving a better understanding of the terminology used by Christian and Muslim philosophers/theologians in their versions of the doctrine of transcendental unity or divine simplicity (hereinafter cited as doctrine of divine simplicity, divine unity, or Tawhīd), this research mainly refers to Griffith’s methodology. Both the Islamic and Christian philosophical and theological terminologies are provided in parenthesis. This research chooses to use the Arabic or Latin terms/phrases purely due to the reason of genuineness. I am aware that this decision brings some awkwardness in linguistic fluidity, but it is a consequence I am willing to accept in order to ground the selected thinkers more solidly within their own particular contexts.

4 I am aware of the various creedal formulations held by these two traditions; these thinkers are selected as they are identified as the most important figures of Islam and Christianity. See Jaroslav Pelikan, The
conceptually link the oneness of God (divine simplicity/Tawḥīd)\(^5\) with the plurality of His attributes (ṣifāt).\(^6\) In addition, we will explore how the Christian thinkers in particular relate the oneness of God’s essence with the plurality of three divine Persons\(^7\) in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. This research will focus on how these scholars reconcile the apparent paradox of “one essence” and “many attributes” in God. These central questions are inseparable from the teachings of Christian theology and Islamic dialectical theology (kalām), particularly with respect to the doctrine of divine simplicity,—namely one of the most crucial doctrines for assuring that Christianity and Islam are monotheistic.\(^8\) In what follows, I will outline the goal, content, approach and method of this study.

### 1.2 Research Goal and Question

The controversy between Muslims and Christians in Malaysia raises the issue of their respective understanding of God’s oneness or simplicity. It shows that there is indeed a practical need to study the issue of divine simplicity/Tawḥīd in relation to the divine attributes in each of these faiths, in order to clarify their theological similarities and differences. We will see that, in spite of their traditional and doctrinal differences, they share a common aim of understanding and worshipping a simple God through proper theological discourses.\(^9\) The intention of this study is not to seek a solution to the problem of the divine

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\(^5\) The Arabic term “Tawḥīd” (lit., ‘faith in divine unity’) deserves fuller and independent treatment. How it is to be reconciled with God’s attributes will be discussed later, see Chapter Two (Al-Ghazālī) and Chapter Three (Ibn Rushd) for the distinctive explanations of this term.

\(^6\) For a detailed discussion of the Arabic term “ṣifāt” (attributes), and its relevance to divine unity, see Chapter Two, p. 10 n6.

\(^7\) Translating persona as ‘person’ became common in both the Old and Modern English translations of the Summa Contra Gentiles and the Institutes. However, the English word ‘person’ seems to represent the meaning of persona rather poorly. Thus, throughout this research, whenever ‘persona’ is employed with reference to the three divine Persons of the Trinity, I use ‘Person’ or ‘Persons’ (italics mine). As far as I am concerned no other term can probably be closer to Tertullian’s usage of the Latin term persona.

\(^8\) See René Munnik, “Chapter Six: The Unity of God,” in Boundaries of Monotheism: Interdisciplinary Exploration Into the Foundations of Western Monotheism, eds. Haardt, Maaike de and Anne-Marie Korte (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 106. It has been said that the use and the meaning of the term “monotheism” is controversial. What does “monotheism” mean when modern thinkers (such as Immanuel Kant’s Critik der reinen Vernunft [The Critique of Pure Reason], trans. F. Max Muller [1787; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922]) described their ideas of “oneness,” or unity? Rene Munnik points out that the modern thinkers’ version of divine simplicity is in dilemma, in the sense that it is meant to “exclude other ideas/attributes about God,” and apparently within a theoretical “one-versus-many conception.” In other words, the major paradox that arises from this modern version of divine simplicity is the relation of “the One and the Many.” Apparently, to accept the modern idea of “One” is to exclude the multiplicity (“Many”) of divine attributes (God’s attributes) and the persons (triune God). Moreover, it is hard to imagine why non-modern theologians, such as the medieval thinkers (Thomas, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd) and a Reformation thinker (Calvin) should have considered themselves to be the exponents. With regard to “monotheism,” although the oneness of God is in the center of their metaphysical and theological reflections, this term was nevertheless meant to indicate the Muslims’ and Christians’ understanding of God as “the One without others.”

\(^9\) It is commonly asked whether all monotheistic traditions worship the same Allāh. Some (e.g., Albert Sundararaj Walters and Miroslav Volf) answered that in terms of intention, yes. But in terms of knowledge/predicates of the subject (i.e., Allāh/God), there are differences. In terms of intention, a Muslim and a Christian are like two travelers who intend to go to one same destination, namely to know and worship the One and True God. See Albert Sundararaj Walters, We Believe In One God? Reflections on the Trinity in the Malaysian Context (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2012) and Miroslav Volf, “Allāh and the Trinity: A Christian Response to Muslim,” The Christian Century, vol. 128, no. 5 (March 2011): pp. 20-24.
unity, but simply to clarify the similarities and differences in the selected thinkers’ formulations of the relationship between essence and attributes in God.

This essay will proceed by concentrating on the following main research question: How do al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and John Calvin conceptually link the oneness of God (Tawḥīd) with the plurality of His attributes (ṣifāt)? Additionally, how do Christian thinkers relate the oneness of God’s essence with the plurality of three divine Persons? Among the numerous recent scholarly works on the doctrine of divine unity, only a few have examined and compared the theology of the four thinkers I have selected, and few invoke them as defenders of divine unity/Tawḥīd. It is hoped that this investigation may contribute to the ongoing interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

The current discussion cannot be understood without investigating these classical thinkers. Al-Ghazālī (448-505 A.H./1056-1111 CE)11 and Ibn Rushd (520-595/1126-1198) are valuable defenders of the Islamic side. Thomas (1225-1274) and Calvin (1509-1564) provide insight into the Christian perspective. Allow me to explain why these four representatives have been chosen for this study.

### 1.2.1 Why al-Ghazālī and Averroës/Ibn Rushd:

Abū Ḥāmid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazālī of Ṭabarān-Ṭūs (known to the Latin west as Algazel) was an eminent Persian doctor/theologian of orthodoxy (‘ālim) is considered one of the greatest articulators and defenders of Islamic theology.12 He held an academic position at the Nizāmīyya seminary (Madrasa) in Nishāpūr and is one of the most prominent and influential theologians (‘īlamā'), philosophers (jalāṣīfū), jurists (fuqahā'), and mystics (Sufis) of Sunni Islam in the ‘Abbasid period (750-1250).13 He is vital to our study because he is undoubtedly the most influential theologian and religious-legal scholar in the history of Islamic thought, particularly in Sunni-majority countries.14

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10 Most scholars have studied these selected thinkers individually. See Fadlou Albert Shehadi, *Ghazali’s Unique Unknowable God* (Leiden: Brill, 1964); Ilona Kock, “The Debate about God’s Simplicity: Reason and Spirit in the Eighth Discussion of al-Ghazālī’s Tahfūt al-falāṣīfā and Ibn Rushd’s Tahfūt at-Tahfūt,” in ed. A.T. Tymieniecka, *Reason, Spirit and the Sacral in the New Enlightenment: Islamic Metaphysics Revived and Recent Phenomenology of Life* (New Hampshire: The World Institute for Advanced Phenomenological Research and Learning, 2011), pp. 157-183; Peter Weigel, *Aquinas on Simplicity: An Investigation into the Foundations of his Philosophical Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008); Brannon Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). But only a few made a philosophical-theological comparison between Islam and Christianity. See also David Burrell’s *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn Sina, Maimonides, and Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); Roger Arnaldez’s *Three Messengers for one God*, trans. Gerald W. Schlabach, with Mary Louise Gude and David Burrell (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that these scholars do not focus on comparing the doctrine of divine simplicity between Islam and Christianity. In other words, there is no study devoted to pursue the goal of this present research, which has become an increasingly important and urgent need, especially in the context of Malaysia.15

11 When two sets of dates are given and separated by a slash mark (as shown here), the first set refers to the dates of the Anno Hegirae ([A.H.], i.e., the Islamic Calendar that starts with the Prophet’s flight to Medina. The second set refers to the calendar system Before the Common (BCE) / Current Era (CE). Hereinafter, this research follows the dating system of BCE / CE unless otherwise specified.


13 References to “Islam” in the following pages refer to the Sunni denomination of Islam, unless otherwise specified.

The selection of Abūl-Walid Muḥammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Ruṣhd (better known in the West as Averroës), as one of the thinkers to speak of divine simplicity, was due to the fact that he was an important interrogator of al-Ghazālī. Ibn Ruṣhd was also one of the most significant Andalusian philosophers of Islam in the medieval era. Ibn Ruṣhd was a Spanish Muslim philosopher and scholar of Islamic scholastic thought (kalām), who also held a judicial position in Muslim Spain. Admittedly, the selected works of Ibn Ruṣhd are only a very small part of his diverse and rich production, but these works weigh much more than others do on the subject of Allāh’s simplicity.

1.2.2 Why Thomas and Calvin:

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), a Dominican friar, has been called the “prince of the scholastics” and the “angelic doctor”, due to his synthesis of philosophy and theology. Thomas is selected for this study because he is one of the most prominent Christian theologians of the medieval scholastic period (particularly the High Scholastic Period). Although Thomas’ articulation of divine simplicity is one of many, since his theology forms the foundation of Roman Catholic theology throughout the late medieval and modern period, it is undeniable that Thomas’ works provide significant insights for us to understand the formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Christianity. The works of Thomas are of profound importance to the church of today, and it is easy to identify the profound impact of Thomas’ works on both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches of Malaysia.

Malaysia, and its Shi’a Muslim community,” CASS (The Center for Academic Shi’a Studies), (25 February, 2014), p. 10, available online at http://www.shiaresource.com/conferences/TheShiaMuslimsofMalaysia.pdf (accessed May 25, 2015). Also, see U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, “International Religious Freedom Report for 2013: Malaysia,” available online at http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/reports/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222145 (accessed May 25, 2015). In the Muslim world Malaysia, Sunni Islam (also known as Ahli Sunnah Wal-Jammah) is the largest denomination (or more precisely, the only denomination). The Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) considers the Shi’a teachings as a “deviant” interpretation of Islam. Even though there are significant figures of Shi’a Muslims in Malaysia (according to the estimation of the local press Utusan Malaysia [Aug. 6, 2011], there are about 2,000 to 250,000 Shi’a Muslims in Malaysia), they are prohibited from exercising their faith publicly.

16 See the various subjects of Ibn Rushd’s work: (i) Commentary on the works of Aristotle, (ii) the relationship between philosophy and Qu’ran in the art of interpretation, and (iii) the refutation of al-Ghazālī’s criticism on divine attributes in Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 274-302.
19 Weigel states that although “Aquinas is aware of considerable historical precedent for this significant emphasis on simplicity,” “he does not just borrow from his sources—Scripture, Aristotle, Church Fathers, Arabic and Jewish philosophers, divergent strains of Platonism, scores of contemporaries and near contemporaries—he rethinks them” (Aquinas on Simplicity, pp. 20, 35).
20 The Catholics make up about 3.56% of the total population in Malaysia; the continuity and discontinuity of Thomas’ thought can be seen in a discussion of the Doctrine of God in Thomas’ Roman Catholic and Protestant successors in Malaysia. See John Duns Scotus, Treatise on God as First Principle, a Latin text and English translation of the De primo principio by Allan B. Wolter (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982),4.4-8; Tommaso de Vio Cajetan, Commentary on Being and Essence, trans. Lottie H. Kendzierski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1964); Francis Turretin, Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Vol. I, 3, Q7
John Calvin (1509-1564) was a leading pastor, professor, theologian, and biblical scholar of the Swiss Reformation, centered in Geneva. It is undeniable that Calvin’s works provide significant insights into the formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Protestant Christianity. The works of Calvin are of profound importance to the church of today. We can easily identify the great impact of Calvin’s works on today’s Protestant Church and Western Society. Calvin’s influence on the Reformed Churches of South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, and China can be demonstrated by the translation of Calvin’s Institutes into Chinese, Indonesian, Korean, and Japanese. Calvin’s concept of God is much discussed in recent secondary literature. However, Calvin’s actual arguments for divine simplicity in light of his exegetical works and various versions of the Institutes have received very little attention. As Richard A. Muller states:

Readers of the Institutes might easily gain the impression that Calvin had little interest in discussion of the divine essence and attributes. Quite to the contrary, Calvin elaborates at considerable length on these issues in his commentaries—most notably in the Harmony of the Last Four Books of Moses, which was begun in 1559 and therefore is not reflected in editorial strata of the Institutes.

To avoid this problem, we will be exploring Calvin’s commentaries in addition to the Institutes.

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23 Only Brannon Ellis clearly indicates that Calvin’s understanding of the Aseity of the Son plays an important role to the doctrine of the Trinity. See Ellis, Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son.
24 Richard A. Muller, The Unaccomodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 153. A word on quotation is in order. The dissertation contains numerous quotations that do not always flow easily, in particular, the capitalization and punctuation is far from consistent. In order to present a smoother presentation of the quotations, I changed the initial letter of a quoted passage from lowercase to capital without noting the change in the citation. If the quotation contains an obvious typographic error, I may correct it without comment.
1.3 Methodology

Methodologically, this study will proceed as follows. First of all, we will carefully read selected systematic texts on the unity of God/Allāh. Secondly, these texts and their authors will be placed in their historical contexts, insofar as it is necessary to understand these texts properly. Thirdly, I will conduct a systematic comparison of the opinions surfacing in the texts. By making use of both historical and systematic methods, it will be possible for us to identify the differences and similarities of the Christian and Muslim articulations of the problem of divine simplicity/Tawḥīd.

This is a comparative study of Islamic and Christian theologies. The focus will mainly be on systematic thought, not so much on the way in which biblical or Qur’ānic texts have been used in support of the theological positions of the selected thinkers. While I am fully aware of the importance of biblical or Qur’ānic texts for some selected thinkers, these will not be the focus of this study. Ibn Rushd and Thomas refer to Scripture more as proof-texts for their formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity than in the form of sustained exegetical analysis. Al-Ghazālī and Calvin rely heavily on such exegesis in formulating their divine simplicity/Tawḥīd; nevertheless, their understanding of the doctrine of divine simplicity/Tawḥīd can still be studied from a more metaphysical perspective.

There is a plethora of material in the selected thinkers’ philosophical-theological works and their exegesis of the Holy Bible, the Qur’ān, and the Ḥadīth, that we can use to explore the answer to this study’s central question. In order to narrow down the vast quantity of material, I have chosen mainly to study al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāsīfa (the Incoherence of the Philosophers, 1095) and his Al-Iqtisād fiʾl-iʿtiqād (Moderation in Belief, 1095). For Ibn Rushd, I have chosen to focus on Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence, 1180), and faṣl al-maqaṣī ālā bayna al-al-shariʿah wa-al-ḥikmah min al-ītīṣāl (Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory, written before 1180), Faṣl al-Maqaṣī (Faith and Reason in Islam, 1190), and Ibn Rushd’s Metaphysics: A Translation of Ibn Rushd’s

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25 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsīfa [The Incoherence of the Philosophers], trans. Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Pakistan: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963). All citations from the Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, unless otherwise specified, are taken from this version. For modern English translation, see Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, edited and translated by Michael E. Marmura as The Incoherence of the Philosophers: A parallel English-Arabic text, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2000). This is cited hereafter as I.O.Philosophers. See also Chapter 2, § 2.1.3 Textual Considerations.

A word on Arabic and Latin titles is in order. Throughout this research, when mentioning works from the Islamic and Christian thinkers in the main text, I use an English title or Arabic/Latin abbreviation; in the footnotes, I put the English title in square brackets immediately after the original title, unless it is not widely employed. In the footnotes, I cite the original title, with the English title in square brackets at the first citation.


Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics (1174). For Christian thinkers, I have chosen mainly to study Thomas’ Summa Contra Gentiles (1261-1263); and Calvin’s Institutes (1536 Latin edition, 1541 French edition, and 1559) and selected biblical commentaries. By exploring these selected texts, we will be able to see how each of these thinkers tackles the problems in his own unique way, and the issues posed by the doctrine of divine simplicity.

1.4 Outline of the Inquiry

With the methodology mentioned above in mind, I would like to pursue five avenues of inquiry (from Chapter Two to Chapter Six) that take us towards a clearer understanding of the selected thinkers’ ideas of divine unity in relation to divine attributes / șifāt.

Chapter Two will concentrate on explicating al-Ghazālī’s philosophical theology of the doctrine of Tawḥīd in relation God’s șifāt through studying his major work Tahāfut al-falāsifā, in which al-Ghazālī examines the effects of Tawḥīd on divine attributes. This chapter will point out some of the general systematic issues arising from Tawḥīd, focusing on al-Ghazālī’s theory of divine attributes, particular the seven essential attributes. Through this investigation, we will explore the three basic characteristics (i.e., the uniqueness, completeness and unknowability of Allāh) constituted in al-Ghazālī’s idea of the doctrine of Tawḥīd, which in fact refutes plurality in Allāh but does not exclude His seven essential attributes/șifāt. This chapter will investigate how al-Ghazālī explains divine attributes as neither identical nor different in essence, and will explore how al-Ghazālī understands divine attributes to be possible in reference to a simple God.

Chapter Three will begin by exploring Ibn Rushd’s adoption of Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysical framework, before turning to his rather different account of al-Ghazālī’s Tawḥīd in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut. Ibn Rushd’s texts cannot be understood without considering his reception of Ibn Sīnā (also known as Avicenna). This chapter will then examine Ibn Rushd’s view and demonstrate that while adopting the Avicennian position, Ibn Rushd also made a synthesis between kalām (Islamic scholastic theology) and falsāfa (philosophy), an innovative approach wholly absent from his predecessors. This chapter will explore the extent of Ibn Rushd’s use of Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysics in appropriating the multiplicity of attributes in the Tawḥīd, and will also explore his innovative synthesis of kalām and falsāfa.

Chapter Four will continue the investigation of this research by focusing on the doctrine of divine simplicity in Thomas, particular on the unity of divine attributes and the Trinity recorded in his Summa Contra Gentiles. Thomas often identified divine attributes as being (esse) without any composition. This chapter will explore Thomas’ answer to the problem of how a being without any composition can possibly have attributes. Thomas’
treatment of divine simplicitas and his critique of numerical sense and categorical unity in particular will be examined in detail.

Chapter Five is devoted to a more in depth examination of the restoration of divine unity through the Trinity (e.g., God’s aseity in each persona) according to Calvin, focusing on selected sections from various versions of Calvin’s Institutes [1536 Latin edition, 1541 French edition and 1559], as well as his biblical commentaries. This chapter will also point out that Calvin specifically formulated his understanding of divine simplicitas in terms of the Trinitas as well as the unity of God. The results of this chapter will hopefully exhibit the important theological implications developed by Calvin to defend divine unity.

Finally, Chapter Six will attempt to apply the results of the study to the interreligious dialogue by comparing the views of these four thinkers on the relationship between divine unity/Tawḥīd and attributes/ṣifāt. It will explore the most important similarities and differences with regard to how these Islamic and Christian thinkers conceptualised divine simplicity in relation to a plurality of attributes (and, with respect to Christian thinkers, the three Persons of the Trinity). We will see that there are significant differences between the Islamic and Christian thinkers with regard to how they reconcile the divine unity God’s attributes/ṣifāt. I will also demonstrate that when it comes to their attitude toward worship, there is no difference between Islamic and Christian believers, as proponents of both religious traditions aim to worship the one and true Allāh.

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The Doctrine of Divine Unity (Al-Tawḥīd) in al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāsifa and His Exposition of the Unity of Allāh As Found in Al-Iqtisād fī’l-i’tiqād

“Had there been therein (in the heavens and the earth) gods besides Allāh, then verily both would have been ruined. Glorified be Allāh, the Lord of the Throne, (High is He) above what they attribute to Him!”

[the Qur‘ān, Sūrah 21: 22]

2.1 Introduction to al-Ghazālī (448-505 / 1056-1111)

2.1.1 Al-Ghazālī’s Doctrine of Tawḥīd and Its Eleventh-century Context

This chapter focuses on the doctrine of divine unity (Tawḥīd) according to the thought of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī of Ṭūs (better known as al-Ghazālī). The following discusses al-Ghazālī’s solution with respect to this research question: How does al-Ghazālī conceptually link the unity of Allāh with a plurality of God’s attributes? When one upholds the simplicity of Allāh, Allāh is considered without any parts or composition. But al-Ghazālī attempts to maintain the plurality of Allāh’s attributes without compromising the simplicity of Allāh. Hence, this chapter aims at investigating how al-Ghazālī safeguards both the distinct essential attributes and Allāh’s unity as described in the Qu’rān.

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1 Abdel Latif Tibawi, “Al-Risālah al-Qudsiyyah [The Jerusalem Tract/Epistle]: Annotated English Translation” (part 3), “Al-Ghazālī’s Tract on Dogmatic Theology,” ed. and trans. A. L. Tibawi, Islamic Quarterly 9 (July-December 1965): pp. 95-122. The Qur’ānic interpretation of al-Ghazālī of this Sūrah is as follows: “Were there two gods and one of them resolved on a course of action (arāda amran), the second would be either obliged to aid him and thereby demonstrating that he was a subordinate being and not an all-powerful god (al-qādir), or would be able to oppose and resist thereby demonstrating that he was the all-powerful and the first weak and deficient, not an all-powerful god” (p. 104).


3 The term Tawḥīd does not appear in the Qu’rān. Although later Tawḥīd serves as a key term to the doctrine of God’s transcendent unity developed by Muslim theologians from the Qu’rān (such as surāh 2:163; 12:39; 37:35; 112). In other words, Tawḥīd is always a main emphasis throughout the Qu’rān. It is a key term that parallels terms such as unicity, transcendent unity, simplicity, and oneness. Furthermore, the term “unicity” is a technical term used for describing the irreducible oneness and wholeness of Allāh (Tawḥīd) in the study of medieval Islamic theology. Unless otherwise intimated, the term translated throughout this chapter as “unity” is Tawḥīd or its equivalent, simplicity. This is because the term “unicity” may mislead modern readers. In modern English, “unicity” refers to the amalgamation of cities into a single metropolitan area with a single government. To use unicity as “oneness” or “simplicity” is no longer common. See D. Gimaret, s.v. “Tawḥīd,” Encyclopaedia of Islam, eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, 2nd ed. (Brill Online, 2014), reference. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. (accessed Sept 2015): http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/tawhid-SIM_7454. See also Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1, below.
Al-Ghazālī devoted one of his chief theological works to Ash'arite kalām (lit., ‘the speech’, derived as dialectical theology, or Islamic scholastic theology) and considered his refutation of the Philosophers, Tahāfut al-falāsifā (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)⁴ as belonging to the genre of Islamic scholastic theology (even though his declared task in this work was mainly to refute the Islamic Philosophers, and not to develop any specific doctrinal position). For al-Ghazālī, the true meaning of Ash'arite scholastic theology is not attained through reason (‘aql), but through the path of direct mystical experience (dhawq) in Sufi tradition (Islamic mysticism). For example, the principles of scholastic theology are shown in one of his major works, Al-Iqtiṣād fi’l-i’tiqād (The Economy of Belief, also translated as ‘Moderation in Belief’ or ‘the Middle Path in Theology’),⁵ an exposition of Ash'arite kalām. The foundation of Ash'arism is a doctrine of the divine predicates/attributes (ṣifāt Allāh, the Arabic term ṣifāt, plural of ṣifa), to which al-Ghazālī fully subscribes and which he further explains. These ‘essential’ attributes (ṣifāt dhātiyya)⁶ are “not identical, but not different”

⁴ See al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifā, translated by Sabih Ahmad Kamali as The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Pakistan: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963). Hereafter abbreviated as Tahāfut al-falāsifā. All citations from the Tahāfut al-falāsifā, unless otherwise specified, are taken from this version. For modern English translation, see Tahāfut al-falāsifā, edited and translated by Michael E. Marmura as The Incoherence of the Philosophers: A parallel English-Arabic text, 2nd ed. (Provo (Utah): Brigham Young University Press, 2000). This is cited hereafter as L.O.Philosophers.


⁶ Abdel Latif Tibawi, Al-Risālah al-Qudsiyyah [The Jerusalem Tract]; pp. 95-122. According to al-Ghazālī’s Al-Risālah al-Qudsiyyah [The Jerusalem Tract], the second pillar of Islamic faith is concerned with the seven essential names or so-called inadequate “attributes” (ṣifāt dhātiyya) of Allāh, namely, His power (qudra), knowledge (‘ilm), life (ḥayāt), will (irrādā), hearing (ṣam’), sight (bāsr), and speech (kalām), which are stated to subsist entirely in Allāh. However, al-Ghazālī discussed in his al-Maqṣad al-asnā, that what these essential names/attributes applied to God are the inadequate attributes, and he qualified these divine attributes/names as “the words of praise He has used of Himself […] and if we go beyond the Names to other attributes, then He may be called by attributes of praise and majesty only” (pp. 2-3), and explained how these many names refer to the essence with seven attributes (pp. 159-162). In his Kitāb al-Tawḥīd wa’l-Tawakkul – Bk. XXXV of the Revival of the Religious Sciences Ilhya’ ‘ulum al-din (Faith in Divine Unity & Trust in Divine Providence), trans. David B. Burrell (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2001), al-Ghazālī also mentioned that “Have you ever heard that the furniture of the house can be compared to the lord of the house? Do you not know that God Most High is not, in His essence, like any other essence? Similarly, His hand is not like other hands, nor His pen like other pens, nor His word like other words, nor His writing like other writing. These divine matters belong to the intelligible world: God the Most High in His essence is neither bodily nor in a place—by contrast with all that is not He […] if you do not see these things in this way, I can only regard you as ambivalent (lit.: bisexual) as between the ‘masculinity’ of the proponents of tanzih (negative theology), who remove all attributes from dignity and the ‘femininity’ of the proponents of tashbīḥ (anthropomorphism), who insist on granting God all Qur’ānic attributes, oscillating between this one and that one, belonging neither to one party nor the other” (emphasis added, pp. 24-25). See Fadlou Shehadi, Ghazali’s Unique Unknowable God: A Philosophical Critical Analysis of Some of the Problems raised by Ghazali’s view of God as Utterly Unique and Unknowable (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964), p. 101: As Fadlou Shehadi also rightly observes, “Ghazālī explicitly rejects the possibility that attribute-statements retain their usual meaning when used of God. Although we understand God’s attributions in our own terms none of them as such (i.e., as we understand them) are true of God.” See also Ash'arite’s theological system below. In this study, the two terms (divine names and attributes) are therefore fundamentally interchangeable.
with regard to God’s essence (adh-Dhāt). This distinction is important. If the essential attributes were not identical to the divine essence, then the oneness of Allāh would be compromised. On the other hand, if the essential names/attributes were co-eternal with the divine essence, then the many essential attributes of Allāh would be sabotaged. In other words, the co-eternity of these essential attributes with the divine essence does not entail that the relationship between the essential attributes is causal. The importance of al-Ghazālī’s view on divine unity (al-Tawḥīd) and Allāh’s essential attributes (ṣifāt ḍhātiyya) will be discussed later in this chapter. At this juncture, let me begin with a brief introduction to al-Ghazālī.

Al-Ghazālī was born in 448 A.H./1056 CE in the town of Tūs (near present-day Mashhad in north-eastern Iran). In his early years, al-Ghazālī received his early education in Tūs. In 1077-1078 he went to Nishāpūr in order to study under the famous Shāfi‘ite jurist (faqīh) and Ash‘arī theologian (ʿālim) Abūl-Ma‘alī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), and with the Sūfī master Abū ʿAlī Fārmandhī (d. 477/1084-1085). This significant period of his life brought him into a close relationship with the court of the Grand-Seljuq Sultan Malikshāh (reg. 1071-1092) and his grand-vizier Nizām al-Mulk (1018-1092). Al-Ghazālī stayed with al-Juwaynī in Nishāpūr until 484/1091, studying theology, philosophy, logic and natural science. Frank Griffel indicates that in al-Ghazālī’s al-Munqidh, al-Ghazālī briefly comments on this early stage of his intellectual life:

The thirst for grasping the real meaning of things was indeed my habit and wont from my early years and in the prime of my life. It was an instinctive, natural disposition (fitra) placed in my makeup by Allāh Most High, not something due to my own choosing and contriving. As a result, the fetters of servile conformism fell away from me, and inherited beliefs lost their hold on me, when I was still quite young. For I saw that the children of Christians always grew up embracing Christianity, and the children of Jews always grew up adhering to Judaism, and the children of Muslims always grew up following the religion of Islam. I also heard the tradition related from the Apostle of Allāh—Allāh’s blessing and peace be upon him!—in which he said: “Every infant is born endowed with the fitra: then his parents make him a Jew or Christian or Magian.” Consequently I felt an inner urge to seek the true meaning of the original fitra, and the true meaning of the beliefs arising through slavish aping of parents and teachers. I wanted to sift out these uncritical beliefs, the beginnings of which are suggestions imposed from without, since there are differences of opinion in the discernment of those that are true from those that are false.10

After the death of al-Juwaynī in 478/1085, al-Ghazālī was invited to go to the court of the Grand-Seljuq Sultan Malikshāh. In 484/1091, Nizām al-Mulk appointed al-Ghazālī as a professor at the Nizāmīyya Madrasa (seminary or college) in Baghdad. Although he taught three hundred students at the Nizāmīyya Madrasa of Baghdad, in his spare time he was able to master philosophy, and wrote two books: Maqāṣid al-falāsifa (The Aims of the

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7 I will further explain the importance of al-Ghazālī’s exposition of this in a more detail manner later in this chapter.
8 See Treiger, Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought, p. 1.
9 See Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, pp. 29-30. Al-Juwaynī was the most significant Ash‘arite scholar of his time, an authority in both Islamic law (fiqh) and scholastic theology (kalām). Al-Juwaynī was also the first Ash‘arite theologian who seriously studied Ibn Sinā’s works (known as Avicenna, 980-1037). Thus, there can be little doubt that al-Ghazālī started to read philosophical works many years before he published books about it. His preoccupation with this philosophical literature likely began in the seminar (madrasa) of al-Juwaynī, where reading philosophy (al-hikma wa-l-falsafa) may have been part of the higher curriculum in Nishāpūr (e.g., Shaf‘ī law, jadal/dialectical disputation, methods of jurisprudence and of theology, and logic).
Philosophers) and Tahāfuṭ al-falāsīfa (The Incoherence of the Philosophers). Al-Ghazālī was undoubtedly the most influential Sunni intellectual of his time, but in 488/1095 he unexpectedly gave up his post of chief teacher (muʿaddarīs) at the Niẓāmiyya Madrasa in Baghdād and left the city. Before his subsequent sojourn in Damascus (Syria) in 490/1097, under the influence of Sufi literature, al-Ghazālī began to change his lifestyle after he had given up his teaching career for two years. In his “spiritual crisis,” al-Ghazālī realized that the highest ethical standard of a virtuous religious life was the method of the Sufis, the right path for the attainment of true knowledge.

During this sojourn (488-499/1095-1106, or ‘the years of seclusion’), al-Ghazālī wrote that he lived “in seclusion (‘uzla) for twelve years devoted to the zāwiya (Sufi hermitage).” However, al-Ghazālī never gave up teaching, nor did he ever take time off from teaching in this period. His vow at the tomb of Abraham in Hebron revealed that he refused to serve the political authorities or teach at state-sponsored madrasa, but he was not against teaching in a private small madrasa. During the years of seclusion, al-Ghazālī wrote many philosophical-theological works; Mustafa Abu-Sway identifies twenty-eight books, letters and treatises of al-Ghazālī’s writings that were published, both in Farsi and Arabic.

In 500/1106-1107, al-Ghazālī went back home to Tūs, where he founded a Sufi lodge (khānaqāh) and a small private seminary (madrasa or Zāwiya) next to his house. Al-Ghazālī ended his ‘seclusion’ in the late months of 499 / summer of 1106, at a request from the vizier...

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11 See Mustafa Abu-Sway, “al-Ghazālī’s Spiritual Crisis Reconsidered,” Al-Shajarah, vol. 1, no. 1 (1996): pp. 77-94. Cf. Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, p. 67. See also al-Ghazālī, Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl [Deliverance from Error],” pp. 81, 85. In al-Munqidh, al-Ghazālī discusses the reasons that led to his sudden departure from Baghdād in 1095: “Next I attentively considered my circumstances, and I saw that I was immersed in attachments which had encompassed me from all sides. I also considered my activities—the best of them being public and private instruction—and that in them I was applying myself to sciences unimportant and useless in this pilgrimage to the hereafter. Then I reflected on my intention in my public teaching, and I saw that it was not directed purely to Allah, but rather was instigated and motivated by the quest for fame and widespread prestige. So I became certain that I was on the brink of a crumbling bank and already on the verge of falling into the Fire, unless I set about mending my ways” (p. 85).

12 See Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, p. 67. See also Kojiro Nakamura, “An Approach to Ghażālī’s Conversion,” p. 57.

13 See al-Ghazālī, Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl [Deliverance from Error],” p. 92. Al-Ghazālī describes his sojourn in this way: “Then I entered Damascus and resided there for nearly two years. My only occupation was seclusion and solitude and spiritual exercise and combat with a view to devoting myself to the purification of my soul and the cultivation of virtues and cleansing my heart (qalb) for the remembrance of Allāh Most High, in the way I had learned from the writings of the Sufis. […] Then I was inwardly moved by an urge to perform the duty of the pilgrimage and to draw succor from the blessings of Mecca and Medina and the visit to the tomb of the Apostle of Allāh—Allāh’s blessing and peace be upon him!—after finishing my visit to the Friend of Allāh—Allāh’s blessings and peace be upon him! So I travelled to the Hijāz.”


15 In the medieval Arabic world, official teaching happened in a seminary (madrasas), unofficial teachings in a “zāwiya” (a ‘corners/’in vinculi). See Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, p. 49. In his Iḥyāʾ (Revival), as Griffel observes, “al-Ghazālī says that scholars fall into two groups: those muftis, that is, scholars, who write official fatwās and who are the companions of sultans, and those who have knowledge (‘ilm) of divine unity (Tawḥīd) and the actions of the heart and who are the solitary and isolated inhabitants of the zāwiyas” (p. 49).

16 Mustafa Abu-Sway, Al-Ghazzālīyy [sic]: A Study in Islamic Epistemology, pp.101-102. Of these twenty eight books, the following four selected works are included in this study: Al-Risālāh al-Qudsiyyah [The Jerusalem Tract/Epistle], Iḥyāʾ Ulum al-dīn [The Revival of The Religious Sciences], al-Maṣqad al-asmā’ fi sharḥ ma’āni asmāʾ Allāh al-husnā [Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of Allāh], and Misḥkāt al-Anwār [The Niche of Lights]. See also a chronological list of al-Ghazālī’s works in Aleander Treiger, Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought, pp. 11-14.
Fakhr al-Mulk to teach at the Niẓāmiyya Madrasa in Nishāpūr. Later al-Ghazālī resigned from teaching in Nishāpūr and returned to his native town in Ṭūs to teach at his zawiyas before his death. On 14 Jumāda II 505 / 18 December 1111, al-Ghazālī died in Ṭabarān, and was buried in a mausoleum right outside the walls of Ṭabarān’s citadel (qāṣba).

I now turn to a preliminary discussion of al-Ghazālī’s teaching concerning “there is only one Allāh.”

2.1.2 Al-Ghazālī’s Doctrine of Tawḥīd and the Historic Monotheism Tradition

In Islamic tradition, the declaration of Allāh’s unity—“lā ilāha illā l-Lāh (there is no god but Allāh)” is the undeniable, essential characteristic of monotheism. Because of this monotheistic belief—that Allāh is one—the possibility of divine attributes (ṣifāt) attaining equivalence with Him became a problematic question in the doctrine of the Tawḥīd/divine simplicity, and has been treated in Islam from various perspectives. In the treatment of the problem of divine ṣifāt in Sunni Islam, al-Ghazālī’s view of Tawḥīd is a highly influential one. Al-Ghazālī solved the problem of characterizing a theologically simple Allāh by maintaining a number of eternal divine ṣifāt without destroying the simplicity of Allāh: whatever the seven essential ṣifāt/attributes are, they are not parts of Allāh. In al-Ghazālī’s

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18 See Griffl, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, pp. 57-59.
19 According to Islamic tradition, the profession of faith (Shahada)—“There is no gods but Allāh” (the Qur’ān, Sūrah 37:35) or there is only one Allāh (Tawḥīd)—is the chief essential principle of six fundamental beliefs: (1) Allāh—His existence and Singularity, (2) the Prophets from Allāh, (3) the Holy Qur’ān, (4) Angels, (5) Eschatology, and (6) Divine Voluntarism. Cf. Muhammad ‘Abduh, Risālat al-Tawḥīd, translated from the Arabic by Ishāq Musa’ad and Kenneth Cragg as The Theology of Unity (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966). Indeed, to be a Muslim means to be one who submits to Allāh. See also the Qur’ān, Sūrah 59:22-24: “He is Allāh of Whom there is Lā ilāha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He) the King, the Holy, the One Free from all defects […]” Subsequent Qur’ānic references will be cited in this way: followed by Sūrah/Chapter and ayat/verse numbers, e.g., [Sūrah 21: 22] between square brackets. Numbers in round brackets are added in the text for explication or identification of key Arabic terms. The Qur’ānic citations in this paper are the English translation of the Noble Qur’ān from International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), unless otherwise noted.
20 See the discussion on the development of doctrine of divine unity (Tawḥīd) in the Islamic tradition in Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 43-66; see also Tjitze J. De Boer, Geschichte der Philosophie im Islam [The History of Philosophy in Islam], trans. Edward R. Jones (1903; repr., New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1967), pp. 154-171; and Henry Corbin, History of Islamic Philosophy, trans. Liadain Sherrard with the assistance of Phillip Sherrard (1980; repr., London: International Publications, 1996), pp. 77-84, 109-110, 114-117; M. M. Sharif (ed.), A History of Muslim Philosophy (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963-1966); and al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, pp. viii-ix. The development of perceptions of divine simplicity in Islamic tradition can be categorized as follows: (i) some Muslim thinkers (mainly from the Muʿtazilah, or so-called rationalism) sought to safeguard the unity and simplicity of Allāh [His absolute unity] by arguing that all positive characteristics of Allāh, as described in the Qur’ān, have to be interpreted (taʾwil: “interpretation”) allegorically; Sharif observes that for them, “no positive ṣifāt can be ascribed to Allāh, for that leads to a subject-predicated dualism; even existence can only be referred to Him. He is above all distinctions and above all the categories of thought” (A History of Muslim Philosophy, p. 618) (ii) Others (Traditionalists/ʿAṣhʿarites and the less extreme literalists) sought to accept the divine predicates (the seven essential ṣifāt of power, knowledge, life, will, hearing, sight, and speech, stated to subsist eternally in Allāh) as distinct from Allāh’s Dhāt and somehow avoid the dangers of allegorical interpretation. (iii) Still a third group, namely literalists (mushabbihah/ṭaḥṣilī, i.e., likeners) took divine ṣifāt literally, and Henry Corbin observes that literalists’ anthropomorphism unavoidably falls into the very trap of metaphysical idolatry.
major works, Allâh is characterized as wholly unique; although He has ṣifāt, His ṣifāt “are not identical, but not different” with regard to His adh-Dhâlî.21

In describing the unity of God (Al-Tawhîd), al-Ghazâlî employs the traditional view of Islam, saying that the One (Al-Wâhid) and Unique (al-Ahad) God is an absolute unity who can neither be divided nor duplicated. This oneness entails that no part of it is itself a substance, as a point has no parts.22 In contrast to al-Fârâbî (A.D. 870-950) and Ibn Sînâ/Avicenna (A.D. 980-1037), al-Ghazâlî’s view of God’s uniqueness (al-khâssîyâh), and His attributes is that He is an incomparable being, yet he claims that this does not harm the absolute unity of God.23 For al-Ghazâlî, God has no contingency. By contrast, both the Philosophers and Muta’zilites claim that the attributes are contingent elements and that their existence is added to the divine essence (adh-Dhâlî). Although al-Ghazâlî in his famous Tahâfut al-falâsîfâ rebukes the Muslim Philosophers (particularly al-Fârâbî and Ibn Sînâ), his arguments for “God is One,” “Divine attributes and essence,” and other related issues are basically built on philosophical grounds.24 In addition, al-Ghazâlî, in his al-Maqsad al-asnâ (The Furthest Goal),25 also indicates that the most essential understanding of God is oneness in His divine names: the One (Al-Wâhid) and Unique (al-Ahad).26

In this chapter, I focus mainly on al-Ghazâlî’s Tahâfut al-falâsîfâ and a few of his other selected texts (particularly his Al-Iqtiṣâd fi l-i’tiqâd; this reference will be abbreviated as Iqtiṣâd in this study).27 In order to answer the question of what al-Ghazâlî means when he says “there is only one Allâh?”; and the question of how he solves the problem that arises from the relation between divine essence and divine attributes in his doctrine of divine simplicity, I begin with presenting the main issues that are worthy of discussion in al-Ghazâlî’s doctrine of Tawhîd in the context of Islamic scholasticism (kalâm). According to the history of Islamic dogma, the ascription of Allâh’s simplicity in Islam was never simply meant to say that Allâh is One in an absolute sense. We also learn that there are various perspectives to treat the problem of characterizing the doctrine of divine simplicity, namely the relations between the divine essence and divine predicates—what does the absolute oneness of Allâh mean? This concern the question of how is “one” defined? Does it mean completely without parts? It is worth noting that although many Islamic thinkers shared the convictions that Allâh’s essence (adh-Dhâlî) is a unique singularity, perfect, and creator of all that is not Himself, each of their claims entails a variety of interpretations. Among the variety of interpretations, I hereby sum up two major arguments concerning what Allâh’s simplicity/unity is, from two kalâm schools:

23 Like the Mu’tazilah, both al-Fârâbî and Ibn Sînâ reject the divine attributes as additional to the essence, and they believe this will necessitate plurality in the Necessary Being.
26 Al-Ghazâlî, al-Maqsad al-asnâ [Ninety-Nine Names].
27 Al-Ghazâlî, al-Maqsad al-asnâ [Ninety-Nine Names].
28 Al-Ghazâlî, Tahâfut al-falâsîfâ, and other selected texts (see Bibliography). All references to al-Ghazâlî’s works are to these English translations unless otherwise mentioned. See also Section 2.1.3.
The Mu'tazilite's Argument (Argument M): Allāh is completely simple if and only if Allāh does not contain any parts of any sort at any moment in every possible world. According to this position, divine simplicity is the pure actuality of thought; Allāh's essence and attributes are identical. Thus, one must reject the idea of eternal attributes co-existing in Allāh.29

Al-Ash'āri's Argument (Argument A): Allāh is completely simple, that is, without parts of any sort. According to this position, divine simplicity is a unique oneness; in Allāh, the divine essence and attributes are not identical, but the Ash'ārites sought to accept seven divine predicates (the seven essential sifāt of power, knowledge, life, will, hearing, sight, and speech, which are stated to subsist eternally in Allāh) as distinct from Allāh's Dhāt and somehow avoid the dangers of allegorical interpretation.30

Following Argument A, al-Ghazālī's conception of the nature of divine unity is in accordance with the Ash'ārite school. Richard M. Frank observes that in describing Allāh's uniqueness (al-khāṣṣiyah) and completeness (kāmiliyyah), al-Ghazālī employs the traditional kalām of the Ash'ārites,31 as he describes divine sifāt as “distinguishable from His Dhāt and [...] eternal and [...] subsistent in His Dhāt.”32 This shows that the divine attributes (sifāt) are neither identical nor different with regard to the divine essence (adh-Dhāt) in al-Ghazālī’s thought, just as the Ash’ārites believed. But in any case, one could claim that the precise meaning of the phrase “the divine sifāt are neither identical nor different with regard to the divine Dhāt” in al-Ghazālī’s claim should be sorted out. According to Frank Griffel, al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāṣīfah mainly criticizes the teachings of the Philosophers as not only inconsistent, but they also “violate” the central creeds of Islam, since the Philosophers believe: (1) that the world has no beginning in the past and is not created in time, (2) that Allāh’s knowledge includes only classes of things and does not extend to individual beings and their circumstances, and (3) that after death the souls of humans will never again return to bodies.33

Al-Ghazālī’s concept of divine unity has been discussed and interpreted variously by many scholars. Shortly after al-Ghazālī’s death, his concept of divine unity triggered heated and intense discussion by one of the al-Andalus (Spanish) Islamic Philosophers, Ibn Rushd (also known as Averroës). In his work Tahāfut Al-Tahāfut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), Ibn Rushd restates Argument M and refutes al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāṣīfah.34 Because of this work, most modern scholars have defended or reintroduced al-Ghazālī’s views about knowing the unknowable Allāh in a more philosophical way.35 For example, Shlomo Pines observes that there was no decline of philosophy after al-Ghazālī, but with the integrated influences of Oriental, Persian, Indian, and Greek thought: “In its further

29 See Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, p. 59.
30 See Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 60-61.
32 See al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, pp. 2-4. Al-Ghazālī reiterated this concept throughout his argument. Cf. “Second Treatise on the Divine Attributes—First Attribute: Power,” in Al-Ghazālī’s Moderation in Belief, Al-Ghazālī writes, “We call the attribute that is additional to His essence through which He becomes prepared [to perform] the existing act ‘power.’”
33 See Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, p. 5; cf. William Montgomery Watt, Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey, Second Edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), p. 91: William M. Watt says that al-Ghazālī argued powerfully against the Philosophers in his Tahāfut al-falāṣīfah, and “since there are no pure philosophical works in the eastern provinces after his time, it is tempting to conclude that his attack on the Philosophers had been so devastating that philosophy was killed off; but such a conclusion is not justified” (emphasis added).
34 See Chapter 3: The Doctrine of the Al-Tawḥīd in Ibn Rushd’s Thoughts.
development, [Islamic theology] did not, as a rule, eliminate one of them; it led them to subsist side by side—or on different planes.” Pines also remarked that there was a trend toward syncretism, in which elements of Islamic scholastic theology (kalām), philosophy (falsāfa), mystical element (sūfism), and illuminative philosophy (hikma ışrāqiyya) would be seen with one and the same thinker (e.g., Fakhr ad-Dīn, al-Rāzī, and others). As Frank Griffel indicates, “At different times in al-Ghazālī’s career, he was considered a Sufi, a mutakallim who refuted philosophy, and, to some degree, a genuine philosopher who subscribed to philosophical teachings.”

In addition, Fadlou Shehadi comments that al-Ghazālī’s view on divine unity is grounded on his threefold idea of Allāh: “His Dhāt is unique and unknowable,” and “His ṣifāt and acts are knowable.” In al-Ghazālī’s threefold idea, as Shehadi explains, the divine essential attributes are particular attributes, but nevertheless the divine essence is simple.

At this point, it seems helpful to trace the main paradigm in order to set out the parameters within which my own discussion of al-Ghazālī’s divine unity will have to be conducted. Harry A. Wolfson’s observation of the history of kalām is worth noting. Wolfson indicates three aspects of divine attributes that appear to be problematic: (1) the ontological aspect; (2) the semantic aspect; and (3) the philosophical/logical aspect. Wolfson provides the key problem of divine attributes in the history of Islamic kalām. Based on Wolfson’s paradigm, we are able to identify that al-Ghazālī discusses mainly the ontological and semantic aspects of transcendent unity (Tawḥīd), rather than a numerical sense of Tawḥīd.

Al-Ghazālī’s description of the transcendence of Tawḥīd is similar to that of al-Kīnānī and many Islamic thinkers after him, and does not compromise the traditional version of the Islamic Allāh. As we will see later, such a duality of approach is a common way for Muslim thinkers to formulate their doctrines of divine unity (Tawḥīd). It is therefore worthwhile to pause and define a few theological terms in al-Ghazālī’s works. Before we move on, the remarks of R. M. Frank are worth noting: “The formal lexicon of al-Ghazālī’s writing is very fluid, as for any given term or concept he commonly employs a number of expressions, often in order to avoid associating a given assertion, thesis, or argument within the particular school or tradition with which particular expressions may be closely identified.” Thus, we must be careful not to simplify the usage of al-Ghazālī’s theological terms in his doctrine of divine unity, while at the same time trying to understand his doctrine of the transcendental unity of Tawḥīd as clearly as possible.

What do the Muslim thinkers mean when they discuss the transcendent unity of Tawḥīd, particularly al-Ghazālī’s definition? And what are the theological terms that frequently appear in al-Ghazālī’s works to safeguard the singularity of Allāh’s essence, as well as the multiplicity of attributes of Allāh? With regard to the terminology of formulating the doctrine of Tawḥīd, the

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38 See Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, pp. 6-19. Griffel argues that al-Ghazālī was indeed “the first Muslim theologian who actively promotes the naturalization of the philosophical tradition into Islamic theology,” he says, “al-Ghazālī’s works document [particularly from the angles of his life and his teachings on cosmology] an attempt to integrate Aristotelian logics into the tradition of kalām, of rationalist Islamic theology” (p. 7).
40 See Fadlou Shehadi, Ghazali’s Unique Unknowable Allāh, pp. 37-77, 101-114.
following distinctive Arabic terms and concepts need to be explained and defined: (i) wahda; (ii) ahadiyya; (iii) kāmil; and (iv) al-khāṣṣiyah. Note that the definitions given below are not the only definitions for these theological terms and concepts in the development of Islamic dogma. The meanings of these Arabic terms presented in the following section are derived mainly from the common definitions used by selected Muslim thinkers, such as al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, and Ibn Sinā; these definitions are intended to provide an overview of the usage of al-Ghazālī’s terminology on Tawhīd, which is helpful for the assessment undertaken in the later section of this chapter.

Generally, the Arabic terms “wahda”; “ahadiyya”; “kāmil”; “al-khāṣṣiya” are commonly used as synonyms when discussing the doctrine of Tawhīd; however, in Ghazālī’s usage, distinct implications that denote each of these terms are found.

(i) Wahda: It is the first Arabic term used in speaking of Allāh’s oneness as the genitive construct noun al-wahda; and is used to defend the doctrine of Tawhīd in the tenets of Islamic scholastic theology and philosophy. It is variously translated into English as “singularity,” or “oneness.” In Arabic, wahda contrasts directly with kathra (“multiplicity” or “plurality”). According to the usage of Islamic scholastic theology and philosophy, wahda conveys the idea of oneness, unity, isolation and solitude. This Arabic term does not occur in the Qur’ān, but is an equivalent noun for the Aristotelian μονάς (“unit” or “aloneness”), as well as Proclus’ metaphysic of the One. However, this term was used distinctively by al-Ghazālī not only as “the absolute unity without parts,” but also entails the “uniqueness” of Allāh in his definition of the divine name al-Wāhīd as follows:

Al-Wāhīd—the Unique—is the one who can neither be divided nor duplicated. Concerning its not being divisible, it is like a unitary substance, which cannot be divided: it is said to be one in the sense that no part of it is itself a substance, as a point has no parts. And Allāh the most high is one in the sense that it is impossible for His essence to be arranged into parts. Concerning its not being able to be duplicated, which reflects its having no equal, like the sun. […] So it belongs to none but Allāh to be absolute unity.45

It is in this passage, al-Ghazālī gives us the theological foundation of his doctrine of Tawhīd to which he subscribes. The basic doctrine which he argues for is that this divine name (al-Wāhīd), an attribute that qualifies the divine essence, is singular and without parts. By this al-Ghazālī means that it is not a multiplicity of divine names that produces a multiplicity of effects, but that it is a “unitary substance.” In addition, this passage has shown that Allāh is one and unique, with no equal in His essence and attributes.

In his Tahāfut al-falāsifa, al-Ghazālī also gives the following argument to indicate the true definition of the phrase “al-wāhīd al-ḥaqq” (the state of absolute oneness in every aspect):

The True One (al-wāhīd al-ḥaqq) in every aspect is the one not subject to [simultaneous] affirmation and negation, since it cannot be said of it that it exists and does not exist and that it is necessary of existence and not necessary of existence. But it is possible to say that [something]
exists but is not necessary of existence, just as it can be said that it exists and is not possible of existence. It is through this that unity is known.\(^{46}\)

For al-Ghazālī, to be the true oneness in every respect,\(^{47}\) one cannot affirm one aspect of this unity and deny another without contradiction. This argument is to denounce the idea of plurality in necessary existence.

On the other hand, \(wāhidiyya\) is used by Ibn Sīnā as a synonym for \(wahda\) (oneness); whereas \(wahdānīyya\) conveys rather literally the idea of “aloneness.”\(^{48}\) Besides, Ibn Sīnā in \(Kitāb al-Najāt\) argues that Allāh is “necessary existence” (\(Wājib al-wujūd\)), precisely because it is impossible to have an infinite series of contingent (\(mumkin\)) beings or causes.\(^{49}\) In his work, \(The Book of Instruction (Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa ‘l-Tanbīhāt)\), Ibn Sīnā also concludes that the series of causes and effects has to be either finite or infinite, or else if there were anything in the chain that was uncaused, it would constitute the limit of a series:

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[...] every series [or chain] (\(silsila\)) ends in the Being who necessarily exists by virtue of Himself [of His essence] (\(Wājib al-wujūd bi-dhaāāthi\)).\(^{50}\)
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In other words, for Ibn Sīnā, the “necessary existence” (\(Wājib al-wujūd\)) of Allāh must also be a “unique essence” (\(wahdānīyya\)) because “Allāh cannot be united to any other being or cause.” He says, “There can be no separation or [multiplicity] between essence and existence.”\(^{51}\) In \(The Book of Learning (Dānish-Nāma)\), Ibn Sīnā argues,

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That whose essence (\(māhiyya\)) is other than existence is not the Necessary Existent. It has become evident that existence has an accidental meaning for that whose essence is other than existence (\(anniyya\)) [...] The cause of such a being is either the essence (\(dhāt\)) of that entity in which it subsists (\(andar wa‘i\)) or something else. [...] Thus, the essence of the Necessary Existent is not the cause of its existence.\(^{52}\)
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In contrast to Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī seems to have used the terminology of the transcendent unity of \(Tawhīd\) in his own writings. Again, al-Ghazālī in his \(Tahāfut al-falāsifa\), offers a critique of the Mu‘tazilite doctrine of \(Tawhīd\), with which he identifies the Philosophers’ inability to prove that Allāh is one:

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The Philosophers have agreed, just as the Mu‘tazila have agreed, on the impossibility of affirming knowledge, power, and will for the First Principle. They claimed that all these names have come about through the religious law and that it is permissible to use them verbally, but that, as has been
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\(^{46}\) Al-Ghazālī, \(I.O.Philosophers\), p. 69 (emphasis added).

\(^{47}\) Cf. Kojiro Nakamura, “Ghazālī’s Theological Thought” in \(Ghazālī and Prayer\) (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2001), p. 32: Based on the \(Ihya\) (\(IV.240\)), Kojiro Nakamura has identified al-Ghazālī’s fourth aspect of \(Tawhīd\) is that of those who “see Oneness in all existence,” or “what the Sufis call ‘passing-away in the Unity’ (\(fanā‘ fi‘l-tawhīd\)).” He quotes from the \(Ihya\) (\(IV.240\)). For “they do not see but One and also do not see themselves. When they do not see themselves as they are absorbed in \(Tawhīd\), they have ‘passed away’ from themselves in the sense that they have ‘passed away’ from seeing themselves and the created things.”


\(^{49}\) See citations and remarks by Ian Richard Netton, \(Allāh Transcendent\), p. 151.

\(^{50}\) See citations and remarks by Ian Richard Netton, \(Allāh Transcendent\), p. 151.

\(^{51}\) See citations and remarks by Ian Richard Netton, \(Allāh Transcendent\), p. 152 (emphasis added).

\(^{52}\) See citations and remarks by Ian Richard Netton, \(Allāh Transcendent\), p. 153.
previously explained, they reduce [referentially] to one essence. Moreover, [they claim that] it is not permissible to affirm attributes that are additional to His essence in the way it is allowable in our case for our knowledge and power to constitute a description of ourselves that is additional to our essence.\textsuperscript{53}

\textit{(ii) al-ahaddiyya}\textsuperscript{54}: This means “aloneness” literally; it is a technical term in Islamic philosophy and kalām. It is related conceptuality to the concept of quiddity, sometimes expressed as inniyya (from the adverb inna “truly”). In his Book of Alif (Kitāb al-Alif), Abū Bakr Ibn al-`Arabi defines the doctrine of Tawhīd thusly: “Unity is the praise of the One for His own uniqueness” (al-`ahadīyya ḵamd al-Wāhid fī wahuḍāniyyatihī).\textsuperscript{55} Furthermore, according to Ibn Sīnā’s Metaphysics, anniyya is paired with māhiyya, which amounts to his distinction between existence (wujūd) and essence (adḥ-dhāt). Correspondingly, Ibn Sīnā defines this term as describing Allāh as one with His “individual existence.” An example of this view is shown in the discussion of inniyya in relation to the oneness of Allāh’s essence in his al-Ilāhiyyat min Al-Shifā’ (The Metaphysics of The Healing). Ibn Sīnā compares Allāh’s essence to His existence and states, “The First (Allāh) has no quiddity (māhiyya) other than His individual existence (al-`inniyya).”\textsuperscript{56} The term inniyya emphasizes “individuality,” hence Ibn Sīnā identifies Allāh as an “individual subject” with His essence (adḥ-dhāt), and argues that the divine essence is not plural but completely one. For when Allāh is considered as “individual existence,” He is absolutely the same as His essence, which in turn is absolutely the same as His “necessary existence.” Thus, in his argument for the complete unity of Allāh, Ibn Sīnā defines the term “individual existence” as a synonym for “necessary existence.”

Ibn Sīnā points out that the term al-ahaddiyya has often been used interchangeably with the subsistence of the first letter al-ālif to describe the “individuality” of Allāh. Here Allāh is also referred to by His Qu’rānic title of “al-Qayyūm” (the Qur’ān, Surāh 2: 256, 111:1, 20: 110), where it becomes very clear that the name al-Qayyūm is the transcendent unity of Allāh (Tawhīd). In al-Ghazālī’s definition, al-Qayyūm means the self-existence of Allāh:

If an existence were to exist whose essence would suffice for itself, whose subsistence would not be from another, and whose existence would not be conditioned by the existence of another, it would \textbf{subsist in itself absolutely}. If beyond that, every existent subsisted by virtue of it, such that the existence and conversation of things would be inconceivable without it, that would be the self-existence one since it subsisted in itself and each thing subsisted by it. But that is \textbf{none other than Allāh}—may He be praised and exalted. And man’s access to this attribute is in proportion to his detachment from everything that is not Allāh the most high.\textsuperscript{57}

This passage is particularly worthy of citation because of its combined emphasis on the absolute “self-existence” of Allāh without another and because of its apophatic description. It is clear from this passage, al-Ghazālī had no hesitation in positively proclaiming the unity of self-existence. In this passage, al-Ghazālī clarifies that the term al-Qayyūm indicates the association of the divine names with the aspect of “different from” (al-mukhālafa); thus Allāh’s attributes or names are

\textsuperscript{53} Al-Ghazālī, I.O.Philosophers, p. 96.


\textsuperscript{57} Al-Ghazālī, al-Maqṣad al-asnā [Ninety-Nine Names], p. 130.
counters to the contingent characteristics (khulq) of human being.\(^{58}\) This term mukhālafa may be described as an attempt to demonstrate the uniqueness and the incomparability of Allāh (“none other than Allāh”), without denying that He has essential attributes or names. In commenting on this, al-Ghazālī says: Allāh is “above [munazzah or muqaddasun ‘an] (most men’s) attributes of perfection just as He is above their attributes of imperfection, nay of every attribute conceivable by man, as well as of what is like it (the attribute) or similar to it.”\(^{59}\) The words used by al-Ghazālī, which are more or less equivalent to the sense of transcendence or unknowability, are: “mukhālafa” (different from), “munazzah” (transcendent) or a “khāṣṣiya” (a differentiating characteristic). Al-Ghazālī implies that Allāh is unique in all aspects, or more precisely, His Tawḥīd (uniqueness and distinctiveness) cannot be like anything that humans conceive or can conceive.

(iii) kāmil (perfect): Islamic thinkers are in agreement that the term kāmil or kamāl\(^{60}\) is considered to be a kind of “perfection,” because it indicates “completeness.” The terminology of al-Ghazālī with respect to this term is worthy of note. According to al-Ghazālī, the term kāmil is interchangeable in the equation between the essence and attributes of Allāh: “When we say ‘Allāh,’ we point to the divine essence (adh-dhāt) together with the attributes, not to the essence alone because the term ‘Allāh’ cannot be predicated of an essence that is judged to be free from the divine attributes such as it could not be said that jurisprudence is something other than the jurist.”\(^{61}\)

In addition, when al-Ghazālī discusses the relationship between Allāh and His attributes (or “the eternal act”) in his Tahāfut al-falāsīfā, he offers another argument for the aspect of “completeness”:

> For, according to us, the act does not attach to it in the subsequent state after origination when it [already] exists, but attaches to it at the moment of its temporal origination. […] if the meaning of temporal existence is denied, then neither its being an act nor its being attached to an agent would be intelligible. […] We do not deem it impossible that the act [should co-exist] with the agent, [provided that] the act is created, as with the movement of the water. For it is created out of nonexistence. It is, hence, possible [for something] to be an act, regardless of whether it is posterior to the essence of the agent or concomitant with it. We only deem impossible the eternal act. […] As regards the effect with the cause, it is possible for both to be created or to be eternal, as [when] it is said that eternal knowledge is a cause for the Eternal to be a knower[…]. what is called an act has as a condition its being created out of nothing. If someone allows himself to call the Eternal, the Permanently Existent, an act of another [attributes or acts], he would be indulging in metaphor.\(^{62}\)

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\(^{58}\) Human beings have a certain degree of “the qualities of Allāh” (ahklāq Allāh) or “the praiseworthy qualities” (al-akhlāq al-hamīdah), but these qualities are not identical to Allāh’s eternal qualities or attributes. See al-Ghazālī, Kīmiyā-e Saadat, trans. Claude Field as The Alchemy of Happiness (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007), p. 19. According to al-Ghazālī’s interpretation of the saying of the Prophet: “God created man in His own likeness” and indicated that there are certain similarities shared between God’s and Human’s attributes: “Not only are man’s attributes a reflection of God’s attributes, but the mode of existence of man’s soul affords some insight into God’s mode of existence. That is to say, both God and the soul are invisible, indivisible, unconfined by space and time, and outside the categories of quantity and quality; nor can the ideas of shape, color, or size attach to them.”

\(^{59}\) Al-Ghazālī, al-Maqṣad al-asnā (Cairo, ‘Alamiyyah’, no date given), p. 29. Citation and translation by Fadlou Shehadi, Ghazalī’s Unique Unknowable God, p. 18.

\(^{60}\) It is often interchangeable with the term “jamīl” (beautiful).

\(^{61}\) Al-Ghazālī, I.O. Philosophers, pp. 62-63 (emphasis added). Cf. See also “Second Treatise on the Divine Attributes—First Characteristic [The attributes are additional to the essence],” in al-Ghazālī’s Moderation in Belief. Al-Ghazālī writes, “For if we say ‘God, the Exalted,’ then we have referred to the divine
Here, al-Ghazālī indicates the “completeness” and “uniqueness” (al-khāṣṣiyah) of divine eternal acts or attributes of Allāh, and he points out that the eternal acts or attributes are not additional, but “attach to its temporal origination” (Allāh). For example, divine knowledge is not the enactment of divine eternal life for the very real sense, that both are eternal, and hence uncreated.

(iv) al-khāṣṣiyah (Uniqueness): Allāh is absolutely unique, and such an incomparable essence entails the corollary that Allāh is utterly unknowable. Says al-Ghazālī:

Allāh is […] an Existent who transcends all that is comprehensible by human sight or human Insight […].

For al-Ghazālī, the unique aspect of Allāh refers to the transcendent unity of His essence with the seven essential attributes/names, in which Allāh’s attributes are not identical to each other (cannot be reduced to an essence), but are unique and whole in Allāh. This unique aspect of Allāh is similar to His distinctive divine characteristic [al-khāṣṣiya] as shown above. As Fadlou Shehadi has observed, “undoubtedly the most common way in which Ghazālī expresses God’s utter uniqueness or utter difference is by declaring Him to be above any attribute that the human mind can conceived.”

It seems that al-Ghazālī is able to solve the dilemma of the transcendent Allāh, a dilemma that the modern scholar Paul Ricoeur summarizes as follows:

To impute a discourse common to God and to his creatures would be to destroy divine transcendence; on the other hand, assuming total incommunicability of meanings from one level to the other would condemn one to utter agnosticism.

This dilemma is solved by al-Ghazālī when Allāh is defined—or, perhaps better, described—according to the doctrine of transcendent unity. Indeed, al-Ghazālī’s use of analogy must be reckoned with as very much a part of this kind of concept. Using the term “transcendence” in a more mystical sense, Allāh is referred to by al-Ghazālī as both knowable and unknowable. Indeed, Maha El-Kaisy Friemuth has indicated that what al-Ghazālī is really interested in, is “the question of the attributes from the standpoint of whether God can be…

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essence together with the divine attributes, and not to the essence alone. The name of God does not designate an essence that is assumed to be devoid of the divine attributes” (Al-Ghazālī’s Moderation in Belief).

63 Al-Ghazālī, Mishkāt al-Anwār, trans. W. H. T. Gairdner as the Niche of Lights (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1924), p. 96. Cf. See Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, p. 247: Griffel indicates that only a fourth group of people in the “Veil Section” who are “those who have arrived [al-wāsitūn], represents the level of those who truly understand who the Lord is. Only this group has gained a proper understanding of God (Tawḥīd) […] this group has developed a proper understanding of the divine attributes and their transcendence.” Griffel further explains, “They understand the Lord is exalted over all anthropomorphic attributes. When they use words such as ‘speech,’ ‘will,’ ‘power,’ and ‘knowledge’ to describe the Lord; they intend their meaning to transcend the ordinary sense of these words. […] The group described in this passage has gained more insight then the Mu’tazilites and understands that all of God’s attributes are transcendent” (Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, p. 247).

64 Al-Ghazālī, al-Maqṣad al-asnā’ [Ninety-Nine Names], p. 29: “God is […] above their (most men’s) attributes of perfection just as He is above their attributes of imperfection, nay of every attribute conceivable by man, as well as of what is like it (the attribute) or similar to it.”

65 Fadlou Shehadi, Ghazalis’ Unique Unknowable God, p. 18. See also footnote 3, above.

knowledge or, to put it more accurately, how far can God be knowable.”

Al-Ghazâlî answers this question by showing that our knowing of “divine attributes” described by human perception and language is possible while the “eternal attributes” as they are in Allâh is not possible. In this light, El-Kaisy Friemuth observes that in al-Ghazâlî’s later works (i.e., Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-dîn and Mishkât al-Anwâr), al-Ghazâlî “rejects the attributes of Allâh as a source from which His essence may be known.” For example, in discussing the unity of Allâh, al-Ghazâlî reveals the highest stage of Tawhîd occurs when the mystic “sees nothing but God. This is the stage of the truthful or Fana-fi-Tauhid which means to lose oneself in Tawhîd.” Furthermore, al-Ghazâlî in Mishkât al-Anwâr declares that “the first of these [those veiled by Pure Light] have searched out and understood the true meaning of divine attributes, and have grasped that these attributes are named Speech, Will, Power, Knowledge, while the rest are not according to human nomenclature. Consequently, this has led them to avoid denoting Him by these attributes altogether, and to denote Him simply by a reference to His creation.” As such, “uniqueness” is connected to al-Ghazâlî’s belief that Allâh has a mystical and mysterious nature which combines His transcendence with His plurality of attributes within an irreducible nature.

In such a way, Allâh is essentially inconceivable, and the best way to know about Him is to employ the vocabulary of Negative Theology or apophasis, which we have encountered in other works of al-Ghazâlî.

Elsewhere (which we will discuss later), the above terminologies of the doctrine of Tawhîd are emphasized by al-Ghazâlî as the following: Allâh is a transcendent unity. Since the earliest Islamic times, the center of theological discussion has been Tawhîd, the absolute oneness and unity of Allâh. This central doctrine is closely connected with three important theological concepts, namely: divine uniqueness or oneness; divine completeness or unity; and divine mystery or unknowability. As we will see in our discussion later, elsewhere al-Ghazâlî speaks of these terms as descriptive of the doctrine of Tawhîd.

We have discussed al-Ghazâlî’s terminologies of Tawhîd in some detail. These terminologies constitute the backbone of his theory of Tawhîd. In the following section, I will discuss how al-Ghazâlî formulates his doctrine of transcendent Tawhîd by using the theological terms mentioned above; and I will refer to the terminologies used by al-Ghazâlî most consistently when he discusses the doctrine of Tawhîd. Although al-Ghazâlî borrowed terminology from his predecessors (e.g., Ibn Sinâ), this is not to say that he adopted their theories of Tawhîd. As we have seen in the preceding sections, al-Ghazâlî uses these terms distinctively by demonstrating the transcendent unity of Allâh.

Al-Ghazâlî’s description of the relationship between the seven essential divine attributes (ṣifât) and divine essence (adh-Dhât) and his expression of the threefold conceptions of Allâh’s unity in Tahâfut al-jalâsisfa implies that he was conscious of what Wolfson calls the ontological and semantic problems of divine attributes. In addition, I would like to present the basic ideas of al-Ghazâlî’s doctrine of divine simplicity based on

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68 Maha El-Kaisy Friemuth, God and Humans in Islamic Thought, p. 125.
69 Al-Ghazâlî, Ihya’ (Revival) and Mishkât al-Anwâr.
70 Maha El-Kaisy Friemuth, God and Humans in Islamic Thought, p. 122.
71 Al-Ghazâlî, Ihya’ (Revival), vol. 4, p. 244.
72 Al-Ghazâlî, Mishkât al-Anwâr, pp. 169-170. Cf. Maha El-Kaisy Friemuth, God and Humans in Islamic Thought, p. 136: El-Kaisy Friemuth indicates that “al-Ghazâlî attributes different qualities to the human soul; all are very close to the qualities which he attributes to God […] This nature is nevertheless created by God and does not emanate from Him, as al-Ghazâlî carefully shows in his explanation that God has made us like Him in order for us to be able to perceive His nature.”
his major works, and we will see how the following statements demonstrate his attempts to solve the problems of divine simplicity.

(1) In his discussion of the divine Dhāt/essence, al-Ghazālī argues: “[Allāh] is not quantifiable, [...] nor divisible (hadd, literally means “no limit” or “without parts”).”73

(2) He further explains how the divine essence must be neither quantifiable nor divisible by indicating that “[Allāh is] one […] which has no equal in its rank (entailed “incomparable” aspect, e.g., munazzah);” 74

(3) In Tahāfut al-falāsifā he rejects “plurality” (katfira) in Allāh’s essence/Dhāt (according “the five categories of plurality”).75

(4) In Tahāfut al-falāsifā, Prob. VI, “Refutation of their denial of the divine ṣifāt,” al-Ghazālī affirms the divine ṣifāt; they are uncaused.”76

(5) In Tahāfut al-falāsifā, Prob. VI, al-Ghazālī concludes: “The First Principle (Allāh) is a possessor of ṣifāt that are eternal and uncaused, such that (a) the Dhāt; (b) ṣifāt, and (c) the subsistence of the ṣifāt in the Dhāt are all uncaused, each existing from eternity to eternity.”77 In the next section I will show how al-Ghazālī arrives at this point.

In these statements we see how al-Ghazālī draws the lines within which he develops his interpretation of divine unity. Following the Ash’arites, al-Ghazālī stresses that although there are differences between the divine ṣifāt, they exist in the one divine Dhāt. Again, in defending the Ash’arite argument, al-Ghazālī states that Allāh is truly simple and uniquely one although He has seven essential ṣifāt; His ṣifāt “are not identical with, but also are not different” from His Dhāt. This sophisticated idea in al-Ghazālī’s view of divine unity deserves a discussion in this chapter, if we are to answer the question: How does al-Ghazālī’s theology attempt to solve the problem of divine unity? Or does al-Ghazālī’s idea of divine simplicity leave other critical questions unanswered? And is al-Ghazālī’s idea of divine simplicity compatible or incompatible with other selected thinkers’ (Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin) ideas of divine simplicity? Indeed, as I will show in section 2.2, al-Ghazālī’s ontological description of the divine essence and attributes presents a clearer and more explicit view than those of any of his predecessors, particularly his uses of singularity, unity and the mystery of Allāh in his formulation of the doctrine of divine unity. Therefore, we will proceed by offering the textual considerations and an outline of what follows in the next sections.

73 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Essence, pp. 198-199. Cf. “First treatise: Theoretical Reflection on the Essence of God—Tenth Proposition,” in al-Ghazālī’s Moderation in Belief. Al-Ghazālī writes, “We claim that God [Exalted is He] is one. His being one is based on affirming the existence of His essence and denying the existence of other such essences. [...] We say that ‘being one’ might be used to indicate that the thing is indivisible, that is, it has no quantity, part [or juz’], or magnitude” (emphasis added).

74 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Essence, pp. 198-199.

75 See al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifā, pp. 100-101: Al-Ghazālī denies these five categories of plurality, and I will pick up this discussion in the following chapter to understand what Al-Ghazālī intends to say about (1) being receptive to division whether actually or in the imagination; (2) the intellectual division of a thing into two different concepts, not quantitatively, like the division of a body into Form and Matter; (3) plurality through ṣifāt, by the supposition of knowledge, power, and will, for if the existence of such ṣifāt were necessary, necessary existence would be common to both Allāh’s Dhāt and these ṣifāt, thereby negating unity; (4) an intellectual plurality resulting from the composition of genus species; (5) the plurality of the divine essence (Dhāt) and existence.

76 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifā, p. 112.

77 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifā, p. 115.
2.1.3 Textual Considerations

There is a lot of material in al-Ghazālī’s philosophical-theological works and his exegesis of the Qur’ān and the Hadīth that we can use to explore the answer to the main question mentioned above. In order to narrow down this vast quantity of material, I have chosen to study al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa78 and his Al-Iqtiṣād fi ʾl-iʿtiqād,79 and then reflect on his exposition of the unity of Allāh as found in his other works.80 These English translations of al-Ghazālī’s works are selected due to my inability to handle Arabic and Persian; and there are very few complete translations, with only two choices available in English: Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa and Al-Iqtiṣād.

The unity of Allāh, according to al-Ghazālī, is to be found scattered throughout his works and is difficult to access. To the best of my knowledge, al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of al-Tawḥīd has not been sufficiently documented and analyzed. A careful study of it would be an important contribution to the history of monotheism and Islamic thought as a whole. Another reason is that al-Ghazālī does not demonstrate his view in one or two works; rather, one should read his selected major works in order to achieve a fair understanding of his view on the unity of Allāh. For example, al-Ghazālī offers a brief yet very comprehensive examination of Allāh’s unity within the twenty discussions in Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa. In this regard, I made every attempt to give an account of the unity of Allāh by outlining the problems that emerge from al-Ghazālī’s different presentations of the divine ṣifāt, and his understanding of Allāh as a simple God throughout his selected works, in order to obtain, through their juxtaposition and comparison, a nuanced picture of al-Ghazālī’s position. For these reasons, his theological works Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa and Al-Iqtiṣād fi ʾl-iʿtiqād are selected for examination in this research.

2.1.4 Preliminary Methodology: An Outline of What Follows

Before we embark upon the following discussions, it is necessary to stress what we can and cannot do in this chapter. First, it is not the primary purpose of this chapter to resolve the contradiction between al-Ghazālī’s and the Muʿtazila’s views on divine unity/Tawḥīd; rather it is to indicate how the concept of divine unity is characterized in al-Ghazālī’s major works. In other words, this chapter focuses on discussing how al-Ghazālī interprets divine unity/simplicity, especially in relation to divine attributes. Second, at this point, I am only examining the English translation of al-Ghazālī’s major works as I am not acquainted with Arabic and Persian (see 2.1.3 Textual Consideration). Third, al-Ghazālī’s works are strikingly extensive and rich; in order to get a better insight into his views on the oneness and unity of Allāh, some main theological aspects that are narrowly related to simplicity will be examined as well (stated in Chapter 1). In Section 2.2 I first concentrate on the main arguments of al-Ghazālī’s divine unity, especially on what the nature of simplicity meant according to him. I will attempt to show that al-Ghazālī could have solved the problem of divine simplicity by describing three key terms of his doctrine of al-Tawḥīd: “uniqueness” (al-khūṣṣiyah), “completeness” (kāmil), and “unknowableness”. In other words, this chapter shows that through these three theological concepts (which al-Ghazālī defines as important aspects to discuss the concept of Allāh’s unity), al-Ghazālī attempts to safeguard the oneness of Allāh without sacrificing His many attributes. Second, in Section 2.3, I begin to examine

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78 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa.
79 Al-Ghazālī, Al-Iqtiṣād fi ʾl-iʿtiqād [Moderation in Belief].
80 Al-Ghazālī’s major works in English translations: see the primary and secondary sources of al-Ghazālī in the Bibliography.
81 See the primary and secondary sources of al-Ghazālī in the Bibliography.
some theological issues (such as the adh-Dhāt and existence [wujūd] of Allāh; the unknowability of Allāh and the world; divine names and attributes; the uncreated Qur’ān) as far as they are related to al-Ghazālī’s discussion of divine simplicity. This examination attempts to find out whether al-Ghazālī has successfully solved the problem of divine simplicity, as well as to discover his grounds for safeguarding a wholly unique Allāh. Finally, I examine and study the selected treatises by al-Ghazālī in order to find out whether or not he discusses Allāh’s simplicity within the theoretical framework given in Chapter 1 (the uses of singularity, unity and mystery of Allāh in his formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity). An overall evaluation of the preceding examinations will be presented at the end of this chapter.

2.2 Discourse on the doctrine of divine simplicity by al-Ghazālī: The Nature of Al-Tawḥīd: Allāh is the Wholly Unique and Unknowable One

2.2.1 Preliminary Remarks

It is important to note that, generally speaking, the nature of divine simplicity is very difficult to understand, analyze, and explain, partly due to the complication that different terms are used in the discussion of this topic. In al-Ghazālī’s works, various terms are used to discuss divine simplicity; for example, unity, oneness, uniqueness, the different one, the absolute one, etc. Nevertheless, these terms are used synonymously; they refer to the same aspect of divine simplicity. In order to avoid confusion arising from the usage of terms, this study will unify and typify the terms al-Ghazālī uses in his discussion of divine simplicity. Indeed, al-Ghazālī uses three terms, which he relates narrowly and even regards as identical, namely: uniqueness, completeness or perfection (kāmil), and unknowability in describing Allāh. ‘Uniqueness-completeness-unknowability’ are, we could say, all referring to God’s simplicity. As far as I am concerned, I will indicate how this is a threefold idea of al-Ghazālī that lies at the heart of his doctrine of divine simplicity.

In this chapter, I prefer to use “uniqueness”, “completeness”, and “unknowability” when referring to transcendental “singularity” or “oneness” (e.g., there is only One Allāh), as these terms suggest distinct features as opposed to the usual terms, such as “one.” More importantly, I feel that we can understand al-Ghazālī’s characterisation of Allāh’s simplicity very clearly in terms of uniqueness (al-khāṣṣiyah) and completeness (kāmil). Although “uniqueness” and “completeness” certainly can be understood in a variety of ways, the ordinary understanding of these terms helps us grasp al-Ghazālī’s view of the nature of Allāh’s simplicity. Furthermore, “uniqueness” and “completeness” make us aware of the conceptual complications involved in divine simplicity. As for al-Ghazālī, the usage of “uniqueness” (al-khāṣṣiyah), does not necessarily imply oneness, but that Allāh is the absolutely unique one; the use of “completeness” (kāmil) does not necessarily imply many, because Allāh is total completeness. We may discuss below why and how al-Ghazālī can ascribe “uniqueness” (the singularity of Allāh), “completeness” (the unity of Allāh), and “unknowableness” (the mystery of Allāh) to Allāh in his divine simplicity. This task is not an easy one, but is undertaken in the following section.

2.2.2 The Nature of Simplicity/Tawḥīd: “Uniqueness,” “Completeness,” and “Unknowability”

In Islamic tradition, the question of the existence of Allāh is not the main issue in the doctrine of Allāh, but the nature of divine essence and attributes, and their relationship between one essence (adh-Dhāt) and many attributes (ṣifāt) in Allāh, became the central
problem in the development of the Islamic scholastic theology, as well as in Islamic philosophy. For al-Ghazâlî, what sort of a being is Allâh? What does he think about the doctrine of divine simplicity? In his treatise on *Divine Essence* (*Dhât*), al-Ghazâlî, before drawing the general conclusion that Allâh is simple, dismisses various specific modes of composition. Al-Ghazâlî argues that Allâh is “not quantifiable or subject to quantification,” nor “divisible,” and “has no equal in rank.” As these modes of non-composites help to make clear, al-Ghazâlî’s view of divine simplicity means that Allâh is indivisible, incomparable, unequalled, and incomprehensible. So, what kind of nature of divine simplicity does al-Ghazâlî propose? In al-Ghazâlî’s doctrine of divine simplicity these terms tell us that the nature of Allâh’s simplicity is a wholly unique oneness.

Also in his *Iqtiṣâd*, the major work of his *kalâm*, he explains divine simplicity by juxtaposing two passages, and bases it mainly on this threefold idea—the uniqueness of Allâh, the completeness of Allâh, and the unknowability of Allâh. My discussion in this section will proceed as follows. I will begin to demonstrate first the threefold idea, and then analyze whether his view is consistent. The threefold idea can be found in the following passages of the *Iqtiṣâd (On Divine Essence)*:

[Allâh] He is not quantifiable, meaning that quantification denies something’s wholeness by dividing it. But [Allâh] is not divisible, since divisibility pertains to things that are quantifiable. Quantification results in division into parts, becoming smaller. But that which is not quantifiable cannot be described as divisible. Furthermore, [one] can be understood as that which has no equal in its rank, such as when we say that the sun is one.

We propose that the cause which we have established for the existence of the world is eternal [*a parte ante* or eternal anteriorly]. If [the cause] had a beginning, it would require another cause, which would require yet another cause, and so on in a chain that is either infinite, which is absurd, or that terminates without absurdity in an eternal [being]. Now then, this is what we were seeking, and we call this [eternal being] the Maker of the world, whose existence must per force be acknowledged. By “eternal being” [Allâh/the Maker of the world] we do not mean anything but a being whose existence has not been preceded by non-existence. Thus, nothing comes under the term eternal except the affirmation of a being and the negation of a prior non-being.

The above passages show that the threefold idea is basic in al-Ghazâlî’s understanding of the oneness of Allâh. Through explaining what is not a true concept of Allâh, al-Ghazâlî expounds the uniqueness and completeness of Allâh. Let us revisit these two passages above to explore how al-Ghazâlî formulates his threefold idea of Allâh. To do so, I hereby present al-Ghazâlî’s arguments (based on the above two passages) by summarising them into the following premises:

Premise 1: Allâh is not quantification but completeness;

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82 Al-Ghazâlî on *Divine Essence*, pp. 198-199.
83 See Al-Ghazâlî on *Divine Essence*, pp. 198-199.
84 Al-Ghazâlî on *Divine Essence*, pp. 198-199.
86 Al-Ghazâlî on *Divine Essence*, pp. 198-199.
87 Al-Ghazâlî on *Divine Essence*, pp. 198-199.

26
Premise 2: Allāh is completely one as the unique being;  
Conclusion: Allāh is an absolutely unique-whole-indivisible Being

Three important remarks can be made from the above premises. First, in premise 1 & 2, we can see how al-Ghazālī problematizes the “quantification” of “Allāh is one” by rejecting that He is the sort of being of which only one exemplar exists: ‘one’ as numerical—Allāh is neither one nor many, but He is a wholly unique kind of being that is beyond the system of counting. As shown above, al-Ghazālī uses the sun as an analogy of the unique one. The sun would only be unique in the entire universe if no other matter had any comparable characteristic with it. Such analogy aptly indicates that when al-Ghazālī speaks of Allāh as oneness, he essentially retains this specific meaning, namely only Allāh alone is said to possess Allāh’s specified characteristics. On the other hand, al-Ghazālī’s unique Allāh differs from the uniqueness of other things in light of His completeness. For al-Ghazālī, the notion of Allāh’s uniqueness is not expressed as a unique thing in the sense of numbers or empirical accidents as uniformity, but as an utter wholeness or completeness. The following example helps us understand this point: if there are many unique lords, each would be unique in a particular identity; but not unique as “lords”. But Allāh is the Lord of Lords: only Allāh Himself is called unique in this sense. For this reason, when al-Ghazālī uses the notion of Allāh as the unique one, it is not in the sense of an empirical accident, but unique in every respect.

Second, al-Ghazālī also relates oneness with completeness in his doctrine of divine simplicity. He argues that the oneness of Allāh is an indivisible oneness within completeness, (Allāh is a wholly indivisible being). It seems to me that here al-Ghazālī places an implied relationship between the unique oneness and completeness of Allāh in his ontological arguments for the existence of Allāh as one. In other words, for al-Ghazālī, when describing Allāh as a unique one and wholly one, in this case it is not to say that the only uniqueness of Allāh is like there the uniqueness of the doorbell at my apartment. To understand this metaphor, let me further elaborate: the uniqueness of Allāh is not identical to the uniqueness of the doorbell, or any other single thing in the created world. The uniqueness of the doorbell is caused and accidental, but the uniqueness of Allāh is uncaused and essential; the uniqueness of Allāh is perfect, but the uniqueness of the doorbell is imperfect. The doorbell of my house is unique in the sense that it is the only doorbell I have; but there are thousands of doorbells in the rest of the world. Therefore, the uniqueness of my doorbell is contingent upon its specific use and location. Neither is my doorbell perfect; inevitably it will fail to function after some years. However, Allāh is unique because there are no other gods; and Allāh is also perfect because He never fails to be Allāh. Therefore, Allāh is eternally wholeness, completeness, and perfection (kāmil). For al-Ghazālī, these eternal predicates attributed to Allāh are neither equal nor univocal attributes that can be understood by humans. This is because the uniqueness and completeness of Allāh’s attributes surpasses or transcends every single attribute that a human being can truly comprehend. Allāh is not contingently unique like a doorbell; Allāh is Allāh, a unique perfection of Being itself. The term “wholly unique” refers exclusively to Allāh, in al-Ghazālī’s thought. This is al-Ghazālī’s formula for expressing Allāh’s whole uniqueness and absolute difference from contingent forms of existence.

From the above premises, we can also observe that al-Ghazālī’s central argument of “Allāh is one” means the negation of anything other than Himself and the affirmation of His essence (adh-Dhāt). In other words, there are no other gods before the one Allāh. To know the completeness of Allāh involves a relationship between divine predicates and divine Dhāt, as divine ṣifāt are “not identical, but not different with regard to the divine
essence.” It should be evident then that, for al-Ghazālī, Allāh’s uniqueness is an utter difference in nature, which is called the Wholly Unique One. This concept of al-Ghazālī is also explicitly demonstrated in his assertion that the existence of Allāh Most High and Holy neither belongs to a single substance, nor to a contingent property. In other words, al-Ghazālī contends that Allāh is neither like anything nor is anything like Him; this is connected to his understanding of divine attributes. In his Iqtiṣād, he indicates such an understanding by saying,

All contingent things, their substances and accidents, which occur in the essences of living and inanimate beings, occur through Allāh’s power. He is unique in their creation, and not one of the created things occurs through another [i.e., none by contingent power] but rather all occur through Allāh’s power.

As shown above, al-Ghazālī carefully expresses the distinction between divine essence and attributes by placing Allāh as divine power over against human-contingent power. I will return to the issues of contingency and necessity later in Section 2.3.4.

Third, for al-Ghazālī, “Allāh’s utter uniqueness” means that Allāh’s uniqueness is incomparable and transcendent. Such a unique nature does not necessarily imply Allāh’s uniformity, but rather implies His perfection (kāmil). To put it another way, al-Ghazālī considers Allāh’s uniqueness as dissimilar to any worldly thing that also would be unique without division. Thus, al-Ghazālī denies plurality in the divine essence through Allāh’s uniqueness (al-khāṣṣiyah) and completeness or perfection (kāmil); He is not “one” in a numerical way. Such a concept is repeated in Iqtiṣād, as well as in a slightly different form in his Tahāfut al-falāsifa. In sum, al-Ghazālī’s perception of oneness in Allāh’s essence is not merely in the numerical sense, but the concept of Allāh’s simplicity is an organic state of indivisible completeness. This concept of Allāh’s simplicity is also shown in that He is a unique being that is incomparable with any other thing. There is no equality in divine essence or attributes of Allāh.

After looking into al-Ghazālī’s understanding of the nature of simplicity through the threefold understanding of uniqueness (al-khāṣṣiyah), completeness or perfection (kāmil), and unknowability, the question arises how, if Allāh is unique and wholly one, the divine attributes (ṣifāt) can be “parts” of a simple indivisible One? In other words, is it logically impossible to ascribe any attributes to Allāh? Thus, we have to discuss how al-Ghazālī solves the problem of attribution in his understanding of Tawḥīd/Divine unity through his threefold idea. To this I now turn.

2.2.3 Solution: The Relation between Divine Essence/ Dhāt and Divine Attributes/Ṣifāt

My discussion in this section will proceed as follows. I begin this section with a brief account of the various treatments of the doctrine of divine simplicity in the context of the

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89 See Al-Ghazālī on Divine Essence, pp. 123-124, 149-150; and al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, pp. 109-123.
91 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Essence, pp. 123-150.
92 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, pp. 20-21. Cf. “Second Treatise on the Divine Attributes,” in Al-Ghazālī’s Moderation in Belief. Al-Ghazālī indicates “that all the occurrences—their substances and their modes, and those that occur in the animate or inanimate beings—come into existence through the power of God [Glorious and Exalted is He], who is their exclusive originator.”
Medieval Age, making clear why al-Ghazālī finds the Philosophers (together with the Mu‘tazilites) incoherent in interpreting the doctrine of divine simplicity in terms of general causality.\textsuperscript{93} I then turn to the task of developing how al-Ghazālī arrives at his doctrine of genuine causality, in particular—“the non-necessary causality”\textsuperscript{94}—the only way of rendering the doctrine of divine simplicity in a more coherent way.

Let us revisit the sketches of various treatments of the problem of attribution in Islamic tradition before we explore the solution of al-Ghazālī. I first identify the problem, or key question, of the relationship between the divine essence (\textit{adh-Dhāt}) and existence of Allāh from the history of Islamic tradition.\textsuperscript{95} This problem is also a key question raised by al-Ghazālī in relation to the doctrine of divine simplicity in his \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}: Can the existence of Allāh and His unity be known rationally from the existence of the world? This question was raised first by an Ash‘arite theologian (al-Baqillānī, d. 1013) against the Mu‘tazilites, who sought to vindicate human rationality as a means of knowing Allāh. Al-Baqillānī argued that only through the premise that the world is created could a creator—Allāh—be required logically.\textsuperscript{96} It appears that in the argument of a First Cause the conclusion that Allāh exists is based on the principle of causality, which says that only if a cause (Allāh) occurs, its effect (the world) would follow. This general principle of causality can be expressed as follows:

\begin{itemize}
  \item A is the necessary cause of B, or:
  \item The occurrence of A is necessary for the occurrence of B.
\end{itemize}

In order to safeguard the divine essence (\textit{adh-Dhāt}) as one, the Mu‘tazilite school holds to this general principle of causality, and holds that Allāh is simple quiddity, and that the key of Tawḥīd is the necessary existence of Allāh (\textit{wājib al-wujūd}).\textsuperscript{97} In other words, to the Mu‘tazilites, Allāh’s ṣifāt have to be subsumed into the divine Dhāt. Thus, the argument of the Mu‘tazilites is not that Allāh has no attributes (ṣifāt), but that divine attributes are logically included in the divine essence. In his \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, al-Ghazālī begins with providing a definition of the Philosopher’s (Al-Fārābī and Ibn Ṣinā) or the Mu‘tazilah’s Simple Allāh: the necessary being (Allāh) must be one if by necessity Allāh is the primary cause for everything.\textsuperscript{98} Let us trace how al-Ghazālī understands the Mu‘tazilite concept “the uncaused is uncaused per se or per causam,” and how he rejects their views. Al-Ghazālī indicates that the whole idea of causality is mistaken. The rule that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{93} See Section 2.1.2
  \item \textsuperscript{94} Al-Ghazālī in his \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa} rejects the assertion of “necessary causality” by the Philosophers (Al-Fārābī and Ibn Ṣinā), which concern the necessary nature of the relation of cause and effect. Al-Ghazālī is clearly against the assertion of the Philosophers that “this connexion observed between causes and effects is of logical necessity, and that the existence of the cause without the effect or the effect without the cause is not within the realm of the contingent and possible” (see Ibn Rushd, \textit{Tahāfut al-Tahāfut}, p. 312). This point is discussed further in this section.
  \item \textsuperscript{95} Majid Fakhry, \textit{A History of Islamic Philosophy}, pp. 215-223.
  \item \textsuperscript{96} Majid Fakhry, \textit{A History of Islamic Philosophy}, p. 217.
  \item \textsuperscript{97} Ibn Ṣinā, \textit{Al-Illahiyyat Al-Shifa} [The Metaphysics of The Healing]. We can see this principle of causality in Ibn Ṣinā: for him, \textit{al-wujūd} serves as a primitive definition of the One. Ibn Ṣinā speaks of the One as, “the Necessary Existent is one, nothing sharing with Him in His rank, and thus nothing other than Him is a necessary existent” (Bk 8, p. 273). Here, Ibn Ṣinā clearly demonstrates his idea of the One as absolutely unique. He explains, “He is the First” in relation to what is other than Him. Besides, “The First has no quiddity other than His individual existence” (pp. 274-276) because everything that has a quiddity other than existence is caused (p. 276). The First is uncaused and, therefore, has no quiddity (\textit{quiddītas: mahiyah} or essence) (Bk.6, pp. 29-34).
  \item \textsuperscript{98} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, pp. 96-99.
\end{itemize}
“what is uncaused is uncaused in per se or per causam,” implies that things exist by necessity “either essentially or derived from a cause.” Such a view, according to al-Ghazālī, does not distinguish between the necessity of the existence of things and the necessity of necessary being (Allāh). Because of this lack of distinction between necessity in things and in Allāh, the Philosophers conclude that there is no composition of divine attributes in Allāh, or more precisely, that Allāh is identical with His attributes.

Let me summarise what al-Ghazālī identifies as the five major characteristics of the Philosophers’ concept of divine unity (that is the First Principle): (1) incorporeal; (2) neither form nor matter; (3) all attributes of Allāh are reduced to His divine essence; (4) there is no composition of genus or species or difference in Allāh, and (5) there is no composition of existence and quiddity in Allāh. These five characteristics of divine unity in the Philosophers’ argument are not meant to deny the divine attributes nor the plurality of negations and relation, but to deny the essential reality of divine attributes that exist in the divine essence. Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī asserts that the Philosophers’ arguments for divine unity are “a groundless way of arguing,” “a strange notion,” or more precisely, a “fundamentally wrong division.” For al-Ghazālī, the assertion of seven divine attributes (warranted by the Qur’ān) does not necessarily destroy the simplicity of divine essence. In fact, the Philosophers’ school argues for divine simplicity by reducing the seven attributions ‘to’ the simplicity of a single divine essence; al-Ghazālī rejects this view as inconsistent with the Qur’ān.

Al-Ghazālī’s Solution: Allāh as the cause of causes

As promised, let us now turn to the task of investigating how al-Ghazālī develops his understanding of genuine causality, and, in particular, of “non-necessary causality”, which he thinks is the only way of rendering the doctrine of divine simplicity in a more coherent way.

Let us revisit the general principle of causality:

A is the cause of B, or:
The occurrence of A causes the occurrence of B.

Al-Ghazālī’s idea of causality is not totally opposed to the above formulation, but he rejects the idea that what looks like the relation between a cause and an effect is always necessarily true. In al-Ghazālī’s words:

[The connection between what are believed to be the cause and the effect is not necessary. Take any two things. This is not That; nor can That be This. The affirmation of one does not imply the affirmation of the other; nor does its denial imply the denial of the other. The

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101 See al-Ghazālī, Tahāfat al-falāsīfa, pp. 99-100.
102 See al-Ghazālī, Tahāfat al-falāsīfa, pp. 102-108, esp. p. 102, al-Ghazālī summarizes the Philosophers’ doctrine of divine simplicity in this way: ‘The essence of the First Principle is one. But a plurality of names for this one Dhat arises either from the relation of things to it, or from its own relation to things, or from the negation of things as its predicates. The negation of something as a predicate does not necessitate plurality in the subject. Nor does a relation indicate the plurality’; compare also to al-Ghazālī’s refutation of their denial of the divine sifāt in Problem VI, pp. 109-124.
103 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfat al-falāsīfa, pp. 96-97.
existence of one is not necessitated by the existence of the other; nor its non-existence by the non-existence of the other.\textsuperscript{104}

Here, al-Ghazālī points out that the principle of cause and effect does not need to be understood in the way that is identical with the Asha’arite concept of ‘āda (habitus), namely, that cause and effect are necessarily unconnected. For al-Ghazālī, Allāh’s uniqueness is related to His unique essence (adh-Dhāt) and uniquely necessary existence (wājib al-wujūd). The uniqueness of Allāh is demonstrated in His being the ultimate necessary cause over all creation through apparent chains of causality. And so we can understand that Allāh is the ultimate cause of each cause, while Allāh Himself is uncaused.\textsuperscript{105} The next question, of course, is whether al-Ghazālī’s causal theory is capable of offering a conceptually coherent account of the relationship between the uniqueness of Allāh and His necessity. In the following sections, I attempt to explore al-Ghazālī’s discussion of the principle of causality, and to identify how al-Ghazālī’s concept of causation has played an important role in the shaping of his concept of the divine essence and existence (wujūd). This concept is presented by explaining al-Ghazālī’s argument, in his treatise Tahāfut al-falāsifa, of the uniqueness and completeness of Allāh in relation to the divine essence and necessary existence: Allāh is the cause of causes. It is necessary to begin our exploration first, by understanding the relationship between necessity and causation.

\textit{The Relationship between Necessary Being and Causation}

In our discussion of the relationship between necessary being and causation, I first need to determine what al-Ghazālī means when he claims that Allāh’s essence is uncaused, and how he justifies this claim. As has been shown, al-Ghazālī’s conception of causality is different from the normal principle of causality. According to al-Ghazālī, the normal principle of causality is not a valid argument. For al-Ghazālī, it is not necessary to demonstrate a direct connection between cause and effect in order to prove the existence of a Necessary Being (Allāh). To grasp the concept of Allāh in relation to the causation of al-Ghazālī, let us revisit the general principle sketched in 2.2.3:

\textit{The above cause and effect principle is a general philosophical assumption. Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī contended that, “the connection between what are believed to be the cause and the effect is not necessary.”\textsuperscript{106} Al-Ghazālī gives the example of “the burning of a piece of cotton at the time of its contact with fire”\textsuperscript{107} to explain his argument. On one hand, al-Ghazālī admits that the above example indeed demonstrates the logical system of cause and effect, as there is a causal relationship between the cotton and the fire. But on the other hand, al-Ghazālī opposed the Philosophers, who concluded from this example that fire necessarily causes the burning of cotton.\textsuperscript{108} Al-Ghazālī points out that the Philosophers are only able to indicate the occurrence of burning at the time when the cotton is in contact with fire, but they are unable to show what the cause of the fire is.\textsuperscript{109}}
When al-Ghazālī claims that “the connection between what are believed to be the cause and the effect is not necessary,” he is saying that “the cause of a natural happening sometimes is not necessary” and therefore “the connection between cause and effect is not necessary.” It is worth noting that al-Ghazālī does not deny or reject the principle of cause and effect; rather he points out that cause and effect are not necessarily interdependent. This is clearly seen in his example of cotton and fire. Al-Ghazālī observes that the fire is an inanimate thing without will, and only the ultimate reason for the burning of the cotton causes the fire in the first place. Since fire is an inanimate thing with no action, or more precisely it is not a personal thing with a will, al-Ghazālī points out that we are only able to observe that the cotton is burned when the effect (cotton) is in contact with the cause (fire), but not the effect by the ultimate cause (Allāh). For this reason, on the one hand, al-Ghazālī affirms that there is indeed a continuous connection between cause and effect, but on the other hand, he also asserts that what we observe from past experience does not mean that this is always the case. Al-Ghazālī explains the reason why this should not always be the case: the existence of cause and effect is ultimately the case due to the prior decree of Allāh. To show the connection between Allāh’s decree and a miracle in al-Ghazālī’s thought, I would say that al-Ghazālī attempts to demonstrate the decree of Allāh in the relationship of cause and effect. For al-Ghazālī, Allāh is Allāh, He is able to use natural means for causes to have effects all the time, but He is also able to perform miracles sometimes. Allāh creates and sustains the world both in a natural and in a miraculous way; the world is not necessary in itself, and is incapable to initiate causes and effects. But on the other hand, it is within the divine power to create a feeling of fullness within the human being without eating, to quench thirst without water, and so on.

Thus, al-Ghazālī’s discussion of necessity and causality does not undermine his view of the uniqueness and completeness of Allāh; rather it upholds the truth of Allāh Himself as the ultimate cause. This idea can also be found in al-Ghazālī’s proof that miracles are possible.

Necessity

In his explanation of necessity, al-Ghazālī makes a distinction between the Philosophers’ use of this term and his own. Al-Ghazālī shows that the Philosophers’ usage of “necessary being” is based upon two arbitrary assumptions: (a) the necessary being is deduced from certain consequences/efficient effects that determine its existence; (b) the necessary being is proven by created creatures on the basis of their own categories. Al-Ghazālī indicates that such assumptions are derived from the Philosophers’ argument that “every quiddity which is an existent has already received plurality, since there is existence in addition to quiddity.” In contrast, al-Ghazālī affirms that “the supposition of quiddity which is one existent is intellectually admissible […] For in any case, the ‘one’ existent is intelligible, and there is no existent without an essence, but the existence of the essence is not incompatible with oneness.” In short, al-Ghazālī refutes the assumptions of the Philosophers as they had against the real existence of divine attributes and the genus-differentia division or composition. One may observe from the above discussion that the Philosophers who sought to safeguard Allāh’s simpleness held that Allāh’s existence cannot
be related to His essence.\textsuperscript{116} This is the reason why the Philosophers denied the existence of attributes: in order to reduce them to Allāh’s essence. Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī rejects these assumptions because they are incompatible with the oneness of Allāh and the real existence of divine attributes.\textsuperscript{117} For al-Ghazālī, “what the Philosophers’ say is like saying, ‘Existence, but no existent; and that is a contradiction in terms.’”\textsuperscript{118} For al-Ghazālī: “The ‘one’ existent is intelligible, and there is no existent without Dhāt [or quiddity], but the existence of divine essence is not incompatible with oneness.”\textsuperscript{119} In this statement, al-Ghazālī attempts to explain that the oneness of the divine essence is not identical to God’s existence, and he further asserts that the existence of divine essence will not necessarily contradict the oneness of Allāh.\textsuperscript{120} In other words, Allāh is a necessary existent with a quiddity of divine essence (\textit{adh-Dhāt}).\textsuperscript{121} I will present below al-Ghazālī’s explanations and arguments for his treatment of the problem of attribution.

For al-Ghazālī, “Allāh is uncaused,” in the sense of pure negation. In his words, “a necessary being is that there is no cause of its existence, and of its uncaused character.”\textsuperscript{122} Here, al-Ghazālī argues that pure negation is necessary for describing a necessary being.\textsuperscript{123} He further explains that pure negation itself has no cause, so we cannot investigate whether this pure negation is \textit{per se} or \textit{per causam}.\textsuperscript{124} According to al-Ghazālī, “The meaning which emerges from the denial of the cause of being, and which is a pure negation, cannot itself be called caused or uncaused.”\textsuperscript{125} Thus, al-Ghazālī concludes that when we call Allāh a necessary being / uncaused in itself, it is not necessary to imply that nothing else can possibly possess the attribute of necessity.\textsuperscript{126} In other words, the Philosophers’ arguments only lead to a dilemma of contradiction: as one would imply that Allāh is one with nothing else and without any real existence of divine attributes. For al-Ghazālī, this is not supposed to be the case if one insists that the existence of divine attributes would pluralize the divine essence.

On the other hand, al-Ghazālī describes ‘necessity’ in the expression “Allāh is a necessary existence” (\textit{wajib al-wujud}) so that it ‘only means the denial of cause.’\textsuperscript{127} It seems that for al-Ghazālī, the existence of necessary being is not dependent on an effect; it is independent of effect. In other words, the relation between necessity and effect is not interdependent as the Philosophers have understood it. Here, al-Ghazālī asserts that necessary existence has and needs no cause. The next exploration we need to conduct is whether the denial of a cause is related to Allāh’s essential nature or accidental features. In order to do so, we must shift to the discussion of the relationship between necessary being and causation.

\textbf{Argument for the Possibility of Miracles}

Al-Ghazālī uses the argument that there is no necessary connection between cause and effect to show that Allāh can interfere in a natural setting of cause and effect, producing

\textsuperscript{116} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{117} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{118} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{119} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{120} See al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{121} See al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{122} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{123} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{124} See al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, pp. 96-97.
\textsuperscript{125} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{126} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{127} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{Tahāfut al-falāsīfa}, p. 135.
results that did not exist in past human experience. Such intervention is called a miracle (kharq al-‘āda, literally, “a rip or tear in the fabric of custom”). For al-Ghazālī, the connection between cause and effect is the result of Allāh’s power and will that precedes the existence of acts. If one act follows another, it is because Allāh created them in this way, not because the connection is necessary in itself.128

A contradiction occurs in the Philosophers’ arguments (particularly in Neo-Platonist thought). On one hand, they claim that ‘only one proceeds from one;’ in which Allāh is a cause that necessitates the world by His nature; but on the other hand, they contend that the Principle (Allāh) is one and the world is composed of different things. For al-Ghazālī, in these Philosophers’ argumentation it is impossible to prove that Allāh is the agent and the maker of the world.129 Indeed, in al-Ghazālī’s view, the Philosophers’ idea that “only one proceeds from one” and “whatever proceeds from Him is a necessary consequence,” ends up in a conception of Allāh who has no will and no attributes at all.130 In addition, only a series of simple entities could proceed from Allāh’s oneness;131 this is exactly the argument that al-Ghazālī contends. Al-Ghazālī uses an illustration to further explain his contention: humans are composed of body and soul (Form and Matter). He argues that “the soul did not originate from the body, nor the body from the soul, but both have emanated from eternal causes.”132 Similarly, “the Principle is simple; whereas the effects are characterized by composition. And this is inconceivable, unless the simple and the composite were to meet.”133 These statements show that al-Ghazālī and the Philosophers both stand in the same position on the aspect of the First Principle as one.

Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī points out that despite their affirmation of the plurality of negations and relations in the divine essence of the First Principle as one, the Philosophers are still unable to prove all divine attributes in terms of negation and relation.134 It is only through denying divine attributes in terms of negation and relation that the Philosophers are able to affirm divine simplicity. In other words, there is a contradiction between divine attributes and divine essence. But according to al-Ghazālī, it is impossible that divine attributes and divine essence are co-eternal, without violating the completeness and uniqueness of Allāh. He asserts that the seven essential divine attributes are identical with the divine essence. Thus, “all the Divine Ṣifāt are ultimately to be identified with Divine Dhat.”135 “His power and will and knowledge are one and the same as His Dhat.”136 Al-Ghazālī also explains the uniqueness of divine attributes (ṣifāt) by pointing out the difference between divine knowledge and human knowledge, and indicates that divine knowledge is not like our imperfect knowledge.137 After explaining the divine attributes in terms of negation, al-Ghazālī moves on to explain the divine attributes in terms of relation.

Al-Ghazālī explains the relationship between divine attributes and essence by giving the following example, which is from Aristotle’s Metaphysics: “The knower, the knowledge and the object of knowledge form a unity.”138 As knowledge and the object of knowledge both proceed from the knower, the knower both contains knowledge and the object of

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128 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, pp. 185-195.
129 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 73.
130 See al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 74.
131 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 73.
132 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 74.
133 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 75.
134 See al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, pp. 102-108.
135 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 105.
136 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 106.
137 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 105.
138 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 79.
knowledge; yet this does not pluralize the knower. Another explanation is given by al-Ghazālī: “Generosity is an expression of His being—in relation to the action, i.e., generosity, and in privation of a purpose. Hence it does not mean any plurality in His 139 Dhāt.” Such a claim, al-Ghazālī argues, does not build on any speculative grounds but simply submit to the authority of the prophets in regard to the fundamentals of these things. Therefore, Allāh’s attributes (ṣifāt), as wholly undivided attributes, are made in terms of uniqueness and completeness, without plurality in divine essence (adh-Dhāt), and affirming divine attributes altogether does not involve plurality and contingency in divine essence.140

In sum, al-Ghazālī’s understanding of Allāh as the cause of all acts can be summarized by the following premises:

Premise 1: Al-Ghazālī affirms that the nature of the Philosophers’ conception of causality is logically possible, but it is not sufficient to prove that Allāh is uncaused.

Premise 2: Al-Ghazālī states that causality is a natural process in the world, but Allāh, as the maker of the world, is the real agent of causation and is able to act in both a natural and supernatural way (miracles), according to His will.

Conclusion: Therefore, al-Ghazālī’s idea of causality does not reject the natural principle of cause and effect, but denies that this natural idea of causality can be applied to Allāh as creator of the world.

In this section we have seen how al-Ghazālī’s solution to the problem of attribution in divine simplicity is related to his argument for causality.

2.2.4 Conclusion: Concerning the Nature of Al-Tawḥīd

Let us now summarize the results of our examination of al-Ghazālī’s central doctrine of divine simplicity. It is difficult if not impossible to offer a simplified definition of divine simplicity in al-Ghazālī’s thought. By trying to do so, we come to the conclusion that al-Ghazālī conceptualizes the nature of Allāh’s simplicity in terms of His uniqueness, completeness, and unknowability (the threefold idea of Allāh’s simplicity). What al-Ghazālī means by conceiving of Allāh as unique and whole is, as far as I can see, that Allāh is beyond the mathematical concept of oneness. Allāh is Allāh; and His oneness to al-Ghazālī is not a numerical oneness, because He is wholly unique Being. This account of the threefold idea of divine simplicity in al-Ghazālī is of crucial importance for him to solve the problem of the relation between divine attributes and the divine essence. Thus, when al-Ghazālī describes Allāh as having divine attributes, he means that these attributes are in their multiplicity co-eternal with Him and superadded to the divine essence (note: unlike the Muta’zilites, 142 al-Ghazālī does not reduce the divine attributes to Allāh’s essence. For al-Ghazālī, the seven essential divine attributes are superadded to divine essence, but do not belong to the divine essence).

139 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 106.
141 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, pp. 185-195.
142 For Muta’zilites, they emphasize the unity of God to such an extent that they deny that the descriptions of Him as having hands (the Qur’ān, Surāh 38: 75), eyes (the Qur’ān, Surāh 54: 14), a face (the Qur’ān, Surāh 55: 27) and God sitting on a throne (the Qur’ān, Surāh 20: 5) should not be taken literally and understood as His having a body, but these terms are used allegorically. For Muta’zilites, these qualities of God are merely “expressions” of His essence.
More precisely, al-Ghazālī explains his doctrine in this way: the divine attributes are not the divine essence but rather ‘the point’ of the divine essence. In other words, al-Ghazālī’s understanding of the doctrine of divine unity is that God’s utter uniqueness provides the proof for the existence of a being that is without a cause, and such uniqueness of Allāh is not a denial of the multiplicity of divine attributes. Besides, we can also understand another crucial notion that al-Ghazālī uses to explain the relationship between divine attributes and divine essence, namely the notion of “a little similar to but not identical.” Such a notion is important, because if we are unaware of the concept of “a little similar to but not identical,” we may easily assimilate the divine attributes to divine essence. For example, the Mu’tazilites’ conception of divine simplicity has identified all positive attributes of Allāh as subsumed in the divine essence. Indeed, al-Ghazālī’s version of divine simplicity solves the problem of the relation between the divine essence and the attributes, because he is able to safeguard Allāh’s uniqueness but not forsake His attributes. Al-Ghazālī’s solution, it seems to me, renders clearer the distinction between the Ash’arite and Mu’tazilite positions on divine simplicity, because he introduces a definition of divine simplicity that is capable of closing the conceptual “gap” between the divine attributes and the divine essence. It is therefore my conclusion that al-Ghazālī’s version of divine simplicity represents a version of orthodox Islamic theology, which also plays a pivotal role in the Sunni Islam that ascribes a threefold conception to Allāh’s simplicity although He is called a simple God.

In this section, we have undertaken the important task of spelling out what the nature of divine simplicity means in al-Ghazālī’s works. In doing so we have concentrated on the notions of “unique,” “completeness,” and “unknowability” as a threefold idea of the concept of al-Tawḥīd (divine simplicity). Al-Ghazālī’s solution to the problematic relation of divine essence and attributes also opens the door to answer further questions that are related to the attribution of predicates to Allāh. These discussions put al-Ghazālī’s understanding of Allāh’s uniqueness and completeness to its supreme test. Therefore, we now will discuss the relevance of al-Ghazālī’s view of divine simplicity for other theological issues, in order to examine more closely what exactly is secured by al-Ghazālī’s argument.

2.3 Theological Issues in Analysing al-Ghazālī’s Doctrine of Divine Unity

2.3.1 Introduction

The discussion in Section 2.2 led us to discover that in al-Ghazālī’s thought, the nature of divine simplicity is a threefold concept—uniqueness, completeness, and unknowability. We also demonstrated in Section 2.2.3 that in comparison to the Philosophers’ view of divine simplicity, al-Ghazālī’s version of divine simplicity appears to be internally more coherent. Now, although al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity has been accepted as an appropriate doctrine by Sunni tradition, we must shift our attention to the question of whether his doctrine of divine simplicity is also compatible with other theological issues of Islam. In Islam, the following three theological issues are the main difficulties or problems that arise in the doctrine of divine simplicity. I examine whether these theological issues have reinforced or weakened al-Ghazālī’s claim of a wholly unique Allāh. To this examination I now proceed.
2.3.2 The Divine Unity in relation to Transcendence: the Unknowable Allāh and Allāh’s Creation

After discussing al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of causality in Section 2.2.3, we now enter into another relevant issue of causality, namely, the relationship between Allāh and Allāh’s created world. Let us restate briefly the ground we have covered thus far regarding al-Ghazālī’s conception of causality. As shown in Section 2.2.3, we must identify two aspects of the relationship between cause and effect in al-Ghazālī’s conception of causality; let me summarize this as follows:

There is merely a habitual connection between cause and effect.
There is no necessary connection between cause and effect.

With this in mind, we are able to understand what al-Ghazālī intends when he speaks about genuine causality. In other words, al-Ghazālī does not deny that there is a habitual connection between cause and effect, but he states that it is not necessary. In Section 2.2.3, we have seen how al-Ghazālī with his formulation of causality is able to solve the problem of attribution in divine simplicity. Now, we turn in this section to the problem of the relationship between Allāh’s simplicity and the multiplicity of creations. How can Allāh be utterly unique and create the multiplicity of the world? How can He have uniqueness and be unknowable to His creation, yet be like something and be knowable to His creation by way of comparison? In this section, I will attempt to work within the framework of al-Ghazālī’s conception of causality in answering this problem of the relationship between Allāh’s simplicity and His creation. I will begin my discussion of this issue with a short outline of the view of al-Ghazālī’s interlocutors (Mu’tazilite rationalism in general and Greek Neo-Platonism in particular), and then discuss whether al-Ghazālī’s idea of causality in relation to divine simplicity is able to solve the problem of the relationship between Allāh’s simplicity and His relation to the diversity of creation.

In his first proposition in Tahāfut al-falāsifa, al-Ghazālī reacts at length against the idea of the eternity of the world as professed by the Philosophers and Islamic Neo-Platonists. In al-Ghazālī’s interpretation, the Philosophers’ response to the relationship between Allāh and His created world is that, in al-Ghazālī’s words:

[The eternity of the world] always co-existed with Allāh (exalted be He) as His effect which was concurrent with Him in time—concurrent as an effect is with the cause, [...]—and that Allāh’s priority to the world is the priority of the cause of the effect, priority in essence and rank, not in time.

The position of the Philosophers shown in this passage is the model of the principle of general causality, in which the cause and effect is always arrived at in the stage of necessary connectedness. For instance, if Allāh is eternal, then His effect (the world) is also eternal (e.g., the Philosophers claim that the procession of a temporal world from an eternal being is impossible). As such, the concept of necessary connection between cause and effect establishes the order of the created world as a sequence of necessarily connected events, such

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143 According to the Qur‘ān, the account of Allāh’s act and His names often share similar characteristics with His creation (human) also, but never in the same sense. For example, divine will and human will, divine knowledge and human knowledge, etc. See al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 26.
144 See al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, pp. 13-53.
as a connected sequence of causes and effects. 148 Such a claim, al-Ghazālī says, is not consistent with the creating power of Allāh; the Philosophers, al-Ghazālī says, make the idea of Allāh as an Agent and the Maker of the world into a metaphor (or mythological story). 149 In addition, al-Ghazālī points out that the Philosophers who claimed to base their views on “self-evident facts” go astray in that they presuppose a clear analogy between the Divine will and the human will, Divine knowledge and human knowledge, and so forth. 150 Because of these invalid comparisons, the Philosophers assert that the world is eternal. These comparisons also raise the problem of attribution in divine simplicity, because they also derive the idea of simplicity and of how the divine ‘possesses’ attributes from the way in which created things ‘possess’ attributes. From this understanding of simplicity the Philosophers identify all divine attributes with the divine Essence. The question that arises is: if Allāh is an essentially unknowable being. This unknowable aspect of Allāh is derived from His utter transcendence. As al-Ghazālī introduces it: “WE BESEECH Allāh, in the name of His greatness which transcends all limits, and His munificence which outruns all measures.” 151 Here, Al-Ghazālī explicitly shows that it is impossible for anyone to fully know Allāh, or more precisely, that Allāh is an essentially unknowable being. Indeed, this concept of an unknowable Allāh is no doubt the most important element of al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity. The question that arises is: if Allāh is utterly unique and unknowable, is it possible that a human (as a part of the World) can know Allāh, even to a limited extent? Inevitably al-Ghazālī has to interpret ‘knowing Allāh’ in such a way that humans are unable to know Allāh in His totality; however, they can know of Him to the degree that is appropriate for them. Al-Ghazālī’s understanding of Allāh and Allāh’s world can be derived from his treatise Tahāfut al-falāsifa, Problems I and II. I first reconstruct al-Ghazālī’s premises that disagree with the Philosophers and how he opposes the Philosophers in order to offer a ground on which to begin our exploration:

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149 See the discussion of the Philosophers’ confusion in saying that Allāh is the Agent and the Maker of the world in al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, pp. 63-88; compare to Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 229-231.
152 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, Introduction, p. I.
Premise 1: It is not true that the world is originated independently from Allāh; therefore, it co-exists with Allāh.\textsuperscript{153}

Premise 2: It is not true that the world neither originated with Allāh, nor is it co-existent with Him;\textsuperscript{154}

Premise 3: The world has a beginning in time (originated) but does not exist independently from Allāh;\textsuperscript{155}

Premise 4: Allāh is a “[B]eing which is neither outside the world nor inside it;”\textsuperscript{156}

Premise 5: “Allāh’s singularity precludes a rival, not a singularity which precludes the co-existence of the contingent creatures with Him.”\textsuperscript{157}

First, al-Ghazālī argues against the Philosophers’ perception of Allāh’s relation to the world in Premises 1, 2 and 3 (as discussed above). Clearly, there is a fundamental disparity between al-Ghazālī’s view and the Philosophers’ conception of Allāh and Allāh’s world. The Philosophers’ understanding of the eternity of the world is rooted in the principle of causality. For them, since the world is the result of the necessary causality of Allāh’s essence, then, the world as a whole is co-eternal with His existence.\textsuperscript{158} Furthermore, they argue that if the world was created, or has a beginning in time, then it must be co-eternal with Allāh.\textsuperscript{159} On the other hand, al-Ghazālī contends that the world was created in time by an eternal decree of Allāh. Here, al-Ghazālī does not deny the general principle of causality (namely events in the world are necessarily connected in nature). He only contends that such a principle of causality cannot always be applied. For al-Ghazālī, not all events in the world are causally and necessarily related, such as “fire and cotton” (example as shown in Section 2.2.3). Besides, al-Ghazālī asserts that their argument “the world has its origin in and is coexistent with Allāh” is not able to safeguard the simplicity of Allāh, but rather produces multiplicity in Allāh.\textsuperscript{160}

Therefore, al-Ghazālī rejects the Philosophers’ view and offers his own notion of the relationship between Allāh and Allāh’s world, as shown in premise 4. Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī raises another problem: what kind of relationship exists between the characteristics of the One and the things of the finite world—similar but not identical? This issue can be seen, for example, in the relation between Allāh’s will and human willing.

Second, what exactly is al-Ghazālī’s conception of the relationship between Allāh and the world? Al-Ghazālī’s claim that “Allāh is a being which is neither outside the world nor inside it” (premise 4) is not a negation of Allāh’s relationship to the world. Because, if it were, it would follow that the question of whether Allāh is or is not inside the world, is not a necessary question concerning Allāh’s essential nature. When al-Ghazālī describes the relationship between Allāh and Allāh’s world as “Allāh is outside the world” or “Allāh is inside the world,” he points out that it may well be equally improper to answer the question in either way. As al-Ghazālī observes, most people (mainly the Philosophers) make a false comparison between the eternal Allāh and the temporal world. Al-Ghazālī contends that “the eternal will does not resemble temporal intention […] comparison of the Divine

\textsuperscript{153} Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, pp. 13-53: such arguments are (i) “the procession of a temporal (being) from an eternal (being) is absolutely impossible;… and the world has been proved to have existed, and the impossibility of its beginning in time has been shown, it follows that the world is eternal;” (ii) “a comparison of the Divine will to our [human] inclination or will.”

\textsuperscript{154} Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, pp. 13-53.

\textsuperscript{155} Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, pp. 13-53: the argument is like this: “before the existence of the world, the Willer existed: the will existed, and the relation of the will to its object existed.”

\textsuperscript{156} Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{157} Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{158} Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{159} Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, pp. 14-15.

\textsuperscript{160} Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, pp. 20-21.
to the human will is as false an analogy as that between Divine and human knowledge." Al-Ghazālī asserts: "There is a fundamental difference between the function and nature of the divine attributes: "[w]ill is a sīfa of which the function—rather, nature—is to distinguish something from its like." In other words, we must avoid this misconception of the relationship between the function and nature in divine attributes by knowing the distinction between the nature and the function of the divine attributes. For al-Ghazālī, the relationship between Allāh and His world is such that Allāh is neither identical with, nor different from, His world.

Thirdly, al-Ghazālī further shows that the idea of emanation is contrary to Allāh’s simplicity. Al-Ghazālī says, “what we call inadmissible is the procession of the first temporal being from the Eternal.” Such an understanding demands another temporal being. Al-Ghazālī states that the Philosophers often misconect the concept of time with the existence of Allāh. For al-Ghazālī, what makes the eternal Allāh “was” and the temporal world “was not” is because “Allāh is prior to the world and time.” In other words, al-Ghazālī indicates that the world was created, and that Allāh is the creator of the world. Thus, Allāh exists before there was both world and time. For this reason, al-Ghazālī asserts that “[b]y His priority we mean that His being was the only being (before the existence of the world),” “Allāh was, and Jesus was not [here, ‘was’ belongs to the past]; and afterwards, Allāh was and Jesus was together with Him [here, ‘was/will’ be refers to the future].” “Allāh had an existence, while the world was not with Him.” Al-Ghazālī argues that Allāh’s world was created by Allāh’s will (Allāh’s eternal decree) and that time itself is also Allāh’s creation. Therefore, there is no change in Allāh’s essence (the difference between the “eternal” Allāh and the “temporal” world). In premise 5, al-Ghazālī continues to explain divine simplicity. Al-Ghazālī asserts that Allāh’s singularity must be singular in divine essence, but His creation (the world) is not necessary. Again, al-Ghazālī explicitly distinguishes between Allāh and His world. As such, Allāh’s relation to the world is conceived of according to al-Ghazālī’s pattern of “not identical but not totally different.”

We conclude, then, that al-Ghazālī’s arguments for Allāh and His relation to His world established and elucidated the compatibility of Allāh’s uniqueness and completeness with His World. We are able to see in the relationship between Allāh and the world that Allāh is a simple being, but the world is not. The world belongs to Him, but Allāh does not belong to His world. This account of the relation between Allāh and His world prepares us to proceed to the following section that focuses on exploring the relationship between the divine essence and the divine attributes. Nevertheless, there is another aspect of al-Ghazālī’s argument that first requires our attention, namely, his conception of divine simplicity in relation to divine names and divine attributes. To this I now turn.

2.3.3 The Divine Unity in relation to Divine Names and Divine Attributes

In Section 2.2.2, we sketched al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine unity/Tawḥīd, as well as demonstrated that the relationship between the divine essence and the divine attributes appears to be the main problem of al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity. Now, we are at
the stage of looking into such problems and exploring how al-Ghazālī solves them. Let me first expand the problem into a more detailed account. Al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity is at stake here, due to two fairly distinct questions that occur in it. On one hand, he presents his arguments for Allāh’s knowability by explicating the meaning of ṣifāt (divine predicates and their properties) and the beautiful names of Allāh. On the other hand, he points out that Allāh’s simplicity entails that Allāh’s being is unknowable. Or, more precisely, Allāh’s simplicity is neither identical with, nor different from the world. As we have seen, al-Ghazālī makes a sharp distinction between Allāh and the world; however, he also relates Allāh to His world. As such, al-Ghazālī implies that for human beings Allāh is an unknowable or incomprehensible Allāh. How could these two parts, which seem to contradict each other, both work in al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity? This section is devoted to examining how al-Ghazālī solves this apparent contradiction in his doctrine of divine simplicity.

In the following, I first explore al-Ghazālī’s explanation of the seven essential attributes that are predicated to Allāh in Islam, namely, divine attributes or names that can and cannot be predicated to Allāh. I then follow with an answer to the question that was posed in the beginning of this chapter: Does al-Ghazālī’s threefold idea of the doctrine of divine simplicity work in the discussion of divine names and divine attributes? What does al-Ghazālī mean when he claims that divine names and divine attributes are one, and are the same as divine essence?

Unity among the Ninety-Nine Divine Names

I begin discussing al-Ghazālī’s view of the unity of the ninety-nine divine names by exploring how al-Ghazālī secures his understanding of divine transcendence as “unified”, when he insists that the ninety-nine beautiful names of Allāh are permissible to describe Allāh Most High. In Islam, many of Allāh’s attributes are described in what is known as the “ninety-nine beautiful names of Allāh.” In other words, many names of Allāh are named after the attributes of the divine nature. For this reason, it would be inaccurate to speak of Allāh’s names without describing the divine attributes. Al-Ghazālī’s commentary on the divine names, entitled The Highest Goal in the Exegesis of The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of Allāh (al-Maqsad al-asna fi sharh asma Allāh al-husna), is famous for its treatment of the “beautiful names” of Allāh. Al-Ghazālī states that the names and divine attributes, which predicate Allāh, are “the means” by which Allāh praises Himself. Through Allāh’s names and attributes, humanity is able to know who Allāh is, yet humanity is unable to fully comprehend what Allāh is.\(^{169}\) Al-Ghazālī explains,

The name [1] can be the same as the thing named, as we say of Allāh most high that He is essence and existent; and that the name can also be other than the thing named, as in our saying that Allāh is creator and provider. For these indicate creating and providing, which are other for Him. So it can be such that the name [2] may not be said either to be the same as the thing named or other than it, as when we say ‘knowing’ and ‘powerful’: both refer to knowing and power, yet ṣifāt of Allāh cannot be said to be the same as Allāh or other than Him.\(^{170}\)

The above statements show that, when al-Ghazālī speaks about subordinating divine names and divine attributes to Allāh’s unitary nature, he brings up the issue of how Allāh, who revealed Himself to be One, also manifests a multiplicity of names and attributes. It is

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\(^{170}\) Al-Ghazālī, al-Maqsad al-asnā [Ninety-Nine Names], p. 5.
worth noting that, for al-Ghazālī, terms such as “the name,” “the named” and “the namings are both distinct and indistinct.”

The following are the premises that we can observe from the above statements.

Premise 1: ‘x is the same as y’ or ‘x is other than y’;
Premise 2: *the name* is identical with or different from *the thing named*;
Premise 3: *real existence* is similar to *existence*;
Premise 4: word, knowledge, and object are three distinct things, although they mutually conform and correspond;
Premise 5: *the name* is simply the word posited for indicating: a positor (namer), a positing (naming), and the thing posited (named);
Premise 7: “is the same as” is used in three ways: (i) ‘wine [khamr] is wine ['uqar]’ (synonymous names); (ii) ‘the sharp sword [sarim] is the sword [sayf]’ (antonymous names); (iii) ‘snow is white and cold,’ as such white and cold are one (‘it is the same as’ indicates a plurality which is one in some respect).

Conclusion: Al-Ghazālī concludes that the logical outcome of the above premises is: “it is clear that our saying ‘is the same as’ presupposes multiplicity in one respect and unity in another;” or “that there is unity in meaning and multiplicity in words alone.”

Al-Ghazālī gives another illustration that helps us understand the above-mentioned premises; it follows al-Ghazālī’s use of “*the name,*” “*the named*” and “*the naming:*”

The Lord is not being named here in *one* name, but is named in ninety-nine names.
(1) Each one of the ninety-nine names has a different meaning that signifies its proper condition.
(2) All the ninety-nine names qualify one divine essence (*adh-Dhāt*).
(3) The ninety-nine names do not demand many names, but rather, one.

Al-Ghazālī asserts that some divine names share the same meaning. For example, unity is derived from two names, namely, ‘The One’ (*al-Aḥad*) and ‘The Unique’ (*al-Wāḥid*). But other divine names do not share the same meaning. ‘The Omniscient’ (*al-‘Alim*) and ‘He who is aware of everything’ (*al-Khabīr*) refer to two dissimilar meanings. The former refers to knowing alone, while the latter refers to knowing interior things. For this reason, al-Ghazālī argues that these ninety-nine beautiful names of Allāh, “although interrelated in meaning, are not synonymous.” Now, it is important to note a problem that occurs with understanding al-Ghazālī. If the ninety-nine beautiful names of Allāh are predicated of Allāh as al-Ghazālī argued, the logic of this point is that we are able to know Allāh through His names. But as mentioned earlier, at the beginning of this section, al-Ghazālī holds that Allāh is ultimately unknowable. How then is it that al-Ghazālī claims that Allāh is unknowable since he also asserts that Allāh is knowable through His names? In

171 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* [Ninety-Nine Names], pp. 5-23.
other words, it seems that al-Ghazālī’s arguments contradict one another. In order to understand what al-Ghazālī means, we need to explore his thoughts on knowing Allāh.

It is worth noting that al-Ghazālī affirms that both the premise that one is able to know Allāh (“I know Allāh”) and not knowing Allāh (“no one other than Allāh knows Allāh”)¹⁷⁴ are true. With regard to the former, al-Ghazālī contends that we can only know Allāh in two ways. Nevertheless, one way is inadequate and the other way is closed. Al-Ghazālī illustrates that, “for He (Allāh) is living but not like living things; powerful but not like powerful persons.”¹⁷⁵ Another explanation of his would be as follows:

**Premise 1:** one who says “I know Allāh” is right;
**Premise 2:** one who says “only Allāh—great and glorious—knows Allāh” is right;
**Conclusion:** Al-Ghazālī affirms that both Premises 1 and 2 are correct.

The above premises suggest a conclusion that Allāh is both knowable and unknowable at the same time. Al-Ghazālī, however, does not leave this seemingly contradictory conclusion without explanation. Rather he wisely responds with the Sūrah of the Qur ‘ān, 8:17 that says, “You did not throw when you threw, but Allāh threw” and argues that some things might seem impossible to man, but for Allāh everything is possible. According to al-Ghazālī, as well as to the people of the Sunna, there are ten fundamental possibilities for reducing the divine names into the divine essence.¹⁷⁶ In addition, al-Ghazālī points out that the application of divine names and attributes applied to Allāh has two foundations: *The Divine Instruction* [tawqīf, which refers to the teaching proceeding from both the Qur ‘ān and Hadīth] and *The Basis of Reason*.¹⁷⁷ Al-Ghazālī argues that, in his words, “whatever pertains to names is based on authorization; whereas whatever pertains to attributes is not based on authorization; rather, the ones that are authentic are acceptable, but not the false ones.”¹⁷⁸

After showing that the ninety-nine names are proper ways to predicate Allāh, al-Ghazālī further expounds how these names and his above arguments resolve the problem of the simple essence and seven essential attributes.

**Al-Ghazālī’s Contention: Unity among Divine Essential Attributes**

It is crucial to see the relationship between divine simplicity and the divine names/attributes for understanding al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity. According to al-Ghazālī, knowing who Allāh is implies knowing what Allāh is, and knowing what Allāh is postulates a knowledge of what one can appropriately say about Allāh. After looking into al-Ghazālī’s views of the divine names, we are now at the stage of examining his understanding of divine attributes. Al-Ghazālī holds that the seven essential divine attributes do not compromise the fundamental belief of the oneness of Allāh (Tawhīd). Nevertheless,

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¹⁷⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqsad al-asnā* [Ninety-Nine Names], pp. 159-162. These ten possibilities are as follows: The ‘ṣfūr indicate (1) the Dhāt (e.g., ‘Allāh’ and ‘the Truth’ [al-Haqq]). (2) the Dhāt with a negation (e.g., ‘the Holy’ [al-Qudūs], ‘the Rich’ [al-Ghāni], ‘the One’ [al-Wahīd]). (3) The Dhāt with something added (‘the Most High’ [al-Ali]). (4) An attribute (ṣfūr) with a negation and something added (‘the King’ [al-Malik]). (5) One of the seven ‘ṣfūr, an attribute with negation (this is further explained in 3.4.2). (6), (7), (8) An attribute with something added (something in addition to knowing, like ‘the Wise’ [al-Hakim]; to power, ‘the Dominator’ [al-Qubbah]; to will, ‘the infinitely Good’ [al-Rahman]). (9) An attribute of action (‘the Creator’ [al-Khalīq]). (10) With something added or negated (‘the All-Glorious’ [al-Majīd]).
this understanding seems to generate a problem, which is closely related to the history of Islam. As such, what follows will identify the central problem of divine attributes through exploring the course of Islamic history.

According to the Mu’tazilite school and its theologians, in order to safeguard the doctrine of a simple Allāh, one must deny the attributes of Allāh and hold that there is only a single essence in Allāh. Although they neither deny divine actions, nor a multiplicity of negations or additions [to it], they resolve or reduce all of Allāh’s attributes to His actions, or more precisely, to a single essence.179 Mu’tazilites asserted that the doctrine of ta’wil, or the allegorical interpretation of this term used in the Qur’ān, describe all the positive characteristics of Allāh.180 However, this thesis generates a difficulty when one turns to the Qur’ān’s teaching on the eternal attributes inherent in Allāh. Majid Fakhry observes that many Mu’tazilite scholars earnestly sought to rationalize the divine attributes and did so by giving up all positive attributes of Allāh in order to safeguard Allāh’s unity.181 This is a major criticism that al-Ghazālī expresses in Tahāfut al-falāsifa.182 Al-Ghazālī points out that attributes are represented by the Mu’tazilite thinkers as something distinct from the divine essence of the entity they qualify and are adventitious to it. According to the Mu’tazilites, the composition of divine essence and attributes is logically impossible for an Allāh who is absolutely simple.183 In sum, from the history of Islamic philosophy and kalām, we are able to recognize that the central problem of divine attributes lies in the question whether attributes, which are conceived of as real, incorporeal beings are distinct from divine essence or, rather, exist in Allāh.184

Unlike the Mu’tazilites, al-Ghazālī in his treatise, al-Iqtiṣād, affirms the following. First, the Qur’ān clearly indicates that the seven essential divine attributes of power, knowledge, life, will, seeing, hearing and speech, subsist eternally in Allāh’s essence. Second, these attributes are different properties. For al-Ghazālī, the consistency of Allāh’s unity is not simply a concern for numerical unity. Rather, the uniqueness and completeness of Allāh is extended to many of Allāh’s essential attributes.185 It would thus be better for me to summarize the main premises of al-Ghazālī:186

Premise 1: The Divine attributes are dependent on their subject, namely, the divine essence. But the divine essence does not depend on the attributes. For example, Allāh is love, but love is not Allāh. From this premise, al-Ghazālī asserts that the Mu’tazilah often misplaced the order of priorities by either claiming that both divine essence and attributes are independent of each other; or that both divine essence and attributes are dependent on each other;

179 See al-Ghazālī, al-Maqsad al-asnā [Ninety-Nine Names], pp. 163-165: See also al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 109: Al-Ghazālī observes that both the Mu’tazilah and the Philosophers assert “[t]hese names have been used by the Sacred Law, and their application is etymologically defensible. Nevertheless, they all mean—as has been shown above—the same thing, viz., the one Dhāt. It is not right to affirm sīfāt which are additional to the divine Dhāt, as our knowledge or power is an attribute additional to our Dhāt. For such a thing necessitates plurality […] So the divine sīfāt, even if co-existent with the divine Dhāt, will not cease to be an additional to the Dhāt,” and compare to Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 43-66.
180 See Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 43-66.
181 See Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, p. 59.
182 See the discussions of al-Ghazālī on Allāh and His sīfāt in al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, from Problem III to Problem XI.
184 Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 32, 47, 57-62.
185 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, pp. 65-75.
Premise 2: The Divine attributes are in the divine essence. Since an eternal being is uncaused, the attributes and essence of an eternal are both uncaused, as well;

Premise 3: “The First Principle is a possessor of attributes who is eternal and uncaused, and whose divine essence, attributes, and the subsistence of the attributes in the essence are all uncaused, each existing from eternity to eternity.”

Conclusion: “The impossibility of attributes existing, not in bodies (which are other than the attributes), but in themselves, is also an argument to prove that the attributes of living beings—e.g., knowledge, life, power, will, seeing, hearing and speech—exist, not in themselves, but in an essence.”

Based on the above premises, al-Ghazālī argues strongly against the Philosophers’ concept of Allāh’s simplicity, since it eventually leads to the denial of Allāh’s attributes. Unlike Ibn Sīnā and the Philosophers, al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of necessary being defends the concept of a being who is without a cause but not without composition. More precisely, the essence is uncaused but compatible with a being that has a multiplicity of essential attributes. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī has provided a convincing argument for divine predicates or sifāt in Iqtiṣād:

First, the seven essential attributes are not the same as Allāh’s essence. Rather “they are distinct and superadded to the essence (Dhāt).” Al-Ghazālī uses the example of “The First sifā (Power)” to explain this. According to this example, the relation between power and its object is the relation between the effect and its cause. As such, “the Creator of the world is powerful;” “the world is a masterly work.” In other words, Allāh’s absolute power is related to every possible thing. According to al-Ghazālī, every contingent thing and every act or movement is divisible into separate parts, and power creates movement after movement.

Second, unlike the Mu’tazilah, who claimed that knowledge (and all other attributes reduced to one divine essence) is a mode (hāl) of the divine essence, but not attributes (since attributes are contingent things) of the divine essence, al-Ghazālī affirms that all the attributes mentioned in the Qur’ān are inherent in Allāh (Dhāt), and eternal as well. Al-Ghazālī uses the illustration of “knowing” and “having knowledge” to explain this. Similar to “knowing” and “having knowledge,” which is one and the same thing, al-Ghazālī asserts, “in this essence (Dhāt) knowledge subsists.” In other words, all attributes subsist in Allāh’s essence and none of them could possibly subsist without His essence.

Third, for al-Ghazālī the divine attributes are not something other than Allāh. Al-Ghazālī explains that when we say ‘Allāh,’ we refer to the essence ‘Dhāt’ together with its attributes; rather than to the divine essence alone, since the term ‘Allāh’ could not be predicated of a divine essence that is judged to be free from the divine attributes.

Fourth, al-Ghazālī asserts that Allāh’s names in the Qur’ān are derived from the seven essential attributes. Thus, they are semipeternally (azalan) and eternally predicated of

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187 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 115.
188 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, p. 124.
189 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, p. 65.
190 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, pp. 1-2.
191 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, p. 4.
192 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, pp. 80-97.
193 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, pp. 65-75.
194 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, p. 74.
His essence (adh-Dhāt). Al-Ghazālī concludes that, “He is, in eternity, Living, Knowing, Powerful, Willing, Hearing, Seeing, and Speaking.”

By exploring the nature of al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity, and the relationship between divine essence and divine attributes in Section 2.2, and then also further exploring the main problem of al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity and his solution for the problem in Section 2.3, the manner in which al-Ghazālī secured divine simplicity through the names of Allāh and his seven essential attributes has been shown.

2.3.4 The Divine Unity in relation to the Uncreated Qur‘ān

In Islamic tradition, among the seven essential divine attributes in the Qur‘ān, the speech of Allāh has been subject to great controversy in philosophical-theological circles. Thus, there is a need to explore how al-Ghazālī argues that Allāh’s speech (or the Qur‘ān) is co-eternal with Allāh, yet does not compromise the unity of Allāh. If the Qur‘ān is co-eternal with Allāh, does this mean that the Qur‘ān is uncreated? We begin by looking into the nature of the Qur‘ān. As Fakhry observes, the Mu’tazilah school’s denial of eternal attributes is also a denial of the eternity of Allāh’s speech. It follows thus that Allāh’s speech is a created accident. This concept of Allāh’s speech is shown in the Preserved Tablet (al-Lauh al-Mahfūz or original codes in heaven). On the other hand, the traditionalist’s view (Ash‘arite school) of the Qur‘ān holds that the Qur‘ān is uncreated. This view is seen in Ibn Abbas’ idea (A.D. 618-87) that the eternal attributes are real, including the eternal šifa of ‘Word’ in the sense of an eternal pre-existent Qur‘ān. According to this view, the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘speech’ are predicated of Allāh and directed to the Qur‘ān—the uncreated divine attributes entail the uncreated Qur‘ān.

Following Ash‘arite tradition, al-Ghazālī in Iqtiṣād holds to the uncreated Qur‘ān through the following arguments. Firstly, al-Ghazālī distinguishes two aspects of speech through (i) sound and letters (huruf); and (ii) inner speech (hadīthu-n-nafs). Al-Ghazālī points out that Allāh’s speech belongs to inner speech. Secondly, Allāh’s speech is an eternal šifa subsisting in Allāh’s essence, and humans (Moses/the Messenger) hear it neither by letter nor by sound, but rather, by inner speech. Thirdly, “Allāh’s speech is written in the books (masāḥif), preserved in the hearts, and read by tongues. Paper, ink, writing, consonants, and vowels are all contingent things because they are bodies and accidents in bodies and all that are contingent.” Al-Ghazālī argues that the Qur‘ān existed before its revelation, or more precisely: it even existed before the creation of the world. Al-Ghazālī asserts that Allāh’s speech is “being,” it is not created. Thus, this proves that the Qur‘ān, namely, Allāh’s speech, is uncreated. It seems to me that al-Ghazālī’s argument in this case acts against rationality, which is different from rationalism, since his theological conclusion

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196 Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, p. 63; and Andrew Rippin ed., The Blackwell Companion to the Qur‘ān (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 425; and Henry Corbin, History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 108-109, 116. According to Ash‘arite, Qur‘ān is eternal in the sense that divine attribute of kalām is subsisting eternally in Allāh, as such, is exempted from all verbal and phonetic articulation. Nevertheless, the Qur‘ān is also composed of words as it is written. Thus, from this aspect, it is created and a temporal fact. Everything is created through the word “be” uttered by Allāh. Now, if word is also created, it follows that there will be an endless chain of creations, which is an absurdity.
198 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, p. 49.
199 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, p. 49.
200 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, p. 55.
201 Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates, p. 55.
is derived on the basis of the Qurʾān, not just through reasoning. Based on the above principle, al-Ghazālī affirms that the Qurʾān includes both Allāh’s uncreated speech and created human writing.

2.4 Conclusions of Chapter 2: Al-Ghazālī’s Doctrine of Divine Unity in Comparative Studies

In this chapter, we concluded that from Islamic philosophical and theological perspectives, al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity represents the Ashʿarite school over the Muʿtazilite version of divine simplicity, or the view that created reality marks the first step toward the philosophization of Muslim thought. Perhaps their major difference is not their understanding of divine essence (both al-Ghazālī and Islamic Neo-Platonists affirm that Allāh is utterly simple), rather it is the distinct ways in which each solves the problem of the attribution of predicates to divine simplicity. For those Muʿtazilites and Islamic Neo-Platonists who wanted to safeguard the divine unity (Tawḥīd), it was necessary to resolve all the essential divine attributes into a single essence. However, for al-Ghazālī, in order to safeguard genuine divine unity (Tawḥīd) it was not necessary to reduce all the seven essential attributes into a simple essence. In fact, al-Ghazālī repeatedly shows that it is necessary to make a fundamental distinction between human attributes and the divine attributes: on the one hand, human attributes are very closely related to, but not identical with, self-existence; on the other hand, all divine attributes are really identical with self-existence and with the divine essence. Thus, the plurality of divine attributes does not result in an addition to a single divine essence as human attributes make addition to human being. In short, I would conclude, for al-Ghazālī, “the plurality of seven essential divine attributes” does not make a “singularity of divine Dhāt” plural.

However, the present dissertation is mainly a comparative study between al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin on divine simplicity. Thus, we will only concentrate on the discussion of al-Ghazālī’s view of divine simplicity. Let me now characterize al-Ghazālī’s version of divine simplicity: if Allāh is utterly unique and wholly one, His being is identical to His essence, and the real existence of a plurality of divine attributes does not compromise His essential simplicity. Perhaps al-Ghazālī’s view of causality is the central solution for explaining how the many divine names resolve into the simplicity of essence with seven essential attributes. In addition, among the issues highlighted in Section 2.3, I have tested al-Ghazālī’s view of divine simplicity as to its systematic relevance to these theological issues. In addressing them I have shown that al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity can stand up to these criticisms, and that it is an orthodox version of divine simplicity in Sunni Islam. In concluding the overview of al-Ghazālī’s view of divine simplicity, let me sum up its main characteristics in terms of an agenda for further comparative study of the theory of divine simplicity with other selected thinkers in the final chapter.

The discussions in this chapter show that the following are the most obvious characteristics of al-Ghazālī’s divine simplicity that can be compared with those of other thinkers of divine simplicity in the final chapter:

First, in section 2.2, we answered the question: “What is Allāh’s being?” by showing that the nature of divine simplicity in al-Ghazālī’s thought is grounded in a threefold idea, namely, the uniqueness, completeness, and unknowability of Allāh. We have also shown how al-Ghazālī’s view of causality has solved the problem of attribution in his doctrine of divine simplicity, in which the relationship between divine essence with His attributes are “not identical, but not different.”
Secondly, in section 2.3.2, we discussed the relationship between Allāh’s simplicity and His multiplicity of creations. According to al-Ghazālī, the threefold idea—the uniqueness, completeness, and unknowability—of Allāh is both known and unknown by His creatures. The knowable aspect of Allāh has been revealed in the Qur’ān through His knowable attributes, and the unknowable aspect of Allāh is His incomprehensible essence, which is beyond our human understanding.

Third, in section 2.3.3, we encountered still another set of ṣifat problems (the unity of the divine names and the divine attributes). In the framework of al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of divine simplicity, the development of the distinctions between divine names/attributes and human names/attributes can be seen as an attempt to solve these ṣifat problems.

Fourth, in section 2.3.4, we met another cluster of problems that needed to be sorted out. The discussion of the origin of Allāh’s speech/word is mainly central in the issue of whether the word of Allāh in the Qur’ān is created or uncreated. To al-Ghazālī, the word of Allāh is one of the seven essential attributes, it is “being” (co-eternal with Allāh), in the sense of an eternal pre-existent Qur’ān.

After all is said and done, this chapter prepares the groundwork for comparative studies of al-Ghazālī’s, Ibn Rushd’s, Thomas’ and Calvin’s views of divine simplicity. After commenting on the general Sunni tradition’s approach to the doctrine of divine simplicity in light of their giants’ formulation of divine simplicity—al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd—as exhibited in this chapter and chapter 3, I shall turn to an examination of Thomas’ and Calvin’s doctrine of divine simplicity, the significant thinker of the medieval and reformed Christian scholars in Chapter 4 & 5.
3

The Doctrine of Divine Unity (Al-Tawḥīd) in the Thought of Ibn Rushd, especially on his Tahāfut al-Tahāfut and some passages from Ibn Rushd’s Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Book XII (Lām)

3.1 An Overview

Al-Ghazālī is best remembered for the Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), one of his major works which provoked a critical reply from the twelfth-century philosopher, Ibn Rushd (better known in the Latin West as Averroës). In Ibn Rushd’s reply to al-Ghazālī, entitled Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), he cites lengthy quotations from al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa, and follows them by a point-by-point refutation of his arguments. Since it is not possible to analyze all of these refutations in this present chapter, I have selected his specific refutation related to the “Divine Essence and Attributes,” and have made a closer examination of the problem of the relation between God’s essence and attributes, that Ibn Rushd posed and discussed in the Tahāfut al-Tahāfut, as well as in his commentaries on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Book XII. I will limit myself to consider one central question within this immense subject: How does Ibn Rushd conceptually link the oneness of God (divine transcendental unity, or so called “Tanzih”Tawḥīd), with the plurality of His attributes (ṣifāt)?

The following selected works of Ibn Rushd will be examined in this chapter: Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence, 1180), Faṣāl al-Maqāl 1 fī mā bayna al-shari‘ah wa-al-ḥikmah min al-ittīṣāl (Decisive Treatise on the Conjunction between the

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3 I am aware that the concept of “transcendental” (transcendens/transcendentia) is a term used more closely by the thinkers of the sixteenth century [see Chapter 1], and it was not frequently used by the Medieval thinkers. It was not until Ibn Sinā (1037) / John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) that the expression became common to both Islamic and Christian thinkers, who used it as “transcendental unity” mainly regarding the proper reflection and understanding of the unity of God in the aspect of philosophical theology. The close connection of the transcendentials with the divine unity is apparent in the work of Thomas and other selected thinkers. See Jan A. Aertsen, “Chapter One: The Concept of Transcendens in Medieval Thought: What is beyond and What is common,” in Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor [ca. 1225] to Francisco Suárez (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 13-34; and Alexander Treiger, “Avicenna’s Notion of Transcendental Modulation of Existence and Its Greek and Arabic Sources,” in Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas, eds. Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (Leiden: Brill, 2012): pp. 327-363.

4 See Chapter 2, p. 9 n. 3.
Shari'ah and Philosophy, 1178), and Tafsir ma'ba'd at-Taba (Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics: A Translation of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book XII [Lambda], 1192-1194). This chapter seeks to situate Ibn Rushd's perspective on the relationship between the essence and attributes of Allâh within the broader dialogue of this thesis (see also Chapter 1: Introduction). In addition, this chapter also explores whether Ibn Rushd's endorsement of Ibn Sinâ's doctrine of divine unity is compatible with his criticism of al-Ghazâlî's doctrine of divine unity?

In what follows, I intend to offer a critique of Ibn Sinâ’s and al-Ghazâlî’s views on the central problem of divine essence and attributes, by presenting the views of Ibn Rushd on this problem; and to show the continuity and discontinuity in the thought of these three thinkers. In the following, I will show that Ibn Rushd in fact endorses both the teachings of al-Ghazâlî and Ibn Sinâ by narrowing the gap between their understandings of Allâh’s oneness.

3.2 Introduction to Ibn Rushd (520–595 / 1126-1198)

3.2.1 Setting the Stage: Ibn Rushd in the Context of Twelfth Century Muslim Spain

Abû al-Walîd Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmâd Ibn Muhammad Ibn Rushd al-Ḥâfîd (commonly known as Ibn Rushd or Averroës) was a Spanish philosopher and mutakallim who held a juristic position in the Islamic region of Andalusia, in southern Spain. In the history of Islamic philosophy, Ibn Rushd is regarded as a significant Andalusian philosopher of Islam during the rule of the North African Berber dynasty of the Almohads (1146-1269). Ibn Rushd was born in 520/1126 in the city of Cordova, Spain. We know very little about his early formative period or upbringings other than that his father and grandfather were legal scholars from Cordova. Ibn Rushd probably studied in Cordova and Seville. He was a representative of a long and well-respected tradition of legal and public service in Muslim Spain. His grandfather, Abdul-Walid Muhammad, was the chief judge (Mâlik juris-consult, qâdî al-jamâ’û) of Cordova and a specialist in legal methodology during the period of the Almoravids, as well as a teacher of the various legal schools. His work had a strong influence on Ibn Rushd, even though he died in 1126, the same year that Ibn Rushd was born. Ibn Rushd’s early education was of the traditional type and centered chiefly on...


6 Ibn Rushd’s Metaphysics.


8 See Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); see also the chronology of Averroes in Roger Arnaldez, Averroës: A Rationalist in Islam, p. 129.


10 See Roger Arnaldez, Averroës: A Rationalist in Islam, pp. 7-8: Arnaldez observes that it would have been impossible for Averroës not to know his grandfather’s work (a book on law entitled Premises [al-
linguistic studies, jurisprudence (fiqh), and Islamic scholastic thought (kalām). Although his philosophical education is not well documented, the internal evidence in his treatises arguably shows that his two chief influences were Ibn Bājja (Latin ‘Avempace’) (d. 1138) and Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185). Ibn Rushd not only possessed training in law and philosophy, but had medical training as well, studying under Abu Ja’far ibn Harun of Trujillo. Through the good offices of Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Rushd was introduced to the Almohad caliph Abū Ya’qūb Yūsuf ca. 1169, whose interest in philosophy and science had a strong effect on Ibn Rushd. The historian al-Marrākushi preserves an account of this crucial meeting between Ibn Rushd and Abū Ya’qūb Yūsuf:

When I entered into the presence of the Prince of the Believers, Abu Ya’qūb, I found him alone with Abu Bakr ibn Tufayl. […] The first thing the Prince of the Believers said to me after asking me my name, my father’s name, and my lineage, was, “What is their opinion about the heavens?” referring to the Philosophers. “Are they eternal or created?” Reticence and fear took hold of me, and I began to make up some excuse and to deny being occupied with the science of philosophy, inasmuch as I was unaware of what Ibn Tufayl had decided with him. The Prince of the Believers, however, perceived my fear and reticence and turned to Ibn Tufayl. He began to speak with him about the question which he had asked me, and he mentioned what Aristotle, Plato, and all the Philosophers had said about it. Along with this, he presented the objections of the people of Islam regarding it. I thus saw in him a copious memory which I would not have expected even in one of those who are occupied with this matter full time. Thus he continued his exposition until eventually I spoke, and he came to know what I thought about that subject.12

In 1169, after meeting with the caliph, Ibn Rushd was appointed as judge (qadi) of Seville in Spain, and was commissioned by Abū Ya’qūb Yūsuf to write a series of commentaries on Aristotle’s works,13 through which he became famous. Matteo di Giovanni indicates that “Ibn Rushd’s exegesis of Aristotle consists of three series of ‘commentaries’ which cover almost the entire Corpus Aristotelicum.”14 Gerhard Endress also observed that,

Muqaddamāt] aimed at facilitating the explanation of the demands made by the qualifications of the code [almudawwana] relative to legal sentences and solid legal traditions for the purpose of explaining the principal questions that are problematical. For example, Arnaldez points out that Averroës, “like his grandfather, authorized the use of a rational method in the juridical search for the principles of what the laws require for men” (p. 8). See also Delfina Serrano Ruano, “Ibn Rushd Al-Jadd (d. 520/1126),” Islamic Legal Thought: A Compendium of Muslim Jurists, eds. Oussama Arabi. David S. Powers and Susan A. Spector (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 319. According to Ibn ‘Idhārī’s al-Bayān al-mughrib (an important medieval historical source), Ibn Rushd Al-Jadd (Ibn Rushd’s grandfather) wrote more than 100 books and treatises in his lifetime.

11 See Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman trans. and ed., Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007), pp. 266-283. Ibn Bājja was the first of the great Andalusian falsafa as well as vizier of the governor of Granada for twenty years. Ibn Rushd the Philosopher would have been 12 years old when Ibn Bājja died, so he obviously could not have worked with the latter.


13 See Oliver Leaman, “Ibn Rushd, Abu’l Walid Muhammad (1126-1198),” Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, pp. 638-639. Oliver Leaman identifies that “Ibn Rushd’s reported nervousness at accepting this commission was well-founded in 1169 […] Over the next twenty-six years, however, Ibn Rushd wrote commentaries took a variety of forms. Often Ibn Rushd would write a summary (epitomes/jami’), medium commentary (middle/talkhis) and long commentary (great/tafsir) of the same text, thus presenting the ideas of Aristotle to a variety of audiences […]” (p. 639). Cf. Dominique Urvoy, Ibn Rushd (Averroës), pp. 36-38.

In the course of the 1160s, Ibn Rushd conceived his project (philosophical project), the long-term project of his life, defined ever more clearly in the course of a prolonged struggle with the epistemic paradigm of the religious community, and brought to fruition in his years of maturity: establishing demonstrative science, the law of reason, as the basis of thought and action in the whole of human society, thus uniting the religious, scientific and intellectual communities under the authority of the philosopher-jurist. This project seems to have consciously developed when he was qadi of Seville, in the years from 1169 until at least 1171, the year of the earthquake at Cordoba.¹⁵

It was through these philosophical works (Ibn Rushd’s commentaries on Aristotle’s works), translated systematically into Latin and Hebrew, that Ibn Rushd became more esteemed in the new universities (i.e., Bologna, Oxford, and Salerno) of the Latin world than in the Islamic world.¹⁶ The movement that started in the Latin world called Averroism continued for centuries.¹⁷ Hilmi Ziya Ülken indicates that the reason Ibn Rushd was not too well known, and that his works were forgotten in the Islamic world, is that “very few copies of his books were made and circulated in the Moslem countries, so that the true Islamic world in the East was not aware of them. The disgrace he had to face at the end of his life was instrument in his being forgotten. Another important reason for that it was destruction of books in Andalusia by the order of Ximanez.”¹⁸

It is, however, only with the influence of his forerunner Ibn Bajjah, as already mentioned, that this philosophical project of Ibn Rushd started to prompt the debate between him and al-Ghazâlî on the critique of reason in the Tahâfut al-Tahâfut (1180).¹⁹ Nevertheless, “it is impossible to understand the work of Ibn Rushd, not only his Aristotelian commentaries, but also his (other works) […] if one does not bear in mind his desire not only to construct a system but to establish the field of rationality.”²⁰ Clearly, Ibn Rushd does not make a distinction between philosophy (falsâfa) and Islamic scholastic thought (kalâm), but combines them both under the principle of the unity of Truth. This unity of Truth is also shown in his Decisive Treatise, in which he explains that demonstrative Truth (the philosophical method of deductive reasoning or burhān) does not contradict the Qur’ânic Truth, but rather is consistent with it and testifies to it.²¹

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¹⁷ See Ülken, The Influence of Islamic Thought, p. 8. For example, Siger de Brabant (d. 1280) was the last proponent of Averroism in the West, and Thomas (d. 1274) was the first westerner to oppose Ibn Rushd’s philosophical system and criticize it in detail.

¹⁸ See Ülken, The Influence of Islamic Thought, p. 10: As identified by Hilmi Ziya Ülken from the Ernest Renan’s account that “in accordance with this Ximanez’s order 80,000 handwritten books in Arabic were burnt in the squares of Granada.”

¹⁹ Urvoy, Ibn Rushd (Averroës), pp. 7-8: Ibn Bajjah did confront al-Ghazâlî’s critique of reason by formulating a “unified theory of knowledge.” According to the observation of Dominique Urvoy: “However, Ibn Rushd’s work was not simply a continuation or completion of Ibn Bajjah’s, which had been interrupted possibly under tragic circumstances. Whereas Ibn Bajjah viewed the philosopher as a ‘solitary’ figure, Ibn Rushd’s work aimed to provide instruction—certainly not of a kind accessible to the masses, but nevertheless directed towards the body of the elite” (p. 8).

²⁰ Urvoy, Ibn Rushd (Averroës), pp. 28-29 (emphasis added).

In 1171, Ibn Rushd returned to his hometown Cordova, and following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather he held the post of chief judge. Eventually, in 1182, he succeeded to the post of court physician of the caliph in the Almohad court at Marrakesh from Ibn Tufayl. During this period of time (1179-1180), his most notable works were *Kashf ‘an manāḥīj al-adilla* (Examination of the Methods of Proof [Concerning the Doctrine of Religion] or “Faith and Reason,” 1179-1180), *Faṣl al-maqāl* (the Decisive Treatise, 1179-80), and *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence, 1180). These three works are the only ones in which Ibn Rushd speaks solely for himself. However, due to a personal grudge against an old habitué of the Almohad court, who had considered the studies of Ibn Rushd’s philosophical works (on Logic and Metaphysics) dangerous to the Islamic religion, the caliph Abū Ya’qūb Yūsuf ordered the banning and burning of Ibn Rushd’s philosophical books in 1195. Consequently, Ibn Rushd was exiled to Lucena, a small town to the southeast of Cordova. After two years of disgrace (1195-1197), as soon as the political climate improved, in 1198, the caliph restored the favour of Ibn Rushd. A few months later, on the night of 11 December 1198, Ibn Rushd died in Marrakesh (present-day Morocco) at the age of seventy-two, and his body was returned to Cordova.

### 3.2.2 Textual Considerations

There are a great number of texts written by Ibn Rushd, which are valuable sources for understanding his view on divine unity (*al-Tawḥīd*). Curiously enough, these eminent works have been mostly neglected by scholars, and no serious study and adequate research have been made, especially of his theological and philosophical works. I have undertaken research on three of Ibn Rushd’s important works: *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, the *Decisive Treatise*, and the only translation into English of Ibn Rushd’s great commentaries is that on *Ibn Rushd’s Metaphysics.* Admittedly, these selected works are only a very small part of all Ibn Rushd’s diverse and rich production, but these works weigh much more than others on the conclusion of deductive reasoning (*burhān*), if Qur’ān is considered carefully, […] there will invariably be found among the expressions of Qur’ān something which in its apparent meaning bears witness to that allegorical/metaphorical interpretation” (*Decisive Treatise*, p. 67). He then explains, “the reason why we have received a Qur’ān with both an apparent meaning (*zāhir*) and an inner meaning (*bāṭin*) lies in the diversity of people’s natural capacities and the difference of their innate dispositions with regard to assent. The reason why we have received in Qur’ān texts whose apparent meanings contradict each other is in order to draw the attention of those who are well grounded in science to the interpretation (*tawil*) which reconciles them” (*Decisive Treatise*, p. 73).

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22 For Almohad movement, the basic of theological doctrine is *Tawḥīd* (divine unity or oneness).


25 See Dominique Urvoï, *Ibn Rushd (Averroës)*, p. 35: Urvoï indicates that “Ibn Rushd was thus the victim of a political gesture, and was sacrificed by the Sultan in order to win over the masses.”

26 See Dominique Urvoï, *Ibn Rushd (Averroës)*, pp. 36-38: Urvoï identifies three important periods of Ibn Rushd’s production: from the initial period until 567/1170; during the transition period in Andalusian intellectual life from 573/1177 to 574/1178; and in the final period from 576/1180 to 586/1190.

27 See *Ibn Rushd’s Metaphysics*.

28 See (i) Commentary on the works of Aristotle, (ii) the relationship between philosophy and Qu’ran in the art of interpretation, and (iii) the refutation of al-Ghazālī’s criticism on divine attributes in Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 274-302.
discussion of God’s unity and His attributes (ṣifāt).\textsuperscript{29} It is undeniable that Ibn Rushd’s \textit{Tahāfut al-Tahāfut} plays an important role in shaping his famous debate with al-Ghazālī concerning how the oneness of God (divine \textit{Tawḥīd}) should be viewed within the plurality of His attributes.\textsuperscript{30} Furthermore, there are various reasons why I have decided to include an analysis of Ibn Rushd’s commentary on the selected passages from Aristotle’s \textit{Metaphysics.} To Ibn Rushd, since these selected passages hold a special place in his formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity which is genuine faith requires.\textsuperscript{31} Although this chapter mainly examines Ibn Rushd’s \textit{Tahāfut al-Tahāfut}, his commentaries in the Aristotle’s \textit{Metaphysics} will be studied as well, as some of the passages selected for this study are elaborated by Ibn Rushd in a more detailed manner in his commentaries (i.e., Aristotle’s \textit{Metaphysics Book XII/Lām}). Also, as we will see in the later sections of this chapter, Ibn Rushd’s commentaries have been identified as a significant catalyst for Ibn Rushd’s treatment of these doctrines in fuller detail. Thus, it is the aim of the following sections (3.4-3.5) to show that by examining the selected passages from Ibn Rushd’s commentaries in connection with his \textit{Tahāfut al-Tahāfut}, a more complete picture of his theology of divine simplicity can be articulated.

\textbf{3.2.3 Preliminary Methodology: An Outline of What Follows}

I began this thesis in chapter 1 with an introduction to the theoretical framework of my research, through which its motifs and methodology are carried out. In this chapter, I demonstrate that this principle of God’s self-existence is applied in Ibn Rushd’s doctrine to address the simplicity and plurality of God’s attributes in Islamic philosophy and theology. I attempt to answer how Ibn Rushd conceptually links the simplicity of Allāh with a plurality of His attributes. In what follows, I begin with considering Ibn Rushd’s adoption of the Avicennian metaphysical framework before turning to his rather different account of al-Ghazālī’s idea of divine unity in \textit{Tahāfut al-Tahāfut}. This chapter then moves on to examine Ibn Rushd’s views and shows that, while inheriting the Avicennian position, he also made a synthesis between Islamic scholastic thought and philosophy, which is in fact an approach wholly absent from his predecessors. I next examine the defense of Ibn Rushd’s doctrine of divine unity through studying his work entitled \textit{Tahāfut al-Tahāfut}, in which he revisits al-Ghazālī’s treatise \textit{Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa}. Ibn Rushd’s idea of divine simplicity, however, cannot be properly understood apart from his extensive commentaries on Aristotle’s corpus on this theme. Here Ibn Rushd includes an extensive discussion of the problematic texts, and incorporates the opinions of both the Greek commentators as well as the Islamic thinkers, especially Ibn Sīnā. This explains to a large extent how Ibn Rushd defends the doctrine of unity in the \textit{Metaphysics}, which he safeguards in \textit{Tahāfut al-Tahāfut}. Finally, I inquire to what extent Ibn Rushd’s use of Aristotle’s and Ibn Sīnā’s \textit{metaphysics} in appropriating the multiplicity of attributes in \textit{Tawḥīd} is similar to, or different from, the approaches of his


\textsuperscript{31} See Majid Fakhry, \textit{A History of Islamic Philosophy}, p. 292. Majid Fakhry rightly points out that there is a twofold truth derived from the revealed Scripture and the philosophy in Ibn Rushd’s Islamic theology: “The rehabilitation of philosophy, Ibn Rushd felt, could be achieved only once it is demonstrated that no genuine conflict between philosophy and religion could arise, and that Scripture properly interpreted is in complete harmony with philosophy properly understood.”
predecessors (Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī). Let me now turn to some of the preliminaries of Ibn Rushd’s teachings concerning “There is no god but only one Allāh.”

3.3 Analysing Ibn Rushd’s Major Doctrinal Theme: The Doctrine of Divine Unity

At this juncture, it is necessary to proceed by providing a brief overview of Ibn Rushd’s project as a whole. It seems reasonable to do this by situating his discussion of the doctrine of God’s unity (Tawḥīd) in Islamic scholastic thought and philosophy during the Middle Ages. I will present the overview through a summary of this important doctrinal theme from Islamic history. According to standard Islamic monotheism (the Mu’tazilite and Ash’arite positions), Allāh cannot be more than one God, which is expressed in the absolute unity and singularity of God (Tawḥīd). Sunni Muslims (Ash‘arites/al-Ghazālī) also hold that seven essential or positive attributes are eternal attributes (ṣifāt) of God, particularly Allāh’s speech (the Qur‘ān), which is an eternal attribute of God and therefore uncreated. These two claims appear to be inconsistent with each other and might compromise the unity of Allāh by implying a plurality in Allāh’s essence (Dhāt), as the Mu‘tazilites and the philosopher Ibn Sīnā had criticized. This led many to think that for Mu‘tazilites and Ibn Sīnā, Allāh is pure Essence without any real attributes. Ibn Rushd argues that this characterization of the Mu‘tazilites is, in fact, mistaken.

The issue of how all divine attributes resolve into one single essence of Allāh

In light of Islamic philosophy and scholastic thought (kalām), the issue of attributes raises serious problems, for divine attributes seem to pluralise the divine singularity, or more precisely, the question of the relation of God’s attributes to His Essence. For al-Ghazālī, the attributes are “not identical and not anything other” than Allāh Himself. Nevertheless, such an understanding of the oneness of Allāh becomes ambiguous and contains difficulties. Ibn Rushd, on the contrary, allegorizes all divine attributes into the oneness of Allāh. For Ibn Rushd, the anthropomorphic terms of divine attributes used in the Qur‘ān: “knowledge, life, power, will, hearing, vision, and speech” are conceptual terms for man, not for Allāh Himself. In other words, these attributes of Allāh are suited to the human’s understanding, language, and the Scripture, but do not describe Allāh’s essence. For this interpretation, Ibn Rushd outlines and explains the seven attributes as subsisting with Allāh eternally, but not as part of Allāh’s essence itself.

In the relationship between divine knowledge and Allāh Himself, Ibn Rushd insists that the Scripture does not explicitly reveal the mode of divine knowledge (the existence of knowledge in actuality versus in potentially), but clearly indicates that nothing is concealed in the eyes of the Lord: “Not a leaf falls but He knows it, and there is no grain in the dark bowels of the earth, nor anything green or dry, but is in a clear Book” (the Qur‘ān, Surāh 6:59). Ibn Rushd does not wish to enter into the debate about the dilemma of the attributes and oneness of Allāh, rather he is concerned with how to believe what the Scripture has revealed. As Ibn Rushd puts it,

It is necessary to accept this rule as it stands, and it must not be said that He knows the creation of what is created and the corruption of what is corrupted either with a created

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32 For a detailed exploration of the historical location of the doctrine of divine simplicity (Tawḥīd) in the medieval period, see Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 57-65.
33 See Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 57-65.
knowledge or with an eternal knowledge. Such a claim is an innovation in Islam: “Your Lord is never forgetful.”

This passage might strike us as a contradictory rule for a religious philosopher to adopt, and we shall see later how Ibn Rushd tries to submit totally to God’s revelation. Based on such interpretation, Ibn Rushd does not speculate about the nature of divine knowledge, but tries to characterize Allāh based on His works without compromising the essence of His oneness. Concerning another eternal attribute of Allāh—divine speech—Ibn Rushd explains that the divine speech is uncreated and eternal, but the words denoting it are created by Allāh Almighty, not by corporeal men. To Ibn Rushd, the Qur‘ān is Allāh’s speech on two levels:

1) the deeper/inner level [the Qur‘ān as uncreated]: the true meaning of the divine speech, that it is the uncreated eternal word of Allāh;
2) the apparent/outer level [the Qur‘ān as created]: the revealed words as written, it is the created word of Allāh.

Therefore, the eternal speech of Allāh is both from Allāh (created words) and subsists in Allāh (uncreated words). Such an interpretation, Ibn Rushd contends, is definitely not contrary to the oneness of Allāh. Closely following this discussion, Ibn Rushd considers the question of divine attributes: “Are divine attributes identical with the essence or additional to it; that is, are they intrinsic or nominal?” In order to safeguard the oneness of Allāh, both Ash‘árites and Mu‘tazilites differentiate two kinds of divine attributes, namely intrinsic attributes and nominal attributes, to uphold their doctrines. However, Ibn Rushd asserts that these doctrines are far from the intention of the Scripture. He claims, “What the ordinary people should know with regard to these attributes is only what Scripture discloses, which is the admission of their existence, without any further details.” In other words, Ibn Rushd does not dwell on speculation about the divine attributes, but only speculates on what the Scriptures reveal.

3.3.1 Ibn Rushd’s Theological Terminology of the Divine Simplicity

I have studied Ibn Rushd’s doctrine of divine simplicity (Tawḥīd) and identified the key terms that are relevant to the question of this study, such as Tawḥīd, essence (Dhāt), necessary (Wājib), existence (anniyya), and intellect (al-‘aql), which are especially shown in his discussion of the divine simplicity in relation to God’s attributes. We now turn to define and clarify what Ibn Rushd means when he uses these terminologies of divine simplicity. The meanings of these key terms presented in the following section are derived mainly from the common definitions used by selected thinkers, such as al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and al-Ghazālī. These definitions are intended to provide an overview of the usage of Ibn Rushd’s terminology on Tawḥīd, which is helpful for the assessment undertaken in the later sections of this chapter.

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39 Ibn Rushd uses these key terms in his unique way, especially when we make comparisons between his usages of these terms and parallel terms in al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sīnā, and Aristotle.
Let us begin by looking at the term “Tawḥīd” (unity, the recognition of the transcendent unity or oneness of Allāh), a theological concept derived from the Qur’ān and developed within the distinct theological framework of Islamic scholastic thought (kalām). The word “Tawḥīd” means belief in the transcendent unity of God. According to Islamic tradition, the profession of faith (Shahada)—“There is no gods but Allāh” (the Qur’ān, Sura 37:35) or there is only one Allāh (Tawḥīd or Faith in Divine Unity)—is the chief essential principle of the fundamental beliefs: Allāh—His existence and Singularity. Thus, to be a true monotheist means to be one who confesses God’s transcendent unity and oneness (Tawḥīd). Ibn Rushd defended and clarified his teaching on this concept of Tawḥīd in conscious dialogue with monotheist tradition. In his Faith and Reason in Islam (al-Kashf), Ibn Rushd states that “This discussion has exhibited the various methods by means of which the Scripture has called upon people to confess the existence of the glorious Creator, and to deny the divinity of anyone other than He. These are the two meanings implied in the profession of divine unity. [There is no god but Allāh, and whoever utters this word] and assents to the two meanings implicit in it, in the manner we have just described, is a true Muslim, whose creed is the Muslim creed.” In short, the ultimate concept of Tawḥīd that uphold the transcendent oneness and unity of Allāh is not only defended by his predecessors (i.e., al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sinā, and al-Ghazālī), but also opposed by Ibn Rushd.

Another important notion that requires our attention is the term “essence.” “Essence” is derived from the Arab Dhāt, which refers to the quiddity or entity of a thing—it is those properties that make a “being” precisely what it is in itself, and not something else. “Essence” is commonly used by Christian and Muslim theologians when describing God as one, simple and undivided. With this working definition, “essence” was assumed to describe the true nature of God (being of God) in the Islamic doctrine of God. According to Ibn Rushd, “essence” is a term legitimately used to refer to a truly simple God (the transcendent unity

41 See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, “Keynote Address: The Worldview of Islam: An Outline,” in Islam and the Challenge of Modernity, ed. Sharifah Shifa Al-Attas (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996), pp. 33-34. According to Al-Attas, the nature of Tawḥīd can be summarized in the following way: “He is one God; living, self-subsistent, eternal and abiding. Existence is His very essence. He is one in essence; no division in His essence, whether in the imagination, in actuality, or in supposition is possible. He is not a locus of qualities, nor is a thing portioned and divisible into parts, nor is He a thing compounded of constituent elements. His oneness is absolute, with an absoluteness unlike the absoluteness of the natural universal, for while being thus absolute He is yet individuated in a manner of individuation that does not impair the purity of His absoluteness nor the sanctity of His oneness. He is transcendent, with a transcendence that does not make it incompatible for Him to be at once omnipresent, so that He is also immanent, yet not in the sense understood as belonging to any of the paradigms of pantheism. He possesses real and eternal attributes which are qualities and perfections which He ascribes to Himself; they are not other than His essence, and yet they are also distinct from His essence and from one another without their reality and distinctness being separate entities subsisting apart from His essence as a plurality of eternals; rather they coalesce with His essence as an unimaginable unity. His unity is then the unity of essence, attributes, and acts, for He is living and powerful, knowing, willing, hearing and seeing, and speaking through His attributes of life and power, knowledge, will, hearing and sight, and speech; and the opposite of these are all impossible in Him.”


43 Ibn Rushd, Faith and Reason in Islam, pp. 43-44.

44 According to the discourse of Islamic scholastic theology, “the translation ‘essence’ is most appropriate for Dhāt. However, in many Sufi texts that are consciously ‘nonessentialist,’ the term Dhāt takes on a different meaning, one that is quite difficult to translate—identity, self, the transcendent aspect of the real that is beyond all distinction, all quiddity, and all description.” See the citation from John Renard, Islamic Theological Themes—A Primary Source Reader (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2014), p. 407n3.

45 According to Aristotle’s Categories, the Latin term essentia can be defined as “the being of a thing.”
of God). Following the theory of divine simplicity of Philosophers, Ibn Rushd writes, “the greater part of what he (al-Ghazālī) mentions in his description of the philosophical theories about God as being one, notwithstanding the plurality of attributes ascribed to Him, he has stated accurately, and we shall not argue with him about it.” Although there are no division and multiplicity in God’s essence, God has divine attributes of perfection (i.e., knowledge, life, power, will, hearing, vision, and speech) which are multiple and subsisting in unity to His essence only in intellection. In other words, “essence” was used by Ibn Rushd to refer the irreducible oneness of God when he speaks of God as one.

“Necessary,” is a term derived from the Arab “Wājid” to describe the existence of God’s being (Wājid al wujūd). Ibn Sīnā indicates that “the Necessary Being cannot be two, but is All Truth, then by virtue of His essential Reality, in respect of which He is a Truth, He is United and One, and no other shares with Him in the Unity: however the All-Truth attains existence, it is through Himself.” Following Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd states that if the nature of necessary existent is numerically one, then “the necessary existent has no cause, and therefore the necessary existent is unique.” In short, a necessary being is a being not composed of essence and existence, but a self-existent being. In the discussion of God’s nature, another important and relevant term that needs to be defined is the self-existence of God (anniyya, or aseity). Traditional theists (including most orthodox Jews, Christians, and Muslims) often referred to God as an absolutely independent being. “Existence” was derived from the Arab anniyya, which literally means “thatness” in Arabic, referring to the ultimate reality of God’s existence. Ibn Rushd points out that the existence of God and His unity were universally upheld by all philosophers, in particular Aristotle. Ibn Rushd holds that Allāh is identical to His essence. As such, if Allāh’s essence exists necessarily, Allāh exists necessarily as well. Ibn Rushd writes:

[…] when it is conceded that the ‘necessary existent’ must indicate an immaterial existent, and In such existents, which subsist by themselves without being bodies, there cannot be imagined essential attributes of which their essence is constituted, not to speak of attributes which are additional to their essence, that is, the so-called accidents, for when accidents are imagined to be removed, the essence remains, which is not the case with the essential attributes. And therefore it is right to attribute essential attributes to their subject, since they constitute its identity, but it is not right to attribute non-essential attributes to it, except through derivative words […] If it is objected that the Philosophers believe that there are such attributes in the soul, since they believe that the soul can perceive, will, and move, although at the same time they hold that the soul is incorporeal, we answer that they do not mean that these attributes are additional to the essence, but that they are essential attributes, and it is of the nature of essential attributes not to multiply the substratum which actually supports them; they are a plurality only in the sense that the thing defined becomes a plurality through the parts of the definitions, that is, they are only a subjective plurality in the mind according to the Philosophers, not an actual plurality outside the soul.

In his formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity in relation to Allāh’s attributes, Ibn Rushd discusses the compatibility between perfect intellect and Allāh’s simplicity. To Ibn Rushd, Allāh’s simplicity entails perfect intellect; it includes the perfect knowledge and

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46 Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut.
47 See the discussion on God’s attributes in Ibn Rushd, Faith and Reason in Islam, pp. 45-53.
49 Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut.
50 Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (emphasis added).
51 Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut.
rationality. In his *Decisive Treatise*, Ibn Rushd states that Allāh’s knowledge of the object (the *cause* of that object) is not the same kind as our knowledge of the object (the *effect* of the object):

He (Allāh, the Holy and the Exalted) knows them (the nature of all particulars) by means if a knowledge that is not of the same kind as our knowledge of them. That is because our knowledge of them is an effect of what is known, so that it is generated when the known thing is generated and changes when it changes. And the knowledge of God (glorious is He) has of existence the *opposite* of this: it is the cause of the thing known, which is the existing thing.\(^{52}\)

In the above passage Ibn Rushd remarks that his arguments for divine simplicity are closely linked to his argument for divine intellect and knowledge, and likewise proceed on the basis of God’s being uncaused. Ibn Rushd’s reasoning here is straightforward. Since God’s existent is uncaused, He cannot be composed of parts that are in some sense the effect of those parts. In this passage, Ibn Rushd follows the same logic of first showing that God is the uncaused being, that generated everything else (i.e., knowledge) to come into existence, and then demonstrating that God is knower through His knowledge in the sense of being simple. Whereas the knowledge of each human being is caused by means of which the existence of our knowledge is multiple and divided, it is necessitated through something else (an effect of what is known), not through itself. Basically this means that knowledge in the human mind is not divine knowledge (or intellect), through Ibn Rushd also discusses the fact that the existences of knowledge in the human mind are not self-generated: “That is because our knowledge of them is an effect of what is known, so that it is generated when the known thing is generated and changes when it changes.”\(^{53}\) We will see another example in the following sections. In a slightly different context, Ibn Rushd in *Faith and Reason in Islam* explicates a certain degree of mystical approach (the negation of the divine attributes) when discussing the unity of God. The underlying motif for this is that he is ordinarily quite restrained when he discusses God’s transcendence publicly, especially among the ordinary people:

The saying of the Almighty ‘Now, is He who creates like him who does not create?’ is a proof of His saying, ‘Nothing is like unto Him.’ […] If to this principle is added that the creature is not a creator, it follows that the attributes of the creature are either negated of the Creator, or exist in the Creator in a different manner from that in which they belong to the creature. […] We hold that, regarding Scripture’s explicit negation of the creature’s qualities of God, it is obvious that it refers to the attributes of imperfection. […] Understanding the meaning of the negation of these imperfections is very close to necessary knowledge.\(^{54}\)

Ibn Rushd admits earlier in *Faith and Reason in Islam*: “What the ordinary people should know with regard to these attributes is only what Scripture discloses, which is the admission of their existence, without any further details.”\(^{55}\) Hence, Ibn Rushd makes it clear at this point that there is a certain level of mysticism which requires that he refuses to explain into the matter of God’s unity and the multiplicity of the divine attributes among the communers but only to hint toward it.

In conclusion, we learned from this section that the features of the above mentioned terminologies are being carried forward into Ibn Rushd’s own work. As such, *Tawḥīd*, essence (*Dhāt*), necessary (*Wājib*), existence (*anniyya*), and intellect (*al-‘aql*) are used as

\(^{52}\) Ibn Rushd, *Decisive Treatise*, p. 13 (emphasis added).  
\(^{53}\) Ibn Rushd, *Decisive Treatise*, p. 13 (emphasis added).  
accepted technical terms in Ibn Rushd’s formulation of the theory of divine unity in all the texts that we will further consider.

3.3.2 Ibn Rushd’s Doctrine of Divine Simplicity and the Historic Monotheistic Tradition

For every Muslim, the confession that there is an absolute oneness of Allāh, and that He alone is to be worshipped, requires a rejection of polytheism and idolatry. From A.D. 630 onwards, after the Prophet Muhammad captured Mecca, Islam has been uncompromising in its doctrine of monotheism (the unity/oneness of God or Tawḥīd), which is the core belief of Islam. Islamic medieval thought was confirmed by the joint authority of the Muslim Philosophers al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, and the Muslim theologian al-Ghazālī. Their position of capital importance in philosophy and Islamic scholastic thought attests to the significance of Ibn Rushd’s discussion of divine unity and attributes (ṣifāt). Ibn Sīnā was led by the apparent contradiction between divine unity (Tawḥīd) and attributes to ask whether Allāh is identical to His essence, since Allāh has no real attributes and is not a genus. Ibn Sīnā’s answer involves a modification of the notion of substance. According to Ibn Sīnā, the theory of divine simplicity can be summarized as follows:

It is not possible in any way that the Necessary Being (God) should be two. [...] If, however, the distinction is essential, the element of essentiality is that whereby the essence as such subsists; and if this element of essentiality is different in each and the two are distinguishable by virtue of it, then each of the two must be a compound; and compounds are caused; so neither of them will be a necessary being. If the element of essentiality belongs to one only, and the other is one in every respect and there is no compounding of any kind in it, then the one which has no element of essentiality is a necessary being, and the other is not a necessary being. Since it is thus established that the Necessary Being cannot be two, but is All Truth, then by virtue of His Essential Reality, in respect of which He is Truth, He is United and One, and no other shares with Him in that Unity; however the All-Truth attains existence, it is through Himself.

As is demonstrated above, Ibn Sīnā recognizes a special kind of “essential” positive attribute belonging only to God in his formulation of the doctrine of divine unity. Ibn Sīnā agreed with the Mu'tazila in holding that something may not yet exist (i.e., the distinction between essential reality [necessary existence] and essential possibility [possible existence] or the distinction between essence and existence) but is still an object of God's seven essential attributes (i.e., as the Mu'tazila put it, that “non-being” is a “thing”).

56 According to the historical location of the development of doctrine of divine simplicity in Islam and Christianity, al-Ghazālī’s, Ibn Rushd’s and Thomas’ perceptions of God can be traced back to the classical ideas of Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Avicenna. Additionally, during the Middle Ages vast amounts of philosophical thought were devoted to elaborating and defending it. As far as we know, this was a direct result of the translations of Greek philosophy into Arabic (influences on Islam), Hebrew (influences on Jews) and the Latin (influences on Christianity). It has been the dominant tradition among Christians as well as among Muslims.


In *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* al-Ghazālī argued against Ibn Sīnā’s theory of God’s simplicity.\(^{59}\) Nevertheless, the post-Avicennian developments in Ibn Rushd’s works reveal the durability of the intellectual spirit that had given a new dimension to the Islamic view of God’s unity. The issue at stake in the debate of Allāh’s simplicity lies in the discussions between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd in *the Eighth Discussion*:\(^{60}\) To refute their theory (mainly the philosophical theory of Ibn Sīnā) that the existence of the First is simple, namely that it is pure existence and that its existence does not stand in relation to quiddity and to essence, but stands in relation to necessary existence as do other beings to their quiddity.\(^{61}\)

On the one hand, Ibn Rushd agrees in certain aspects with the doctrine of God’s simplicity that is peculiar to Ibn Sīnā: “The Necessary Existent has no cause, and therefore the Necessary existent is unique. […] if there were two necessary existences, […] the difference between them must consist […] in rank, […] the necessary existent will have to be one, and will be cause of all the separate existents. And this is the truth, and the necessary existent is therefore one. For there is only this tripartite disjunction, two absolute uniqueness of the necessary existent, is the true one.”\(^{62}\)

On the other hand, for Ibn Rushd, the version of divine simplicity according to the Philosophers is not the same as the doctrine (derived from Ibn Sīnā) al-Ghazālī accused him of. Rather, it is a doctrine formulated as a series of negation: “the First Principle (God) is not body […] the body of heaven is not composed of matter and form, but is simple, and it has sometimes been thought that it is a necessary existent by its own essence.”\(^{63}\) Ibn Rushd argues that Ibn Sīnā’s theory of the divine simplicity in this regard was something foreign to Aristotle. Thus, in his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, Ibn Rushd explicitly repudiates Avicennan’s theory of simplicity, but affirms an alternative theory of simplicity that is consistent with al-Ghazālī’s theory.

For Ibn Rushd, Allāh alone is to be worshipped and served; his questions are shown in his argument against al-Ghazālī’s accusations, such as: who is the Allāh of religion? Is there a fundamental difference or just a relative difference between the God of the Philosophers and the Allāh of religion? How are we to think about and discuss Him? What is the ultimate authority in such matters? Using these crucial questions, Ibn Rushd attempted to harmonise the tension between faith and reason. The consequences of this doctrinal position affect all of Ibn Rushd’s *Metaphysics* and consequently his scholastic thought (*kalām*). Ibn Rushd’s thought on divine unity and attributes is shown in the following statements:

Existence (*anniyya*) in the nature of things is a logical concept which affirms the conformity of a thing *outside the soul* with what is *inside the soul*. Its meaning is synonymous with the true (*al-ṣādiq*, or as truth), and it is this that is meant by the copula in categorical propositions. The term ‘existence’ is used in two senses; the first synonymous with the true, when we ask, for instance, if something exists or not, or whether a certain thing has such and such a quality or not. The second sense stands in relation to the existing things as their genus, in the way the existent is divided into the ten categories, and into substance and accident. When by empirical

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\(^{59}\) See Chapter 2: *The Doctrine of Divine Unity (Al-Tawḥīd) in al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāsifa, and reflect his exposition of the unity of Allāh as found in his Al-Iṣṭiṣāḥ fi’l-i’tiṣāḥ.*

\(^{60}\) See Ibn Rushd, “the Eighth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, I will take up this discussion more thoroughly in the later section.


\(^{62}\) Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*.

\(^{63}\) Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*.
existential (wājīd al-wujūd) is understood as true, there is no plurality outside the soul when by existence is understood what is understood by entity or essence (Dhāt) and thing, the term ‘existent’ is attributed essentially to God and analogically to all other things in the way warmth is attributed to fire and to all warm things. This is the theory of the Philosophers.\footnote{Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut, p. 179 (emphasis added). This passage is complicated by the usage of anniyya, which literally means “thatness” in Arabic, referring to the ultimate reality of God’s existence. This terminology had many meanings in different contexts. See also 3.3.1 Ibn Rushd’s Theological Terminology, above. It is worth noting that this term is used by Ibn Rushd to denote existence as opposed to quiddity (māhiyya), although in other context it also refers to essence or quiddity. Cf. Catarina Belo, “Essence and Existence in Avicenna and Averroës,” Al-Qantara, Madrid, vol. XXX, 2 (June-December 2009): pp. 418-422.}

For Ibn Rushd, empirical ‘existent’ (wājīd al-wujūd) is an important term in the discussion of Allāh’s essence (its absolute oneness, al-ahaddiya) and in its relation to His essential attributes (ṣifāt). Based on the above text and in several other places, Ibn Rushd explains his understanding of ‘existence’ in two senses: The first sense of existence is as truth, in the distinction between the existence ‘outside the soul’ and ‘inside the soul.’ In this sense, he argues that any entity which has a certain quality or predicate belongs to twofold existence: an actual existence (without qualities) and existence as a thing (with qualities). The second sense of existence is parallel to Aristotle’s Categories, and Ibn Rushd echoes Aristotle’s principle that the term ‘existent’ is developed in many ways.\footnote{I will take up this issue more thoroughly in a later section.} In this second sense, existence is an accident only because it can be said of substance and consequently of the nine remaining categories. Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd’s theory of existence in this second sense also indicates that it is attributed primarily to God’s essence and only secondarily to all other existing things or predicates. Apparently, this is different from Ibn Sīnā’s theory of existence, which clearly denies the existence of predicates (additional contingent things or qualities) with respect to the essence. According to Ibn Rushd:

Ibn Sīnā believed that existence (anniyya) is something additional to the essence (Dhāt) outside the soul and is like an accident of the essence. And if existence were a condition for the being of the essence and a condition for the essence of the necessary existing, the necessary existent would be composed of the conditioning and the conditioned and it would be of a possible existence. Ibn Sīnā affirms also that what exists as an addition to its essence has a cause. Now, existence for Ibn Sīnā is an accident which supervenes on the essence (māhiyya).\footnote{Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (emphasis added).}

Ibn Rushd rejects the claim of Ibn Sīnā about existence: “existence (anniyya) is something additional to the essence (Dhāt), […] what exists as an addition to its essence has a cause.” Ibn Rushd further points out why existence for Ibn Sīnā is accidental to the essence. For Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sīnā’s existence is a contingent attribute that is added to its essence, which will pluralize the singularity of essence. It is important to note that Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sīnā are offering two different accounts of the nature of existence. Unlike Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd allowed the concepts of accidental and actual existence. According to Ibn Rushd, the fundamental concept of actual existence does not explicitly add accidental predicates or contingency to the essence of Allāh. Clearly, although there is some continuity between Ibn Rushd’s and Ibn Sīnā’s theories of existence, we find crucial discontinuities as well. The following explanation by Ibn Rushd indicates the discontinuity between them:

For the term ‘existence’ is used in two meanings, the former signifies the true (ṣadiq) and the latter the opposite of non-existence, and in this latter sense it is that which is divided into the
ten categories and is like their genus. This essential sense which refers to the things which exist in the real world outside the soul is prior to the sense it has in the existents of second intention, and it is this sense which is predicated of the ten categories analogically, and it is in this sense that we say of the substance that it exists by itself and of the accident that it exists through its existing in the existent which subsists by itself. As to the existent which has the meaning of the ‘true’, all the categories participate in it in the same way, and the existent which has the meaning of the ‘true’ is something in the mind, namely that a thing is outside the soul in conformity with what it is inside the soul, and the knowledge of this is prior to the knowledge of its quiddity; that is, knowledge of the quiddity of a thing cannot be asked for, unless it is known that it exists. ‘And as to those quiddities which precede in our minds the knowledge of their existence, they are not really quiddities, but only nominal definitions, and only when it is known that their meaning exists outside the soul does it become known that they are quiddities and definitions. And in this sense it is said in the book of the Categories that the intelligible universals of things become existent through their particulars, and that the particulars become intelligible through their universals. And it is said in the De Anima that the faculty by which it is perceived that a thing is a definite particular and exists is another faculty than the faculty by which the quiddity of the definite particular is perceived, and it is in this way that it is said that particulars exist in the external world and universals in the mind? And there is no difference in the meaning of the ‘true’, whether it concerns material existents or separate existents.

Here Ibn Rushd follows up his position on existence with the following clarification: “. . . the existent which has the meaning of the ‘true’ is something in the mind, […] and the knowledge of this is prior to the knowledge of its quiddity; […] And as to those quiddities which precede in our minds the knowledge of their existence, they are not real quiddities, but only nominal definitions.” This understanding finds its root in Ibn Rushd’s support for the Aristotelian understanding of nominal categories. When Aristotle says that knowledge of an existent is prior to its quiddity, he means to refer to the existent as a principle or a nominal category.

The discontinuity between the theories of Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sīnā is further detailed in the following statement:

The theory that existence (wujūd) is an addition to the quiddity and that the existent in its essence does not subsist by it—this is the theory of Ibn Sīnā—is a most erroneous theory, for this would imply that the term ‘existence’ signified an accident outside the soul common to the ten categories. And then it can be asked about this accident when it is said to exist, if ‘exist’ is taken here in the meaning of the ‘true’ or whether it is meant that an accident exists in this accident, and so on ad infinitum, which is absurd, as we have shown elsewhere. ‘I believe that it is this meaning of ‘existence’ which al-Ghazālī tried to deny of the First principle, and indeed in this sense it must be denied of all existents and a fortiori of the First Principle, since it is a false theory. As shown in the above passage, Ibn Rushd holds that Ibn Sīnā’s theory of existence contradicts Aristotle’s usage of existence. If the term ‘existence’ is an additional predicate or accident of the ten categories, Ibn Rushd says, then perhaps “it can be asked about this accident when it is said to exist at all, if ‘exist’ is taken here in the meaning of the ‘true’ or whether it is meant that an accident exists in this accident, and so on ad infinitum, which is absurd, as we have shown elsewhere.”

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67 Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in Tahāfat al-Tahāfat (emphasis added). The view of existence as a concept of category can be traced back to Aristotle, i.e., it is a concept of an Aristotelian nominal category.
68 Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in Tahāfat al-Tahāfat (emphasis added).
69 Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in Tahāfat al-Tahāfat (emphasis added).
In his Fifth Discussion, Ibn Rushd explicitly refers to God’s simplicity in connection to His very essence:

When it is said that He is the lover and the beloved, the enjoyer and the enjoyed, it means that He is every beauty and splendour and perfection, […] But the First possesses the most perfect splendour and the most complete beauty, since all perfection is possible to Him and present in Him, and He perceives this beauty […] And all these concepts refer to His essence and to His perfection and to His knowledge of His essence, and the knowledge of His essence is His very essence, for He is pure intellect, and all this leads back to one single notion.70

Hence, this chapter seeks to explore how Ibn Rushd answers the research question spelled out at the beginning of this chapter. I point to the fact that in Ibn Rushd’s writings, particularly in the Tahāfut al-Tahāfut and in his commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, there is a discussion on whether God’s attributes are not compatible with His simplicity. We also learned from these writings of Ibn Rushd that he is a Muslim apologist, who treats the divine simplicity before all the divine attributes. With the results we gained from our preceding study, I will now further examine the works of Ibn Rushd on how it is possible that an absolutely simple God has a plurality of divine attributes (predicates or names) in Section 3.4 and Section 3.5.

3.4 Discourse on the Doctrine of Unity by Ibn Rushd in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut

Ibn Rushd’s exposition of how it is possible that an absolutely simple God has a plurality of divine attributes (predicates or names) is found in several chapters/discussions of his Tahāfut al-Tahāfut. Obviously, there is no space in this chapter for an extensive study of all the discussions of Tahāfut al-Tahāfut. Hence, I have restricted my analysis to the Sixth and Eighth Discussions of Tahāfut al-Tahāfut, as these selected two discussions appear to be the more representative and significant texts in Ibn Rushd’s construction of his arguments in defending the doctrine. This section aims to study these selected discussions in order to answer our research question concerning the relationship between simplicity and multiple attributes.

3.4.1 The Sixth Discussion of Ibn Rushd’s Tahāfut al-Tahāfut: the Compatibility between Divine Attributes and Divine Simplicity

By insisting on the theory of divine unity with regards to the divine attributes, in the Sixth Discussion, Ibn Rushd continues to argue against a composite God by maintaining the compatibility between divine attributes and simplicity of God. Ibn Rushd refers to al-Ghazālī’s argument that the Philosophers’ denial of attributes is unwarranted: “[…] why is it impossible to say that, just as there is no agent for the essence of the necessary existent, which is eternal, there is no agent for its attributes, which are equally eternal?” In answering al-Ghazālī’s query, Ibn Rushd explains the factors why it is impossible for the Philosophers to accept the divine attributes:

What is impossible is only a single simple existence with a plurality of attributes, existing by themselves, and especially if these attributes should be essential and exist in act, and as to these attributes existing in potency, it is not impossible, according to the Philosophers, that

70 Ibn Rushd, “the Fifth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut.
something should be one in act and a plurality in potency, and this is the case according to them, with the parts of the definition in their relation to the thing defined. ⁷¹

Through the above explanation, Ibn Rushd points out that there is a gap between the Ghazālīan perspective and that of the Philosophers—their disagreement is in fact on the matter of simplicity. From this point on, Ibn Rushd continues to argue that if we “assume that the attributes are additional to the essence of the First,” ⁷² a composition of God’s being will emerge. Therefore, Ibn Rushd contends that the existence and essence are identical to God Himself, but they are distinct in respect to the created things. In Ibn Rushd’s words: “existence is a quality which is the essence itself.” ⁷³ In sum, Ibn Rushd seeks to demonstrate God as a simple being in His essence and attributes involving the total identification of His essence and existence, rather than to demonstrate a composite God that constitutes a composition of essence and attributes.

As for Ibn Rushd’s discussion of how to avoid compositeness in God, while at the same time maintaining His plurality of attributes, his main argument is to emphasize that God’s self-existence entails His transcendence. The plurality of God’s attributes does not concern attributes that humans can comprehend, but attributes that are utterly unique to Him. By distinguishing the divine intellect from the human intellect, Ibn Rushd rebuts al-Ghazālī’s attack on the philosophical theory of simplicity. Ibn Rushd asserts that the divine intellect is not the essence of God Himself, but the principle of the universe that represents a relationship to God’s essence. Whereas the human intellect is neither the intelligible itself nor the object of the intellect, but it is the cause of the intellect’s perception. Thus, Ibn Rushd equates the First Principle (which he identifies as the active principle of intellect) and the First Intellect as one and the same entity. This aspect, for example, can be found in his elaboration of the relationship between knower and knowledge. As Ibn Rushd puts it:

As to the fact that knower and knowledge are one, it is not impossible, but necessary, that such pairs of things lead up to the unity of their concepts; e.g., if the knower knows through knowledge, that through which he becomes a knower is more apt to be a knower, for the quality which any thing acquires from another is in itself more apt to possess the concept which is acquired, e. g. if the living bodies in our sublunary world are not alive by themselves, but through a life which inheres in them, then necessarily this life through which the non-living acquires life is alive by itself, or there would be an infinite regress; and the same is the case with knowledge and the other attributes. ⁷⁴

It is important to note Ibn Rushd’s explicitly statement that though the knower and knowledge may be considered two different intelligibilities from one point of view, they are essentially one intellect. Consequently, he is able to reconcile the intelligible (that is plural) with divine intellect (that is one). In other words, Ibn Rushd perceives God as one and simple not by defining Him as an intelligible being, but rather by defining Him as the First intellect. What God as intellect tells us is that His oneness derives from the singleness of His act of thinking, which enables Ibn Rushd to find a way to maintain the simplicity of God and the plurality of knowledge. For Ibn Rushd, such a transcendent theory of simplicity is impossible for human understanding: “The nature of this unity and the representation of its reality are impossible for human understanding, for if man could perceive the unity, his intellect would be identical with the intellect of the Creator, and this is impossible.” ⁷⁵

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⁷¹ Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (emphasis added).
⁷² See Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut.
⁷³ Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (emphasis added).
⁷⁴ Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (emphasis added).
⁷⁵ Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut.
Furthermore, Ibn Rushd indicates that the knowledge of God is fundamentally different from human knowledge, as the plurality of our knowledge does not imply plurality in God:

As to the conclusion which the Philosophers force upon the theologians, that all the theologians recognize that God’s knowledge is infinite and that at the same time it is one, this is an *negamentum ad hominem*, not an objective argument based on the facts themselves. And from this there is no escape for the theologians, unless they assume that the knowledge of the Creator differs in this respect from the knowledge of the creature, and indeed there is no one more ignorant than the man who believes that the knowledge of God differs only quantitatively from the knowledge of the creature, that is that He only possesses more knowledge.  

Ibn Rushd also explains that there is a difference between essential attributes and attributes of the essence: the former refers to essence itself, while the latter refers to accidental attributes:

And they found that in these bodies there are quiddities which exist essentially in them, and I understand by the ‘quiddities’ of bodies attributes existing in them, through which these bodies become existent in act and specified by the act which proceeds from them; and according to the Philosophers these quiddities differ from the accidental attributes, because they found that the accidents were additions to the individual substance which exists by itself and that these accidents were in need of the substances for their existence, whereas the substances do not need the accidents for their own existence. And they found also that those attributes which were not accidents were not additional to the essence, but that they were the genuine essence of the individual which exists by itself, so that if one imagined these attributes annulled, the essence itself would be annulled.  

With this principle in mind, Ibn Rushd holds the First (God) as the supreme creator of all things, who displays each created attribute in its most perfect form.

And as to the term ‘substance’ which the Philosophers give to that which is separate from matter, the First has the highest claim on the term ‘substance’, the terms ‘existent’, ‘knowing’, ‘living’, and all the terms for the qualities it bestows on the existents and especially those attributes which belong to perfection.  

In addition, Ibn Rushd also clarifies that the knowledge of God in fact derives from nothing else than from His essence. According to Ibn Rushd, knowledge especially that of the First could not be more unlike an accident, existing as essentially as it does. Ibn Rushd concludes,

The error and confusion in his statement is very evident, for it has been proved that there is among attributes one that has a greater claim to the term `substantiality’ than the substance existing by itself, and this is the attribute through which the substance existing by itself becomes existing by itself. For it has been proved that the substratum for this attribute is something neither existing by itself nor existing in actuality; no, its existing by itself and its actual existence derive from this attribute, and this attribute in its existence is like that which receives the accidents, although certain of these attributes, as is evident from their nature, need a substratum in the changeable things, since it is the fundamental law of the accidents,

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76 Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (emphasis added).
77 Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (emphasis added).
78 Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (emphasis added).
that they exist in something else, whereas the fundamental law of the quiddities is that they exist by themselves, except when, in the sublunary world, these quiddities need a substratum through being in transitory things. But this attribute is at the greatest distance from the nature of an accident, and to compare this transcendent knowledge to sublunary accidents is extremely foolish, indeed more foolish than to consider the soul an accident like threeness and fourness. And this suffices to show the incoherence and the foolishness of this whole argument, and let us rather call this book simply ‘The Incoherence’, not ‘The Incoherence of the Philosophers’. And what is further from the nature of an accident than the nature of knowledge, and especially the knowledge of the First? And since it is at the greatest distance from the nature of an accident, it is at the greatest distance from having a necessity for a substratum. 

The doctrine of divine unity, according to Ibn Rushd, is linked with the perfect unity of divine attributes and His essence. The ascription of the unity of divine attributes would imply that God in some sense consists of plurality. However, for Ibn Rushd, the understanding of the “unique plurality” of God’s attributes must not to be equal with the plurality of human’s attributes. With this in mind, let me make a further explanation of Ibn Rushd’s treatment: on the one hand, Ibn Rushd equates God the Knower with His Knowledge. On the other hand, Ibn Rushd emphasizes that this identification does not imply the plurality of essence, but rather the same and single divine essence. Although the Knower and His Knowledge describe the same essence, they illuminate it in distinctive ways. In his discussion, Ibn Rushd clearly refers to the divine Knowledge as the unity of the intellect, as well as the intelligible. As pointed out above, for Ibn Rushd such an interpretation does not deny the validity and reality of the divine attributes (His Knowledge). Rather, it is in a way consistent with the doctrine of unity. Since Allāh is the one and only Tawḥīd (the oneness of God), He is the absolute unity of His transcendence. Hence, He is radically different from the multiplicity of any kind. In other words, clearly, Ibn Rushd upholds the theory of Tawḥīd, namely the irreducible oneness of God’s essence, as well as the plurality of attributes. The following statements of Ibn Rushd explain how the oneness of God is only knowable through His essence:

And further, it has already been said that every compound is only one because of a oneness existing in it, and this oneness exists only in it through something which is one through itself. And if this is so, then the one, in so far as it is one, precedes every compound, and the act of this one agent—if this agent is eternal—through which it gives all single existents which exist through it their oneness, is everlasting and without a beginning, not intermittent; for the agent whose act is attached to its object at the time of its actualization is temporal and its object is necessarily temporal, but the attachment of the First Agent to its object is everlasting and its power is everlastingly mixed with its object. And it is in this way that one must understand the relation of the First, God, praise be to Him, to all existents. But since it is not possible to prove these things here, let us turn away from them, since our sole aim was to show that this book of Ghazālī does not contain any proofs, but mostly sophisms and at best dialectical arguments. But proofs are very rare, and they stand in relation to other arguments as unalloyed gold to the other minerals and the pure pearl to the other jewels. ‘And now let us revert to our subject. 

3.4.2 The Eighth Discussion of Ibn Rushd’s Tahāfut al-Tahāfut: the Compatibility between Divine Simplicity and His Existence

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79 Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (emphasis added).

80 Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (emphasis added).
The central issue of the Eighth Discussion is about the assertion of the simple essence of God. Al-Ghazālī points out that the theory of God’s simplicity according to the Philosophers appears to face a dilemma: on the one hand, if God is simple, He is a pure existence without essence (Necessary existence). On the other hand, however, if God’s essence includes attributes (necessity), He is not a simple God. In al-Ghazālī’s words:

If the necessity were added to the existence, this would form a plurality; and if it is not added, how then could it be the quiddity? For existence is not the quiddity, and thus what is not added to the existence cannot be the quiddity either.

Hence, al-Ghazālī brings charges against the God of the Philosophers. But Ibn Rushd’s response to the dilemma is incoherent with al-Ghazālī. For Ibn Rushd, the Philosophers “do not assume that the First (God) has an existence without a quiddity (essence) and a quiddity without an existence. They believe only that the existence.” In other words, the Philosophers do not hold that existence or necessity would be an attribute added to the essence (as how al-Ghazālī charges them). But they see existence or necessity as a “mental” attribute that carries the same sense of “entity.” Since the necessary existence is one and the same with the “entity,” God is not a compound of essence and existence. Rather, God’s existence is itself His essence. Ibn Rushd concludes that in such a way, the Philosophers solved the apparent tension between divine simplicity and God’s existence:

According to the Philosophers necessity is not an attribute added to the essence, and it is predicated of the essence in the same way as we say of it that it is inevitable and eternal. ‘And likewise if we understand by ‘existence’ a mental attribute, it is not an addition to the essence, but if we understand it as being an accident, in the way Avicenna regards it in the composite existent, then it becomes difficult to explain how the uncompounded can be the quiddity itself, although one might say perhaps: ‘In the way the knowledge in the uncompounded becomes the knower himself. ‘ If, however, one regards the existent as the true, all these doubts lose their meaning, and likewise, if one understands ‘existent’ as having the same sense as ‘entity’, and according to this it is true that the existence in the uncompounded is the quiddity itself.

Take, for example, the arguments concerning the relationship between attributes and essence, as present in the al-Ghazālī—Ibn Rushd debate.

Al-Ghazālī says,

“If necessity were added to existence, this would form a plurality; and if it is not added, how then could it be a quiddity? For existence is not quiddity, and thus what is not added to existence cannot be quiddity either.”

Ibn Rushd responds:

“If one understands an existent as having the same sense as an entity, according to this it is true that existence is a quiddity itself.”

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82 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, quoted in Ibn Rushd, “the Eighth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut.
83 Ibn Rushd, “the Eighth Discussion,” in Tahāfut al-Tahāfut.
In the eighth discussion of Ibn Rushd’s *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, he deals with the essence of God; he asserts that the existence of Allāh or “the First” is simple quiddity. The heading specifies already how al-Ghazālī conceives of this position: Allāh is pure and necessary existence with an essence. In other words, such interpretations of Allāh do not compromise the simplicity of His existence; likewise, the reality of divine attributes is added to His existence without making Allāh compound. With regard to the question “Does Allāh have an essence/quiddity?,” if the answer is “Yes” as al-Ghazālī puts it, “then the quiddity may be the cause of existence, without involving any impossibility.”

Al-Ghazālī points out the ignorance of the Philosophers by concluding the following:

Existence without quiddity or essence is unintelligible. As we do not understand non-existence which is not related to a being whose non-existence it should be, so we cannot understand unqualified existence, which is not related to a definite essence. Especially, when existence is particularised into one essence.

In al-Ghazālī’s interpretation, the necessary being (Allāh) of the Philosophers is without essence or quiddity (but not the God of al-Ghazālī himself); the Philosophers affirm the reality of various divine attributes, but deny the divine attributes and difference in the absolute one and simple being. Such understanding is also apparent in al-Ghazālī’s *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of Allāh*. This discussion was further developed by Ibn Rushd through a thorough explanation.

Ibn Rushd criticizes al-Ghazālī for misinterpreting Ibn Sīnā’s idea of Allāh. For example, the observation of al-Ghazālī that Ibn Sīnā treats the necessary attributes and essence as identical is untrue. Rather, Ibn Sīnā does not deny the essence of existence but testifies to the unity of both. As Ibn Rushd puts it, “To identify the quiddity and the existence of a thing is not to do away with its quiddity, as al-Ghazālī asserts, but is only the affirmation of the unity of quiddity/essence and existence.”

In Ibn Rushd’s *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, he faithfully reproduces the twenty problems of al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* before he proceeds to respond to the objections of al-Ghazālī to Ibn Sīnā. Over all, there are three main discussions in al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* against the Philosophers (i.e., al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā): (Problems I-X) the world’s eternity; (Problems XI-XIX) the foreknowledge of Allāh; and (Problem XX) the bodily resurrection. I will limit myself to examine only the eighth discussion, which deals with the essence of Allāh.

To my knowledge, both al-Ghazālī’s and Ibn Rushd’s *Tahāfut* attempt to safeguard the simple existence of Allāh, albeit from different perspectives. Al-Ghazālī’s concern is this: if one must acknowledge that Allāh is a simple existence in light of philosophy, then this Allāh is only a pure existence without essence and attributes. However, this Allāh is not the

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89 See Ilona Kock, “The Debate about God’s Simplicity;” p. 158. Kock gives an example of the conflict in the debate: “Ibn Rushd reveals where al-Ghazālī’s line of reasoning is incoherent and where he [al-Ghazālī] misunderstood the Philosophers he criticized. Nevertheless, where appropriate, Ibn Rushd fairly accepts the critique. There can thus be no talk of reciprocal destruction. *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (the Incoherence of the Philosophers) and *Tahāfut at-Tahāfut* (the Incoherence of the Incoherence) rather illustrate a fruitful debate, conciliating philosophy and religion, reason and spirit, to allow them to serve, enhance and enrich each other, […]”
91 See Ibn Rushd, “the Eighth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. 
same Allāh who revealed the Qur’ān: the Allāh of the Qur’ān is Allāh with one single essence and a plurality of divine attributes. Al-Ghazālī states, “The meaning of a single existent is perfectly understandable: nothing exists which has no essence, and the existence of an essence does not negate its [oneness].”

Ibn Rushd’s response to al-Ghazālī is that the God of the Philosophers is not incompatible with Allāh of the Qur’ān; and he asserts that al-Ghazālī misunderstood the God of the Philosophers. Indeed, the God of the Philosophers is not a simple existence without essence and attributes, but a pure existence with un-compounded essence and analogous attributes in God itself. Ibn Rushd’s idea of God in the eighth discussion indicates that “the existence which in our knowledge is prior to the quiddity of a thing is that which signifies the true.” Ibn Rushd asserts that God, who is one single essence only, could be understood “when by existent is meant what is understood by thing and entity, it follows the rule of the genus which predicated analogically.” This understanding is similar to the First Principle according to Aristotle. We shall see the formulation of Ibn Rushd’s doctrine of divine simplicity when we examine the commentaries.

In addition, Ibn Rushd’s arguments respond to another line of al-Ghazālī’s concern: “If the necessity were added to the existence, this would form a plurality; and if it is not added, how then could it be the quiddity?” To put it another way, for al-Ghazālī, if the Philosophers assume existence as a substitute for essence, then plurality in the First Principle would be the result. For Ibn Rushd, this assumption is not true: “According to the Philosophers necessity is not an attribute added to the essence, and it is predicated of the essence in the same way as […] the eternal.” The terminology here used by Ibn Rushd to describe the reality of Allāh is “essence,” rather than “existence” as used by al-Ghazālī. This is because “existence” seems meaningless to Ibn Rushd in light of al-Ghazālī’s argument for Allāh’s simplicity. For Ibn Rushd, necessity is not an attribute that is added to the essence, but is predicated qualitatively in the essence itself. As Ibn Rushd concludes, “If one understands “existent” as having the same sense as “entity,” according to this it is true that existence in the uncompounded is quiddity itself.”

In other words, Ibn Rushd holds that existence is not “an attribute” added to essence, existence is essence itself. This argument is based on the assumption that “If we understand by existence a mental attribute, it is not an addition to the essence.” However, Ibn Rushd observes that “If we understand existence as being an accident, in the way that Ibn Sīnā regards it in composite existence, then it becomes difficult to explain how the uncompounded can be the quiddity itself.” In his Tahāfut al-Tahāfut, Ibn Rushd attempts to solve the dilemma of the doctrine of divine simplicity by further explaining: “In a way knowledge in the uncompounded becomes the knower itself.” In his discourse on Allāh’s attributes in Faṣl al-maqāl, Ibn Rushd also elaborates a similar understanding of the eternal attribute of “knowledge.” According to the Qur’ān, Surāh 67:14, “Does He not know what He has created, though He is the All-Subtle, the All-Informed?” To Ibn Rushd, “knowledge is necessarily consequent upon existence […] since what exists sometimes exists in actuality and sometimes in potentiality.” Furthermore, Ibn Rushd indicates that “no accidents inhere in

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92 See al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa, p. 134.

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the Glorious Originator […] since that modality necessitates that eternal knowledge be analogous to created knowledge.”

In addition, Ibn Rushd reasons that several passages from the Qur’ān (i.e., Surāh 21:22, 23:91, and 17:42) emphasize that if heaven and earth were ruled by more than one Allāh, they would surely have been ruined. This is “self-evident,” to Ibn Rushd,

For there cannot result from two agents of the same kind one and the same action. It follows necessarily that if they acted together, the city would be ruined, unless one of them acted while the other remained inactive; and this is incompatible with the attribute of divinity.

This argument is undoubtedly a scriptural basis for the concept of the oneness of Allāh, and with this foundation Ibn Rushd develops his argument regarding the matter of divine acts. In the issue of divine acts, Ibn Rushd observes that since the world is one single entity, it is impossible to have more than one Allāh with diverse actions.

Even the Qur’ān, Surāh 17:42 mentions “the Throne” with the Lord, and this “Throne” seems to be an attribute of Allāh with Himself eternally. However, Ibn Rushd explains that this verse does not attempt to indicate the unity of two gods: “there would have been two similar things having the same relationship to the same locus”, but asserts that the unity of the throne inevitably subsists in one Allāh:

For if the relationship (between the Throne with Allāh) is identical, the relata are identical. The relata cannot have an identical relation to the same locus, although the relationship of Allāh to the Throne is the opposite of this type of relation; by which I mean that the Throne subsists in Him, not that He subsists in the Throne.

Therefore, the Throne is one of the divine attributes that inevitably subsists in Allāh eternally, but does not compromise His oneness (cf. the Qur’ān, Surāh 2:255 “His throne encompasses the heavens and the earth, and their preservation does not burden Him”). Besides, in light of the Qur’ān, Surāh 21:22, “were there in heaven and earth other gods than Allāh,” Ibn Rushd continues to explain: “then the world has been inexistent now, but He excluded that it is not inexistent. It follows that there is no God but one.” Ibn Rushd asserts that these arguments give knowledge of the oneness of Allāh, and such interpretation is much better and coherent than the Mutakallimun’s understanding of the Scripture.

3.5 Discourse on the doctrine of unity by Ibn Rushd in his Commentary on the Metaphysics

Ibn Rushd was without any doubt a great medieval thinker, and, in particular, a great commentator on Aristotle. However, he cannot be credited with greatly influencing the Islamic scholastic tradition—a merit that belongs to his rivals (e.g., al-Ghazālī). Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd’s contribution lies in his extensive commentaries on Aristotle’s corpus; his aim of

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105 See Ibn Rushd, *Faith and Reason in Islam*, pp. 42-43. For Averroës, these are the two meanings implied in the profession of divine unity (the doctrine of Tawḥīd).
this project was to reconcile the conflict of Islamic scholastic thought and philosophy. Ibn Rushd was glorified by Jews and Christians alike as “The Commentator par excellence” in the later Middle Ages because of this project. Additionally, Ibn Rushd’s Fast al-Maqal (Decisive Treatise) has long been recognized as central to his complex views on the reconciliation of reason and faith in Islam. The key to addressing these issues is Ibn Rushd’s much quoted, yet insufficiently appreciated, assertion of a principle which we may call the principle of the unity of Truth in Decisive Treatise: “Truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it.”

Ibn Rushd’s intelligence and deep knowledge of both Aristotle’s philosophy and Islamic law earned him the esteem of the Almohad rulers, which enabled him to exert considerable influence on the most relevant political and religious issues of his time. This knowledge also explains why Ibn Rushd played an important role in the development of philosophy. In other words, Ibn Rushd represented much of what was impressive about both Islamic philosophy and law, which formed an important part of the character of Western thought in the Middle Ages. His most important philosophical interpretation of Aristotle’s corpus had a major influence on the intellectual life of medieval Europe. Thus, it is important for us to note the context of Andalusian philosophy in Spain, which shaped Ibn Rushd’s thought to a large extent. In sum, we learn from Ibn Rushd’s works that for him the harmony of faith and reason was crucial if one wanted to obtain true knowledge of Allāh. Hence, he sees and treats the God of philosophy (particularly the works of Aristotle) and the Allāh of the Qur’ān as identical. As Matteo Di Giovanni observes,

In full accord with the spirit of Almohadism, Ibn Rushd maintained that the Qur’ān in its entirety is but a call to theoretical investigation. What is more, he assumed that the content of revelation is not only available to rational investigation but also enriched, made coherent and perfected by the work of philosophy and the use of demonstrative reason (burhān, lit: deductive reasoning). In this way he continued the naturalistic thread that runs all through Andalusian philosophy and finds in Ibn Tufayl one of its highest expression.

Although Ibn Rushd did occasionally discuss theological topics (particularly that of divine unity) in his commentaries on the Metaphysics, he usually reserved these discussions for his more polemical works, such as Tahāfut al-Tahāfut, where he had more contemporary

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106 See Ibn Rushd, “Long Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima,” trans. A. Hyman, in Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions, eds. A. Hyman and J. J. Walsh (Cambridge: Hackett, 1973), pp. 304-323: In Ibn Rushd’s perspective on Commentaries 14, bk. 3 (De anima), Aristotle was “a rule and examplar which nature devised to show the final perfection of man […] the teaching of Aristotle is the supreme truth, because his mind was the final expression of the human mind. Wherefore it has been well said that he was created and given to us by divine providence that we might know all that is to be known.” This perspective shows that Ibn Rushd had devoted years to the works of Aristotle and wrote commentaries on most of Aristotle’s works.


108 See Ibn Rushd, Decisive Treatise.

Philosophers in mind (i.e., al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī). As already stated, Ibn Rushd’s idea of divine unity cannot be properly understood apart from his exegesis of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* on this theme. As with the rest of the Ibn Rushd’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, the structure of the commentary consists of Ibn Rushd’s quotations of Aristotle’s text—as little as a phrase or as much as several pages—and his comments of it. These sections are literally prefaced by “Aristotle says” and “Ibn Rushd says.” Thus, in the following, I refer to Ibn Rushd’s comments to the arguments of Aristotle and Aristotle himself in one section.

In his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Ibn Rushd speaks not in his own name as Islamic philosopher, but as the Commentator of Aristotle. Ibn Rushd argues that the problem of the One and the Many is the most crucial aspect of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Below we will show that this exposition of divine simplicity and other attributes in this work is consistent with what is found in his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. Ibn Rushd’s view of divine unity has important consequences not only for the content of Aristotle’s view, but also for proper understanding of Muslim thinkers regarding divine unity. According to Richard C. Taylor,

While Ibn Sīnā proceeds to indicate the existence of God or the Necessary Being on the basis of the mind’s grasp of the notion that all reality is divided into the possible and the necessary, Ibn Rushd follows Aristotle in the beginning of his philosophical account from the physical world and its need for an ultimate cause of motion. For Ibn Rushd it is the science of physics, which includes cosmology that establishes the ground of the eternal motion of the heavens. Aristotle’s requirement of eternal motion which as necessary cannot be otherwise led him to assert the existence of a plurality of unmoved movers with one among them understood to be first (God). Working within a conceptual framework affected by the mixture of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thinking together with religious thought on the nature of God, Ibn Rushd followed and expanded on Aristotle.\(^{111}\)

Thus, it is worth noting that the terminology of *Tawḥīd* plays an important role throughout the discussions of Ibn Rushd’s theory of divine unity, which depends on various understandings of *Tawḥīd*. In order to trace the role of *Tawḥīd* in Ibn Rushd’s thought one must understand what divine unity entails. Therefore, we must further examine its terminology and ascertain its relevance for Ibn Rushd’s discussion of the theory of Tawhīd in light of contemporary kalām scholarship, which we reviewed earlier in 3.3.1. With regard to the terminology of *Tawḥīd* (the unity of God), the following two distinctions need to be explained and defined: (1) essence/substance; (2) attributes/properties. The meaning of these terms presented in the following section is mainly derived from the common definitions used by Muslim philosophers and theologians; they provide an overview of the usage of Ibn Rushd’s terminology of the doctrine of divine unity, which is helpful for the assessment undertaken in the later section of this chapter.

According to Ibn Rushd, Aristotle’s *Metaphysics XII*, particularly in Ibn Rushd’s *Metaphysics* part XII.1549:1071a2 to XII.1709:1075a11 (pp. 131-198): “is primarily a discussion of the eternal substance, for Aristotle has already expounded the principle of the sensible substance subject to generation and corruption in books *Wāw/O* and *Zay/Z*,”\(^{112}\) Thus,

\(^{110}\) In this section, I use and follow Ibn Rushd’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (i.e., Ibn Rushd’s *Metaphysics*) as my main source. Ibn Rushd’s approaches to Aristotle’s text slavishly imitate or even follow the order (the numbering more or less) of Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*.


we must first focus on the question of what the substance (both external and sensible substances) is according to Ibn Rushd’s commentaries on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

First, it is clear from Ibn Rushd’s exegesis of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* that he follows Aristotle’s notion of substance (Latin: *substantia*; Greek: *ousia*) to describe God’s transcendent nature as the First, the First Intellect and the Prime immovable mover. Notably, in Ibn Rushd’s *Metaphysics*, Allāh is posited as the First Principle (the Unmoved Mover) of a first moved substance, that is, beyond the outermost heavenly body and the sphere of the fixed stars.

Such a notion of transcendent substance or essence is distinct from Aristotle’s *Categories*, including qualities, quantities, relations, etc. These categories contain things that cannot exist on their own; their existence depends on their being “in” substances. For example, when considering Aristotle’s lexicon of philosophical terms, Ibn Rushd indicates that Aristotle makes a distinction between a type A “substance” (the first sense: cause of being) and a type B “substance” (the essence “what it is to be”). For Aristotle, a substance of type A is “the proximate cause of being.” On the other hand, a substance of type B is the first essence (e.g., “what it is to be”), in which it must be simple, with no form, and no matter. Therefore, for Aristotle, the first essence or the first unmoved mover is both one in definition and one in number. Ibn Rushd comments on this first essence as follows,

Therefore, what is necessary in the case of the first essence [type B] insofar as it is perfection and end is that it should not have a form, but it must be simple, and everything simple is not in matter […] the first unmoved mover, then, must be one in definition and number […] if the first unmoved mover is one in number, then it is clear that the first object moved by it, if this motion is eternal and continuous, must also be one in number. Ibn Rushd comments on this first essence as follows,

Second, let us now turn to another notion that needs to be explained concerning the definition of *Tawḥīd*, namely, the properties or predications/attributes. Ibn Rushd’s major rebuttal of al-Ghazālī’s chief anti-Avicennian arguments in his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* concerns the divine attributes—the allegation that Ibn Sīnā and the Neo-Platonists have taken away the positive attributes of Allāh. For Ibn Sīnā, as well as the Mu’tazilite theologians, Allāh is absolutely simple: the combination of essence and attributes is logically impossible. Ibn Rushd accuses al-Ghazālī of misunderstanding the nature of predication as it applies to Allāh and creation respectively. Ibn Rushd responds that the Philosophers do not deny the essential or positive attributes of God (the seven attributes of perfection, i.e., knowledge, will, life, power, speech, hearing and seeing), but they do deny that these essential attributes apply to God and the creature univocally. For example, in his account of divine knowledge, Ibn Rushd argues,

But it is impossible, according to the Philosophers, that God’s knowledge should be analogous to ours, for our knowledge is the effect of the existents, whereas God’s knowledge is their cause, and it is not true that eternal knowledge is of the same form as temporal knowledge. He who believes this makes God an eternal man, and man a mortal God. In short, it has previously been shown that God’s knowledge stands in opposition to man’s, for it is His knowledge which produces the existents, and it is not the existents which produce His knowledge.115

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Kendall-Hunt, 2009), p. 37. S. Marc Cohen indicates that Aristotle’s notion of substance is crucial to his metaphysics, but is complicated by the fact that he uses the term in several interrelated ways.

113 Ibn Rushd’s *Metaphysics*, XII.1686:1074a31, trans. Genequand, p. 188 (emphasis added).
115 Ibn Rushd, “the Thirteenth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. 

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As shown in his comments on the *Metaphysics*, Ibn Rushd agreed with Aristotle that the first subject (the first intellect/prime immovable mover) of metaphysics is God. However, concerning where the existence of God was to be demonstrated, Ibn Rushd placed this proof in physics rather than in metaphysics. Indeed, the main text for the introduction of this debate in the medieval period was Ibn Rushd’s comment on the *Epitome of Metaphysics* (1159), in which he explains and considers the following questions regarding this notion of unity: Is it one or many? If it is many, what is the one to which this plurality ascends? How is this plurality ordered with respect to unity? Ibn Rushd’s critique of the notion of unity in Avicenna is by far the most extended in the *Epitome*, and it is based on his distinction between numerical and metaphysical unity, which comes up for the first time in Book I of *Metaphysics*. For Ibn Rushd, metaphysical unity is the only distinctive philosophical sense of the term—it is basically equivalent to essential being. All other usages of unity refer to numerical unity, because it is the kind of unity that leads to the concept of number.

Ibn Rushd’s First Principle/the Prime Mover/ Unmoved Mover

In light of the history of Islamic philosophy, Ibn Rushd was the Interpreter of Aristotelian philosophy and was regarded as the great commentator *par excellence* of Aristotle by both Arabist and non-Arabist/Europeans. Roger Arnaldez has rightly observed that some of Ibn Rushd’s works are not merely commentaries that explain Aristotle’s thought, but are his own thought. Before I move on, let me briefly mention the scope of my study of Ibn Rushd. Ibn Rushd’s philosophy (in particular his commentaries on *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*) is beyond the scope of this paper; my main concern is to explore his thinking about the First Principle/the Prime Unmoved Mover, which is necessary for the discourse of the doctrine of divine simplicity. Therefore, this present chapter is an exploration of Ibn Rushd’s great commentaries on Aristotle, especially the Twelfth Book (Lām) of the *Metaphysics* in which the concept of the First Principle/the Prime mover/ the unmoved mover is dealt with by Aristotle.

3.5 The theory of a Simple Allāh in Book XII (Lām) of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*

3.5.1 The Problem

In what follows, we will attempt to answer the following questions: First, we will explore how Ibn Rushd deals with the problem of the One and the Many in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Isaac Husik indicates that “Metaphysics builds upon foundations laid in physics and mathematics. From the former it accepts the idea of an immaterial mover and shows in what

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See Averroës (Ibn Rushd), *Averroës on Aristotle’s “Metaphysics:” An Annotated Translation of the So-called ‘Epitome,’” The *Epitome of Metaphysics* is the last in a collection of six small treatises with the title *Summaries of Aristotle’s Books on Physics and Metaphysics* that is found in a variety of Arabic and Hebrew manuscripts.

The research of this paper mainly focuses on *Ibn Rushd’s Metaphysics*. Cf. Aris. Met.


way it moves. From mathematical astronomy it accepts the number of moves, i.e., the number of motions in the heavenly spheres, since each motion has a mover” (Chapter 8/Textus 44, 1073b).\footnote{Isaac Husik, “Averroës on the Metaphysics of Aristotle,” p. 421.} Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd comments that Aristotle assumes a plurality of movers, as many as the number of the spheres, but “among them is a first, which is the [first] mover of the universe.” Second, we will explore Ibn Rushd’s reception and adaption of Aristotle’s claims concerning the immovable mover. More specifically, I would like to identify Ibn Rushd’s own position and explore some of the implication on the doctrine of divine simplicity of his arguments. One of the major works of Ibn Rushd, namely Ibn Rushd’s Metaphysics: A Translation of Ibn Rushd’s Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Book Lam, translated by Charles Genequand, will be examined in order to pursue the answer to the questions we mentioned above.

### 3.5.2 Existence and Essence

The distinction between essence and existence is one of the most central and controversial aspects of Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy, due to his claim that Ibn Sīnā made a mistake in treating both being and existence as distinct accidental properties of essence:

Therefore it is not correct to say that there is something contingent by itself and eternal and necessary by something else, as Ibn Sīnā says that the necessary is partly necessary by itself and partly necessary by something else, except for the motion of the heaven only. It is not possible that there should be something contingent by its essence but necessary on account of something else, because the same thing cannot have a contingent existence on account of its essence and receive a necessary existence from something else, unless it were possible for its nature to be completely reversed. […] Therefore there cannot be a substance contingent by itself but necessarily by something else, but this is possible in the case of motion. […] If there is a power in a body which can never cease to impart motion, it will necessarily be moved by a mover in which there is no potentiality at all, either by essence or by accident. This is the state of the celestial body.\footnote{Ibn Rushd’s Metaphysics, XII.1632:1073a3, trans. Genequand, p. 165.}

The above statements show that there is both compatibility and incompatibility between Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of existence/essence and Ibn Rushd’s metaphysical views. Both Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sīnā maintained a logical distinction between essence and existence, but Ibn Rushd accused Ibn Sīnā of confusing the logical order with the ontological order. Ibn Sīnā’s schema entails the following premise: Since the necessary existent is absolutely simple, all the complexity that is in the heavens “is something contingent by itself and eternal and necessary by something else;” but the necessary existent is so in a unified and non-composite way.

The Necessary Existent must be one entity. Otherwise, there would be a multiplicity in which each is a necessary existent. […] If necessary existence is an attribute of the thing, existing for it then would be necessary, as regards this attribute—that is, necessary existence—that that very attribute should exist for this to which it is attributed. As such, any other [hypothetical attribute] of [the kind] cannot exist except as an attribute of that [one] thing. Hence, it would be impossible for [such an attribute] to exist for another and it must, hence, exist for [that thing] alone. [The second alternative is that] the existence [of the attribute] is possible but not necessary for it. […] That whose existence is always necessitated by another is also not simple in its true nature, […] because what belongs to it [when] considered in itself is other than what belongs to it from another. It attains its (quiddity) in existence from both together. For this reason, nothing other than the Necessary Existent, considered in Itsel, is
stripped of associating with what is in potentiality and [what is within the realm of] possibility. He is the single existent, [every] other [being] a composite [dual].

In this passage, Ibn Sīnā describes Allāh as the ‘Necessary Existent’ (wājib al-wujūd); or more precisely, the definition of the necessary existence as that whose non-existence is impossible.

In “Metaphysics,” II.4, Ibn Sīnā also states:

A Single necessary existent can neither come to be from two nor is there multiplicity in the necessary in any way. There cannot be two things, where this one is not that one, and that one is not this one, and each one is necessary through itself (al-wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihī) and through the other (al-wājib al-wujūd bi-ghayrihi). […] Therefore, each one’s necessary existence is not derived from the other, but rather from the external cause that occasions the attachment between them.

For Ibn Sīnā, the metaphysical distinction between ‘the necessary existence through or in itself’ and ‘the necessary existence through another’ seems to be similar to the essence/quiddity (māhiyya) of Allāh, or means, more precisely, that Allāh’s essence/quiddity and existence are identical. It was this metaphysical distinction of Ibn Sīnā’s necessary existence through which he solved the problems of kalām, and explained how Allāh’s attributes (ṣifāt) were related to the oneness of His essence (Dhāt). For this reason, when considering Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysical analysis of ‘the necessary in itself,’ it was seen that what exists in itself had to be one and wholly simple. This distinction worked for Ibn Sīnā, who, as mentioned above, tended to reduce Allāh’s attributes to the particularization of His essence (Dhāt). According to Ibn Sīnā, Allāh’s essence and existence is between three modes of intellect; namely, ‘intellectus in habitu,’ (an intelligence which is not in action) ‘intellectus in actu’ (an intelligence which is always in action), and ‘intellectus acquisitus’ (acquired intellect). For example, Ibn Sīnā argues that “God has knowledge of His Essence: His Knowledge, His Being Known and His Knowing are one and the same thing. He knows other than Himself, and all objects of knowledge. He knows all things by virtue of one knowledge, and in a single manner. His knowledge does not change according to whether the thing known has being or not-being.”

In “Metaphysics,” II.5, Ibn Sīnā writes:

We cannot say that the whole is essentially prior to the parts, and so it is either later or simultaneous—how could it be?!—since then it would not exist necessarily. From this it has become clear that what exists necessarily is not a body, not any matter of a body, nor a form of a body, nor an intelligible matter of an intelligible form, nor an intelligible form in an intelligible matter, nor divisible—whether in quantity, principles, or account—and so it is one from these three perspectives.

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Jon McGinnis has rightly summarized Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of existence/essence and attributes from Ibn Sīnā’s *Psychology*:

Ibn Sīnā next identifies intellect with that thing that has something essentially intelligible. In other words, only intellects are the sort of things that have intelligible objects. [...] As for its being its very act of intellection [which is the act of thinking], Ibn Sīnā observed in his *Psychology* that for an intellect to have an intelligible object is simply identical with the act of intellection. So, it follows that the Necessary Existent is essentially the act of intellecting, the intellect, and what is intellected (‘āqīl, ‘aql, ma’qūl). In the Necessary Existent the three are numerically one and the same; there is absolutely no multiplicity in the Necessary Existent. That is because all of these all of these are essentially the same and ultimately reduce to its existing necessarily through itself.129

For Ibn Sīnā, what proceeds from something absolutely simple should also be one. In other words, Ibn Sīnā divided the contingent world into existing things and essences, into things that are necessary through “something else” and are possible “by it.” However, for Ibn Rushd, the first subject of metaphysics (necessary being or essence) was God, not the separate substances. Therefore, Ibn Rushd rejected Ibn Sīnā’s proof as merely probable at best, because it relied on Ibn Sīnā’s notion of something as possible in itself, and necessary from another perspective, which is a notion that Ibn Rushd argued is inconsistent with the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of the heavens.

### 3.5.3 The First Immovable Mover

When we turn to the question of the First Principle, we find that Ibn Rushd follows closely Aristotle’s argument for the existence of a Prime Mover (unmoved mover in Ibn Rushd’s *Metaphysics XII*, especially chapters 8 [1073a14-1074a38] to 10 [1075a11-1075b30]).130 Ibn Rushd asserts that the Prime Mover must be eternal and pure actuality. In other words, its action must be continuous and eternal.

In chapter 8 (1073a14-1074a38) Aristotle indicates a plurality of movers, as many as the number of the spheres, and all of these movers seem like the first immovable mover, existing apart from the spheres that are moved by them. Therefore “it is necessary that each one of these motions should be caused by something immovable by essence and an eternal substance”;131 however, such understanding is not to undermine or to pluralize the uniqueness of the transcendent immovable mover.132 According to Ibn Rushd, the plurality of the movers (unlike the mover of the universe) all obey and follow this great motion (the first mover), and the first mover is prior to them in nature, position, and magnitude. In Ibn Rushd’s words, “all this implies [the first mover’s] precedence over [the plurality of movers] in nobility and substance. It is also evident that the rank of these movers relative to the first mover must follow the order of the spheres in space because their precedence in position and magnitude determines their hierarchy in nobility.”133

Furthermore, Ibn Rushd explains that “the [multiple] motions of each star follow one single motion which is the motion of the star itself [...] the first mover of each sphere is

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achieved by the first mover of all.” 134 Or more precisely, “all the motions of the sphere follow one act and one order common to all of them [...] to a first mover and follows in all its motions that which is produced by this first mover.” 135 Ibn Rushd also gives a brilliant analogy to compare the first mover (one) with the multiplicity of movers (many):

The people of a good state cooperate for the establishment of a good political constitution by modelling their actions on those of the first ruler. I mean that they make their actions follow and obey the action of the first ruler. Just as the first ruler in cities must behave in a way peculiar to him, and this must be the noblest behaviour (otherwise he would be impotent and useless), and everybody under the first ruler imitates his behaviour, and just as these leaders must have a first leadership, likewise the actions of the rulers must depend on a first action. 136

In chapter 8 (1074a15), 137 Aristotle debates whether there is one motion or many motions in the celestial bodies which move in the heavens. Now, if there were many motions, would it mean that there are many first immovable movers? Aristotle states, “If there are others (motions), they will impart motion because they are the perfection of a motion.” 138 However, Aristotle argues against the existence of many immovable motions by denying the consequent, and says “there cannot be other motions apart from those that have been mentioned, and this must be inferred from the objects moved; if every motion exists because of that which is moved and every motion moves something, then there is no motion whatever which moves itself or another motion, but they exist because of the stars.” 139 Again, if there were “other” motions, there would of course have to be many first immovable movers. Ibn Rushd comments that such a premise is not valid, because “the number of the motions must be the same as the number of the objects moved and of the movers, for if every motion exists only for something which is moved, and every motion also exists only because of something which imparts motion, and (if) no motion exists because of itself or because of another motion.” 140 Aristotle explains this notion and clarifies it. In Aristotle’s words, “Since it is not possible, then, that what is in perfection should be infinite, every motion is for one of the celestial bodies which move in the heaven.” 141 In other words, it is impossible to be more than one immovable mover as Ibn Rushd indicates: “If the motion (the first immovable mover) is because of another motion this must also be because of another and this will go on ad infinitum. That which has an end and a perfection cannot be infinite because the infinite has no end.” 142

Aristotle also argues against the theory of the existence of many heavens in chapter 8 (1074a31). 143 Aristotle says that “the heaven is one is evident; if there were many heavens, they would be like men [...] the same definition applies equally to a multiplicity, for instance

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the definition of man; but Socrates is one, and that which exists in the first essence does not have matter because it is perfection."  

Ibn Rushd similarly comments on this passage that "those which are one in definition are many in number, for instance man; for he is one in number and many in potentiality, for instance Socrates, Plato and Callias. The reason why it is so is that the first essence, which indicates the existence of the thing, must not have matter, for if it had matter, it would be another essence, and so on ad infinitum."  

Ibn Rushd then says, "Therefore, what is necessary in the case of the first essence insofar as it is perfection and entelos is that it should not have a form, but it must be simple, and everything simple is not in matter."  

For Aristotle, the first immovable mover must be simple, one in number, without form and matter in its essence. Then, on the basis of the continuity of the motion of this heaven, Aristotle explicitly tries to show that there must be only one first immovable mover in number and definition:

The first unmoving mover, then, is one in definition and in number. Therefore, that which is moved always and continuously must be only one; therefore, there is only one heaven.  

Ibn Rushd comments this passage: “if the first mover is one in number, then it is clear that the first object moved by it, if its motion is eternal and continuous, must also be one in number, i.e., insofar as it receives a single continuous and eternal motion from a mover that is one in number and definition.  

Aristotle has thus established in Chapter 8 of Metaphysics that there is only one first immovable mover—which is the mover of the heavens.  

Moreover, Aristotle has also carefully qualified the immovable mover by “first,” “one in number,” “not in matter and form”; and that they are other many “subordinate” movers, which are the movers of the planetary spheres. It is on this account that Aristotle demonstrates that in contrast to the first immovable mover, all the other movers are moved accidently by something else. Therefore, after discussing the first mover and multiplicity of movers in chapter 8 (1073b1), Aristotle states that “the first unmovable mover, then, is one in definition and in number” in the later passage (1074a31), where it is fully consistent with the uniqueness of the first mover in the rest of the chapter 8. In short, we see in chapter 8 that Aristotle indicates a multiplicity of movers, at the head of which is a first immovable mover; and it is with regard to this first immovable mover that he answered that it was one.

Let us now examine other aspects of the first immovable mover in Aristotle’s Metaphysics XII, Chapters 8 to 10, in order to answer the second question mentioned in the beginning of this chapter (i.e., to explore Ibn Rushd’s view concerning the question of how we ought to understand Aristotle’s claims about the immovable mover).
3.5.4 The First Intellect

In chapter 9 (1074b13), Aristotle established the discussion on the question of whether that which thinks of itself (the first intellect) is one and simple or multiple and composite. Aristotle first makes a distinction of “the essence of intellection” versus “the object of intellection.” In Aristotle’s words,

If intellection [an act of thinking] and being the object of intellection are two different things, which one of them will have excellence? The essence of intellection is not the same as being the object of intellection, as in some cases knowledge is the known thing; in the case of intellectual things, the substance without matter and the “what is it in essence too”; but in speculative (things), the things is the definition and the intellection, and thus the object of intellection is not different from the intellect and everything which is without matter is the same because intellection and being an object of intellection are also the same. These remains a problem if the object of intellection is composite, for then it will change in the parts of the whole; or is everything which is immaterial indivisible, for instance the human intellect and that of the composite excellent in this (respect) in this way? But the excellent in something is whole and something else. In this way, intellection is of itself throughout eternity.

According to Ibn Rushd, the above passage can be explained through the analogy of “art and the artefact.” Ibn Rushd explains that “the form of the artefact which is in matter and that which is in the soul of the artisan are one and the same thing; how much more fitting it is that the same should apply to intellectional things with which matter is not mixed and which are only a form and an essence denoting the existence of the thing.” This analogy clearly indicates that the intellect and the object of intellection should not be distinct to each, just as Aristotle states in the later part of the passage: “but in speculative (things) […] the object of intellection is not different from the intellect and everything which is without matter is the same because intellection and being an object of intellection are also the same.” For this reason, Ibn Rushd comments and indicates that the intellect itself (without matter or eternal) is one and the same thing, and it is not something external to itself: “It is clear that the intellect and the object of intellection of everything, which is without matter, is one and the same thing, because being an object of intellection (in’iqāl) and the object of intellection (mun’aqil) are one and the same thing.”

Although it became clear that the intellect itself is one without matter, and it does not think something external to itself, Aristotle asserts: “there remains a problem if the object of intellection is composite, for then it will change in the parts of the whole; or is everything

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153 Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Book XII, quoted in Ibn Rushd’s *Metaphysics*, XII.1692-1693:1074b13, trans. Genequand, p. 191. Cf. Aris. *Met*. XII.1075a4-10, trans. Oxford Translation: “Further, if thinking and being thought are different, in respect of which does goodness belong to thought? For being an act of thinking and being an object of thought are not the same. We answer that in some cases knowledge is the object. In the productive sciences (if we abstract from the matter) the substance in the sense of essence, and in the theoretical sciences the formula or the act of thinking, is the object. As, then, thought and the object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter, they will be the same, i.e., the thinking will be one with the object of its thought. A further question is left—whether the object of the thought is composite; for if it were, thought would change in passing from part to part of the whole. We answer that everything which has not matter is indivisible. As human thought, or rather the thought of composite objects, is in a certain period of time (for it does not possess the good at this moment or at that, but its best, being something different from it, is attained only in a whole period of time), so throughout eternity is the thought which has itself for its object.”


which is immaterial and indivisible [...]." 157 Hence, for Ibn Rushd, the problem of one and many shown in Aristotle’s discussion of the intellect needs to be solved. Ibn Rushd attempts to answer this by raising the following comments:

**First.** “If it (the intellect in itself) is composed of many intelligibles, it will necessarily have parts different one from another, not similar one to another; and that which is of such a nature thinks many things, and that which thinks many things thinks something external to itself and the object of its intellection are the cause of itself.” 158

**Second.** “If the intellect and its object were united in all respects, then it would not follow that its intelligibles are many, for the cause of multiplicity is the difference between the intellect and the intelligibles in us.” 159

**Third.** “If its being free from matter is its essence,” then “the intellect and its intelligibles are absolutely the same thing” [because they are both free from matter]. 160

**Fourth.** “If there exists a genus of intelligibles of which one element surpasses another in composition,” then “the simple in this genus.” 161

In sum, Ibn Rushd demonstrates that for Aristotle, “intellect” is not multiple, but unitary and simple. In a later part of the passage, Aristotle confirms this idea of the intellect. In his words, “but the excellent in something is whole and something else from the thing itself. In this way, intellection is of itself and separate from the intelligibles throughout eternity.” 162 Ibn Rushd gives a very insightful explanation of the uniqueness of the intellect,

It follows that the excellent [i.e., the paradigm] in every genus is whole and simple and indivisible; it is something isolated by itself, outside the composite, I mean its essence is not in the composite. 163

And Ibn Rushd gives another analogy to clarify the absolutely simple and one of the first intellect:

Hot things surpass one another by the small or great amount of heat; therefore, the absolutely hot thing is that in which there is no composition, that is to say fire, since no other body is mixed with it because it would become low in heat and abate. Likewise, the first intellect must be absolutely simple and one. 164

In other words, there is a relation of “one” and “the same” between the essence of intellection and the object of intellection, which Aristotle describes as (both) “whole and

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160 Ibn Rushd’s *Metaphysics*, XII.1704:1074b13, trans. Genequand, p. 196: Ibn Rushd comments, “Aristotle probably means that the indication that in the cause of everything which has no matter, its intelligible aspect is not separable from the human intellect, is that we see that through its being free from matter in its essence, although the intellect and its intelligible are not absolutely free, it becomes the same thing (as the intelligible).”
something else.” According to Aristotle, this expression applies to a thing which is in every possible way the excellent or paradigm of the existence of something else. Ibn Rushd, however, transforms Aristotle’s expression of “the excellent in every genus is whole and something else” to “the excellent in every genus is whole and simple and indivisible.” On this point, Aristotle’s statements about the intellect are not very precise. Ibn Rushd, as we have seen, attempts to give a more satisfactory explanation of the nature of the intellect. According to Ibn Rushd, the first intellect is the simple or paradigm of all the other separate intellects. In his words, “The absolutely one is that in which there is no multiplicity at all, neither on account of the differentiation between the intellect and the intelligible, nor on account of the multiplicity of intelligibles […] for this intellect is one and simple in every aspect, because if the intelligibles occurring in one intellect are many, then they are not united with its essence and its essence is distinct from them.”  

Such an understanding of the intellect in the thought of Aristotle, Ibn Rushd says, is compatible with the truth (the Qur’an) and with the Islamic doctrinal knowledge of God’s essence. Ibn Rushd explains that “the First is He who knows absolutely the nature of being qua being, which is His essence.”

### 3.5.5 The First Principle

We now turn to the last two passages of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics XII* in Chapter 10 (1075b20-1075b30), in which he discusses the first principle. Aristotle states that “the First has no contrary, because all contraries have matter and they are the same thing in potentiality and the contrary ignorance leads to the contrary; but the First is not a contrary at all.” According to Ibn Rushd’s commentaries, “the first principle is supremely free from matter.” Furthermore, Aristotle clarifies, “if there are forms and numbers, they are causes of nothing, and therefore not of motion.” This original statement of Aristotle shows that the First principle must be one and simple, without form and number; otherwise the First will not produce the multiplicity of motions, forms, and numbers in the sphere.

Finally, Aristotle argues against the multiplicity of the First principle by giving an example from politics: “and if there are many principles, the essences will not be in the best government, for the multiplicity of rulers is not praiseworthy, but the ruler is one.” We see from this statement that Aristotle makes three assertions:

1. The government is in chaos if it is ruled by a multiplicity of rulers.
2. The best government must be ruled by one ruler.
3. Therefore, the ruler [i.e., the First Principle] is one.

According to Ibn Rushd, “if the first principles of the world are different principles, then, there cannot be among the existents which exist there the best government, nor an order resembling the order of government and its good; in the same way, if there are many rulers, there is no order and no right and justice in government.”

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3.6 Some Concluding Remarks: Ibn Rushd’s Doctrine of Divine Unity in Comparative Studies

At this juncture, we may conclude the following from our preceding examination of selected works of Ibn Rushd. The implication of belief in God’s unity is clear in Ibn Rushd’s thought. Having defined adherence to *Tawḥīd* and divine attributes in theory, Ibn Rushd successfully safeguards the unity of God in his discussion both from the perspectives of Islamic religion and from philosophy. Thus far I have described and examined the task before Ibn Rushd, setting the stage to discuss the unity and plurality in Ibn Rushd’s understandings of Allāh’s simplicity and attributes.

In this chapter, I have shown that by applying the principle of “God is necessarily existent” (*anniyya*) in his formulation of the doctrine of *Tawḥīd* (the doctrine of divine simplicity), Ibn Rushd distinguishes the attributes of perfection (i.e., the seven essential attributes of God that are explicitly given in the Qu'rān: knowledge, life, power, will, hearing, vision, and speech) from the non-essential attributes. In such a way, he states that the non-essential attributes of perfection are a unique plurality of attributes “without implying a plurality in essence.”

However, it is worth noting that for Ibn Rushd, God does not actually possess essential attributes that are multiple and super-added to His essence. Rather His divine attributes exist in intellection (*ta‘aqquł*, or in the mind) only. Consequently, His divine attributes are identical with (to express singularity) His real essence (self-existence, or *anniyya*); yet also different from it in the sense that His perfections are manifested only in relation to His essence as distinct realities, and not to His real essence. After all, the essential attributes are to be considered as multiple distinct attributes in God and thus it is appropriate only on human perception, and presupposes simple essence, and this secures His utter simplicity. In other words, “the attribute and its subject are one and the same, and the acts which are ascribed to this subject as proceeding necessarily from different attributes exist only in a relative way.”

Ibn Rushd also distinguishes the “plurality” of divine attributes from the numerical plurality in human attributes, for example, as he puts it: “that there is not a plurality of things known in the Eternal Knowledge like their numerical plurality in human knowledge.” For Ibn Rushd, if we applied the unique existence of attributes in a potentially multiple, a plurality of divine attributes can in one way be identical with the single essence of Allāh (i.e., God the Knower is His Knowledge). In doing so, we will not render God’s essence to a composite being which has multiple constituent attributes, but to a single being. This explanation of Ibn Rushd represents his reliance on the discussion of God’s self existence and

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173 See Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. For Ibn Rushd, the plurality of attributes does not violate the theory of *Tawḥīd*, if we understand that He is one in actuality but multiple in potency. As Ibn Rushd puts it: “That a thing is an existent and one and possible or necessary, for when the one identical entity is viewed in so far as something else proceeds from it, it is called capable and acting, and in so far as it is viewed as differentiating between two opposite acts, it is called willing, and in so far as it is viewed as knowing, and in so far as it is viewed as perceiving and as a cause of motion, it is called living, since the living is the perceiving and the self-moving.”

174 See Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*.

175 See Ibn Rushd, “the Sixth Discussion,” in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. As he also stated in “the Fifth Discussion,” Ibn Rushd compares his understanding of “a plurality of divine attributes” to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity: “And therefore he who conceives that matter is not a condition for the existence of the soul must concede that in the separate existences there is a real oneness existing outside the soul, although this oneness becomes a plurality through definition. This is the doctrine of the Christians concerning the three hypostases in the divine Nature. They do not believe that they are attributes additional to the essence, but according to them they are only a plurality in the definition—they are a potential, not an actual, plurality. Therefore they say that the three are one, i.e., one in act and three in potency.”
the existence of plural attributes in his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (see 3.4), which Aristotle also discusses at length in *Metaphysics* (see 3.5).

At *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (see 3.4, above), Ibn Rushd arguments for divine simplicity in relation to God’s attributes are closely linked to his arguments for the Necessary Existent (*anniyya*). That is, he argues that if divine attributes were multiple necessary existents that somehow predicate of God’s essence essentially and of creatures analogically, and this would not compromise the simplicity of Allāh. Since in essence, however, nothing exists except Allāh, the multiplicity of attributes cannot be understood as “actual” existences, but as “contingent” existences. Ibn Rushd speaks about the attributes of Allāh carefully, as it would be dangerous to speculate about Allāh’s essence. According to the above analysis, the idea of Allāh in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* of Ibn Rushd can be summarized as follows: The attributes of Allāh only appear as accidental to human beings, and thus seem to be in addition to the essence of Allāh. The attributes of Allāh should instead be interpreted as “imagined attributes” (mental concepts), as “inner/deeper level attributes,” or as non-compounded and uncreated attributes subsisting in Allāh eternally. In this sense, the plurality of divine attributes is not contrary to Allāh’s oneness.

As we have also seen in our preceding investigations, Ibn Rushd admits that his arguments for the oneness of Allāh are different from the Ash’arites’ and Mu’tazilites’ treatment of doctrine of divine unity; nevertheless, his arguments are not far from Scripture. Ibn Rushd deals with the concept of divine simplicity within the boundaries of both Scripture and philosophy. In other words, Ibn Rushd’s idea of Allāh must be related to how Allāh is revealed to humankind through the Qur’ān. Ibn Rushd does not deny but affirms the seven essential divine attributes by following the pattern of the classical doctrine of Allāh’s oneness (similar to al-Ghazālī) in the sense that he believes that Allāh exists supremely and He is the reality who rules all things.

As already mentioned, to understand fully the theory of divine simplicity in Ibn Rushd’s philosophical theology, we need to examine his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (see 3.5, above). With regard to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (*Book XII*), Ibn Rushd addresses not only about the interpretation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, but also a series of fundamental topics: the concept of being and unity, the first principle, actuality and potentiality, and knowledge. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle argues for God primarily as a first immovable mover—the only mover of the sphere of the fixed stars, and it is this immovable mover that Aristotle describes as the first and the only God. It is very important for Ibn Rushd to argue for God instead as a first immovable mover. For Ibn Rushd, God is the first immovable mover (or the first cause of being, which inferred that God is essentially necessarily existent) and the movers of celestial sphere are not. Furthermore, this first unmoved mover is one and unique, because it alone is immovable even accidentally and it alone produces only one kind of motion. Most remarkably, Ibn Rushd discusses a fundamental difference in conception between actuality and potentiality; he constantly treats them as unity among the attributes of being.

To summarize: our analysis of the divine essence and attributes of Ibn Rushd’s *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* and his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* show that his arguments for divine simplicity are closely linked to the premise that God is the necessary first uncaused cause of the existent (self-existence). This premise concerns the oneness of the essence and the multiplicity of attributes in Allāh. Thus, we can say that the divine simplicity is derived from this premise, whether this attribute is taken to mean uniqueness or oneness. The self-existence of God suffices for the theory of *Tawḥīd*.
Thomas Aquinas on Divine Simplicitas in relation to God’s Attributa and Personae
(in Summa Contra Gentiles)  

The doctrine of divine simplicity is a centerpiece of medieval theology. Inspired by Greek philosophy, it was important because of the problems to which it gave rise: in metaphysics, with how to reconcile the plurality of the divine attributes and ideas in God? Marilyn McCord Adams, William Ockham

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 An Outline of the Inquiry: Thomas on the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

The simplicity of God is one of the most important attributes affirmed by Islam and Christianity as monotheistic religions. However, both Christian and Islamic thinkers do not always agree on how to characterize the doctrine of divine simplicity. The disagreement is not only due to their different faiths, but also because of their various understandings of the doctrine of divine simplicity. In short, their understandings of this doctrine lie in the key concept of how to define and explain the oneness of God. For Christian theology, the oneness of God is a dual notion of divine unity; God does not consist only in ‘a unity of singularity’ (God’s exclusive numerical oneness), but also in ‘a unity of simplicity’ (God’s qualitative oneness). The doctrine of divine simplicity is, put simply, a conjunction of these three claims: (i) God is a simple essentia without any composition; (ii) God has essential attributes that are distinct from one another, but they exist perfectly without parts in His simplicity; and (iii) the one simple being of God exists in three distinct divine Persons. If so, the following questions emerge in our research in this chapter: (1) How does Thomas conceptually link the oneness of God with a plurality of divine attributes, and (2) how does Thomas relate the oneness of God’s essence to the plurality of three divine Persons?

When one upholds the simplicity of God, God is considered without any parts or composition. Consequently, the question arises for either Muslim or Christian thinkers how to

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5 In the following sections of this chapter, I deal only with this central question by examining Thomas’ Summa Contra Gentiles (SCG). Of course, like anyone else who examines Thomas’ doctrine of God, I have consulted the most characteristic work of Thomas, namely Summa Theologiae (ST) over and over again in this study, and I will often refer to it explicitly.
safeguard distinct essential attributes of God described in the Bible as well as in the Qu’rān. In what follows, this chapter first discusses Thomas’ solution with respect to the first research question: How does Thomas conceptually link the simplicity of God with a plurality of God’s attributes? The answer seems obvious. Thomas distinguishes the essential attributes of God from the “creaturely” attributes, and he states that the essential attributes are not predicated of God and of creatures univocally and equivocally. In order to understand the plurality of God’s attributes, Thomas introduces the method of remotion (via remotionis) in his SCG.I.c.14. Thomas then continues to explain his thoughts on the via remotionis in SCG.I.cc.15-28; and then he discusses how these predicates (attributes) describe God without contradicting the simplicity of God, throughout the SCG.I.cc.29-102. On this view, Thomas shows that the irreducible simplicity of God can only be understood through application of the via remotionis.

The second part of the research question is this: If God is a simple essence, how could it be possible for Thomas to uphold that there are three distinct and fully divine personae in God? Or to be more precise, how does Thomas relate the oneness of God’s essence to the plurality of three divine Persons? In light of the history of interfaith dialogue, it is commonly argued by Muslim thinkers that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is incompatible with the doctrine of the divine simplicity. Thus, Muslims argue that Christianity is not monotheistic.

This line of anti-Christian polemics was known to Thomas as well. For example, Thomas his De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, Graecos et Armenos ad Cantorem Antiochenum (Reasons for the Faith against Muslim objections) addressed to the Cantor of Antioch. In this book he responded to the “attack and ridicule” that Muslims directed against the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. As Thomas points out: “They [the Muslims] ridicule the fact that we say Christ is the Son of God, when God has no wife (the Qur'ān, Surāh 6:110; 72:3); and they think we are insane for professing three Persons in God, even though we do not mean by this three gods.” The main argument of Muslims against the doctrine of the Trinity is about the notion of “generation” as being applied to God. As Thomas writes: “First of all we must observe that Muslims are silly in ridiculing us for holding that Christ is the Son of the living God, as if God has a wife.” In his response Thomas argues that “generation” has different meanings: “For any wise man can observe that the mode of generation is not the same for everything […] God, however, is not of a fleshly nature, requiring a woman to copulate with to generate offspring, but He is of a spiritual or intellectual nature, much higher than every intellectual nature.” Thomas here differentiated the divine intellect from the created intellect, and he further explained that the divine intellect is identical to God’s essence. Thomas says there: “In God understanding is not different from His being. Consequently the word which is conceived in His intellect is not something accidental to Him or alien from His nature.” Accordingly, Thomas affirms both the Trinity and the simplicity of God: “the Word of God [Thomas called the Word of the divine intellect the Son of God] is not an accident or a part of God, who is simple, nor something extrinsic to the divine nature, but is something complete, subsisting in the divine nature and coming forth from another.”

Thomas, obviously, placed the trinitarian generation within the one and simple divine nature,

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6 As mentioned above, Marilyn McCord Adams also observed that one of the central questions has been raised in the medieval theology—“how to reconcile the plurality of the divine attributes and ideas in God?”

7 See also Section 4.3.2.A, below.


9 Saint Thomas Aquinas, De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, p. 33.

10 Saint Thomas Aquinas, De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, p. 34.

11 Saint Thomas Aquinas, De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, p. 34.
thus affirming both trinitarian doctrine and divine simplicity. Thomas concludes his discussion on the generation of the Son:

So the Word He conceives by His essence, when He understands Himself and everything else, is as great as His essence. It is therefore perfect, simple and equal to God. We call this Word of God a Son, as said above, because He is of the same nature with the Father, and we profess that He is co-eternal with the Father, only-begotten and perfect.  

In addition, Thomas also explains that the concept of divine Persons is compatible with divine simplicity. He writes:

Since everything that subsists with an intelligent nature we call a ‘person’, which is equivalent to the Greek ‘hypostasis’ [...] thus we fittingly posit three Persons in God: the Person of the Father, the Person of the Son and the Person of the Holy Spirit.” Yet, “we do not say that these three Persons or hypostases are distinct by essence, [...] but by mere relations which arise from the coming forth of the word and the love [...] we call the Father true God, almighty, eternal and whatever else, so also the Son, and for the same reason the Holy Spirit. Therefore, since the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not distinct in their divine nature, but only by relationship, we are right in saying that the three Persons are not three gods, but one true and perfect God. 

In sum, we learn that for Thomas, the divine Persons are distinct “by mere relations” and not “by essence.” Accordingly, the simplicity of God is shared by each Person “because of the one simple divine nature in three Persons.”

This brief discussion of De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos shows that divine simplicity was an issue in the polemics between Christians and Muslims. Thomas developed an apologetic argument in order to defend both divine simplicity and the trinitarian faith. At the end of the treatise Thomas indicates that “the questions you [the Cantor of Antioch] sent to me [...] are treated in greater detail elsewhere [in the Summa Contra Gentiles].” In what follows, then, we will focus our analysis on Thomas’ Summa Contra Gentiles. There he developed his most extensive and detailed defense of Christianity addressed to non-Christians.

It is worth noting that there have not been many studies on the doctrine of divine simplicity of Thomas from the perspectives of Christian history and apology. As historian Richard A. Muller observes, the difficulty for modern scholarship to interpret and adopt Thomas’ doctrine of divine simplicity appropriately is due to “those modern writers who take the concept as purely philosophical and therefore miss the point of the traditional treatment,

12 Saint Thomas Aquinas, De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, p. 35.
13 Saint Thomas Aquinas, De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, p. 36 (emphasis added).
14 Saint Thomas Aquinas, De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, p. 36.
15 Saint Thomas Aquinas, De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, p. 51. See also p. 33: “On these questions I will make some explanations as easy as the subject allow, since I have written more amply about them elsewhere [in the Summa Contra Gentiles].”
which always assumed that the denial of composition was made for the sake of the right understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the divine attributes." Muller further explains that:

Thomas himself, like Alexander of Hales and like many theologians in the subsequent tradition, recognized the potential for misunderstanding caused by a juxtaposition of divine simplicity with the doctrine of the Trinity: the assumption of “threefold personality […] in God,” inasmuch as it indicates number and, given that “number always follows division,” appears to contradict the notion of “supreme simplicity” in God. […] yet, neither Thomas nor later writers, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, were ready to give up either of these points of doctrine (simplicity or Trinity) that had been so intimately related in patristic orthodoxy […].

Following Marie-Dominique Chenu, James Waltz also indicated that there is an urgent need for researching the interfaith dialogue between Thomas and Muslims, based on the SCG, in Thomas’ time as well as modern times. Waltz says,

Thomas’ works were then being widely used to train both missionaries and indigenous clergy in mission lands, and heartily recommended to confront contemporary philosophical “gentiles.” Today increasing knowledge of one faith by the other’s followers and greater awareness of the history of Christian-Muslim relations are producing meaningful dialogue in which persons of both faiths, in the words of Vatican II’s statement on non-Christian religions, “strive sincerely for mutual understanding.” Since the points at issue and the arguments about them remain similar if not identical to those of Thomas’ day, his rational presentation of Christian faith still merits study.

The focus of the following study is on Thomas’ Summa Contra Gentiles in the light of the twofold research question. In short, in this chapter I attempt to investigate how Thomas endeavoured to maintain the doctrine of divine simplicity while at the same time he affirmed the plurality of God’s attributes and personae. Such investigation will be done through studying Thomas’ SCG in order to discover his view on the relation of God’s attributa and personae to the doctrine of divine simplicity.

4.1.2 Analysis of Thomas’ Summa Contra Gentiles

Since the patristic period perhaps no Christian philosopher or theologian has discussed and meditated more productively on the simplicity of God than Thomas Aquinas of Rocca Secca (1225-1274). With the strong heritage of an ecclesiastical career and theological

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21 See Simon Tugwell, O. P. (trans. and ed.), Albert & Thomas Selected Writings (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), p. 201. Thomas was born in 1224/1225 at the Roccasecca Castle in the town of Naples, Italy. His fundamental literary culture was nurtured at Monte Cassino. Before Thomas was born, his mother has been told by a hermit that she would give birth to a son called Thomas, who would be unrivalled in holiness and knowledge. Hence, Thomas was destined by his parents to pursue an ecclesiastical career (early monastic formation) as abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino before he studied at Paris from 1245 until 1248.
Thomas served as Regent Master (lecturer) in different Dominican houses of study in Italy between the years of 1261-1265. Here Thomas met his fellow Dominican William of Moerbeke, who devoted himself to translating the writings of Aristotle from the Greek. At a time when an Arabized Aristotle, mainly painted by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroës), was being hardened into an enemy of Christianity in Paris, Thomas was destined to provide a constructive contribution to the emergence of an enduring Christian Aristotelianism. Thomas’ writings during this period included his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG, 1261-1264), *De Rationibus Fidei contra Saracenos* [*On the Reasons of the Faith against the Saracens*] (1261-1264), the First Part of his *Summa Theologiae* [*ST*, 1266-1273] and many other commentaries.

According to historian Richard A. Muller, Thomas went into considerable detail to discuss the *distinctions* of the divine attributes and the Trinity in light of his doctrine of divine simplicity. Muller summarises the discussion in this period in the following remarks:

The scholastics of the thirteenth century understood the doctrine of divine simplicity, in continuity with the fathers and their immediate predecessors, as an exclusion of compoundedness from the Godhead and as a significant corollary of both the unity and Trinity of God. [...] great pains were taken [in this scholastic period] to indicate that this “simplicity of substance” in no way removed distinction of *Persons*. [...] Thomas addressed the concept of divine simplicity as fundamental to the understanding of God, giving it more relative importance in his doctrine of the attributes than his predecessors had done and addressing the issue of distinction in the Godhead other than the distinctions between the *Persons*.  

Muller further indicates:

The more nominally philosophical of the attributes, like simplicity, eternity, infinity or omnipresence, were easily recognized as indicated or implied by the text of Scripture, as stated precisely by the fathers of the first five centuries and argued rationally by earlier generations of scholastics, [...] The teachers of the high scholastic era, [...], identified the central problems of the doctrine of God as an epistemological and linguistic one: they recognized the problem of predicking attributes of a transcendent being as central to the discussion of the doctrine of God. [...] Beginning with Alexander of Hales, the medieval doctors addressed in considerable depth the problem of the predication of divine attributes: Alexander recognized [...] that *the doctrine of God must assume the divine simplicity*. 

Muller points to the problem of the doctrine of divine simplicity in relation to the Trinity this way: “Against Islamic and Jewish philosophy, the medieval scholastic...
theologians were pressed to argue that the doctrine of the Trinity did not render God composite and that the \textit{distinctions} between Persons were \textit{not} division of the divine essence.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, the two relevant questions that shaped the reflection on the doctrine of divine simplicity and raised vigorous debates during this period were: (i) \textit{What is the relationship between divine simplicity and other attributes?} (ii) \textit{How are simplicity and Trinity related?} Both of these questions lead to an answer to the central problem analyzed in this study.

Thomas defended his treatment on the doctrine of divine simplicity in connection with the concept of the Trinity as it was rooted in the Christian tradition.\textsuperscript{26} As Muller observes:

An important element of Aquinas’ doctrine of the Trinity is his fairly traditional identification of the personal relations of paternity, filiation, and procession as constitutive of real distinctions in the Godhead while at the same time insisting on the simplicity of God.\textsuperscript{27}

In addition, with the rise of the Islamic movement, the philosophers and theologians of the medieval age are presumed to consent to the teaching of God’s unity (monotheism) in their formulation of the doctrine of God.\textsuperscript{28} Thomas responded to the Muslims by defending God’s simplicity through the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, in the \textit{SCG.I.c.2}, Thomas expressed his intention in this work:

And so, in the name of the divine Mercy, I have the confidence to embark upon the work of a wise man, even though this may surpass my powers, and I have set myself the task of making known, as far as my limited powers will allow, \textit{the truth that the Catholic faith professes, and of setting aside the errors that are opposed to it} (my emphasis). To use the words of Hilary: “I am aware that I owe this to God as the chief duty of my life, that my every word and sense may speak of Him. To proceed against individual errors, however, is a difficult business, […] it is difficult because some of them, such as the Mohammedans and the pagans, do not agree with us in accepting the authority of any Scripture, by which they may be convinced of their error. […] But the Mohammedans and the pagans accept neither the one (the Old Testament) nor the other (the New Testament). We must, therefore, have recourse to the natural reason, to which all men are forced to give their assent. However, it is true, in divine matters the natural reason has its failings.”\textsuperscript{29}

This makes clear that Thomas’ purpose in writing the \textit{SCG} was apologetic. His aim is defending “the truth that the Catholic faith professes, and of setting aside the errors that are opposed to it.”\textsuperscript{30} Perhaps one of the most prominent features of the \textit{SCG} is its polemic against “the errors of unbelievers,” including Muslims.\textsuperscript{31} Though he had approved to use the method


\textsuperscript{27} Muller, \textit{Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics}, vol. 4, p. 47 (emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{28} Muller, \textit{Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics}, vol. 4, p. 47 (emphasis added).


\textsuperscript{30} \textit{SCG} I.c.2, p. 62.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{SCG} I.c.2, p. 62.
of the natural reason to refute the errors of Mohammedans, Thomas explained that the divine truth surpassed natural reason. Moreover, in his polemic against the Muslims, Thomas argues that their strict emphasis on God’s oneness (Tawḥīd) in fact defames God in that it denies the doctrine of the divine attributa and the Trinity. The following text, presented by Thomas in SCG I.c.6, provides ample evidence of this:

On the other hand, those [Muslims] who founded sects committed to erroneous doctrines proceeded in a way that is opposite to this, the point is clear in the case of Muhammad. He seduced the people by promises of carnal pleasure to which the concupiscence of the flesh goads us. His teaching also contained precepts that were in conformity with his promises, and he gave free rein to carnal pleasure. In all this, as is not unexpected, he was obeyed by carnal men. As for proofs of the truth of his doctrine, he brought forward only such as could be grasped by the natural ability of anyone with a very modest wisdom. Indeed, the truths that he taught he mingled with many fables and with doctrines of the greatest falsity. He did not bring forth any signs produced in a supernatural way, which alone fittingly gives witness to divine inspiration; for a visible action that can be only divine reveals an invisibly inspired teacher of truth. On the contrary, Muhammad said that he was sent in the power of his arms—which are signs not lacking even to robbers and tyrants. What is more, no wise men, men trained in things divine and human, believed in him from the beginning. Those who believed in him were brutal men and desert wanderers, utterly ignorant of all divine teaching, through whose numbers Muhammad forced others to become his followers by the violence of his arms. Nor do divine pronouncements on the part of preceding prophets offer him any witness. On the contrary, he perverts almost all the testimonies of the Old and New Testaments by making them into fabrications of his own, as can be seen by anyone who examines his law. It was, therefore, a shrewd decision on his part to forbid his followers to read the Old and New Testaments, lest these books convict him of falsity. It is thus clear that those who place any faith in his words believe foolishly.

As Anton C. Pegis observes, Thomas “himself may very well have thought that the SCG was precisely the sort of work needed for Christian missionaries in Spain face to face the high intellectual culture of the Moslem world.” Pegis then continues to assert that

[… ] seen from this point of view, the SCG is a manual of apologetics against the intellectual picture of the universe created for the Western world by the translation of the writings of Aristotle and his followers into Latin in the course of the 12th and 13th centuries. This is a perfectly understandable objective. In a large sense, therefore, the SCG is part of the Christian intellectual reaction against Arabian intellectual culture, and especially against Arabian Aristotelianism. ³³

There is certainly a vast quantity of material in Thomas’ philosophical and theological works ³⁴ that we could use to explore the answer to our central question (as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter). Nevertheless, such a task would go beyond the limits of a single chapter. This is an additional reason to focus our analysis on the Summa Contra Gentiles. It is one of Thomas’ four theological syntheses (his other systematic works are: the Scriptum super libros Sententiarum [Scriptum, 1253-56], Compendium theologiae [Compendium, ³² Thomas makes the same remarks in his De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos [Reasons for the Faith against Muslim objections]. Cf. James Kritzeck, Peter the Venerable and Islam (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 126-140. James Kritzeck indicates that Thomas relied upon Peter the Venerable’s (d. 1156) Summa Totius Haeresis Saracenorum in composing his SCG I.c.6. ³³ Thomas Aquinas, “General Introduction,” in Summa Contra Gentiles, trans. with an Introduction and Notes by Anton C. Pegis, F.R.S.C (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 21. ³⁴ See Thomas’ varied works in Norman Kretzmann, The Metaphysics of Theism: Thomas’ Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997): Appendix I.

92
and Summa Theologiae [ST, 1266-73]), and it is also an important basis for Thomas’ attempt to develop his theology and philosophy in the Compendium and ST. Therefore, although I have consulted ST, I am not focusing on ST but on the earlier SCG, as I am interested in a fully developed philosophical theology for interfaith dialogue. Among Thomas’ systematic works, SCG provides the most extensive and detailed exposition of it. The other three theological works (the Scriptum, the Compendium, and ST) are all contributions mainly to Christian theology (as introduction to theology).

This chapter therefore seeks to explore how Thomas answers the two questions spelled out at the beginning of this chapter. I point to the fact that in Thomas’ writings, particularly in the Summa Contra Gentiles (SCG), there was a discussion on whether God’s attributes and divine Persons are not compatible with His simplicity. Thomas follows the orthodox teaching of the church—he recognized that each attribute is identical with the divine essence. In his monumental SCG he provided an account of divine simplicitas that was more systematic and explicit than that of any other Christian thinker.

Immediately after giving four arguments for the existence of God in SCG.I.cc.10-13, Thomas introduces the theological approach of the via remotionis, according to which every form of imperfection is denied of God (SCG.I.c.14). We learn from the SCG, Book 1, cc. 14-27 that Thomas is a Christian apologist who treats the divine simplicity before all the divine attributes (SCG, Book I, cc. 28-102) and before the doctrine of the Trinity (SCG, Book IV, cc. 2-14 are on the Second Divine Person; cc. 15-25 are on the Holy Spirit, and c. 26 offer a summary of Christian theology affirming the three Persons who are equal in divinity. In other words, Thomas’ discussion of how it is possible that an absolutely simple God has a plurality of divine attributes (predicates or names) is shown in SCG.1 (1259-1260).

After some further explanation of the via remotionis in SCG.I.cc.15-28, Thomas discusses how the divine attributes can be ascribed to God without denying the simplicity of God (SCG.I.cc.29-102). Thomas begins by treating the different arguments related to God’s simplicity (SCG.I.cc.16-27), followed by studying other attributes: goodness (SCG.I.c.37); unity (SCG.I.c.42); intelligence and knowledge of God (SCG.I.cc.44-71); and also will, love and blessedness of God (SCG.I.cc.72-102). For Thomas, in order to safeguard the irreducible simplicity of God, these attributes must be understood through application of the via remotionis. Thomas uses this via remotionis as an explanatory principle of God’s simplicity. Through this principle, Thomas demonstrates that the attributes presuppose divine simplicity, for the divine simplicity determines our understanding of God’s attributes. I will examine

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35 See Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 3. Muller observed that: “The early scholastic understanding of divine simplicity was maintained with little fundamental modification in its high scholastic development. The scholastic of the thirteenth century understood the doctrine, in continuity with the fathers and their immediate predecessors as an exclusion of compoundedness from the Godhead and as a significant corollary of both the unity and Trinity of God” (p. 53).

36 See Peter Weigel, Aquinas on Simplicity: An Investigation into the Foundations of his Philosophical Theology (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008) and Brian Davies (ed.), “Classical Theism and the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity,” pp. 51-74. Weigel states that although “Aquinas is aware of considerable historical precedent for this significant emphasis on simplicity,” but “he does not just borrow from his sources—Scripture, Aristotle, Church Fathers, Arabic and Jewish philosophers, divergent strains of Platonism, scores of contemporaries and near contemporaries—he rethinks them” (Aquinas on Simplicity, pp. 20, 35).

37 See also Section 4.3.2.A, below.

38 Cf. ST Ia, q.3, 1-8.

39 See the main purpose of Thomas’ SCG in Chapter 9: “We are aiming, then, to set out following the way of the reason and to inquire into what the human reason can investigate about God. In this aim the first consideration that confronts us is of that which belongs to God in Himself [Book I]. The second consideration concerns the coming forth of creatures from God [Book II]. The third concerns the ordering of creatures to God as to their end [Book III]” (p. 78).
further the discussion of Thomas on these issues in Section 4.2: *The Simplicity and the Plurality of Attributes in God* and in Section 4.3: *The Simplicity and the Trinity of God*.

### 4.2 The Simplicity and the Attributes of God

#### 4.2.1 Preliminary Remarks

In what follows, I will study selected passages of *SCG*, in which Thomas discusses the divine *simplicitas*. I analyze the argument of Thomas in his *SCG*, in order to answer the following research question (RQ1): *How does Thomas relate God's simplicity to a multiplicity of His attributes?* Attention is given not only to Thomas’ view of divine simplicity in this selected work, but also to the question whether his position on simplicity has any special link to the debate with Islamic thinkers such as Ibn Rushd. In order to do this in a clear manner, in what follows I analyze the selected chapters of *SCG* from the perspectives of the following sub-questions:

(i) What does Thomas mean when he holds that all divine attributes are really identical in God?

(ii) Does Thomas have any theological or philosophical opponents in mind (e.g., Ibn Rushd or Averroism in general) when he analyzes the notion of divine simplicity in relation to the divine attributes? Does the appearance of *SCG*.I (c.1259-1265) have any specific link to the polemical doctrinal debates between Thomas with Ibn Rushd?\(^{40}\)

(iii) I will conclude our examination with an evaluation.

I have searched the Latin database of Thomas’ *SCG* \(^{41}\) and realized that the key terms relevant to the questions of this study, such as *simplicitas*, *simplex*, *unitas*, *pluralitas*, *compositum*, and *additio* are especially shown in a number of chapters of Book I;\(^ {42}\) Book II;\(^ {43}\) Book III;\(^ {44}\) and Book IV.\(^ {45}\) Obviously, there is no space in this chapter for an extensive study of all these texts. Also, similar points are made repeatedly. Hence, I have restricted my analysis to Chapters 14, 18, 26, 31, 32, 35, 42, 54, 77, 90 of Book I, as these selected chapters appear to be the more representative and significant texts in Thomas’ construction of arguments in defense of this doctrine. As we will see, the arguments of Thomas that relate to our questions are mostly found in these selected chapters of Book I; and they also enable us to find out whether Thomas conducted a theological polemic (in particular with Islamic thinkers) regarding this point. Lastly, I am aware of the historical circumstances during which Thomas wrote the *SCG*; due to the limitation of space and the focus of this present study, however, I do not intend to provide a detailed description of these historical circumstances, but to make some references when they are directly relevant to the theme of this chapter.

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\(^{42}\) See Chapters 17, 18, 19, 22, 24, 26, 29, 30, 31, 36, 38, 42, 54, 58, 59, 77, 78, 90, 92, and 100 of Book I.

\(^{43}\) See Chapters 13, 14, 42, 52, 70, 90, 95 of Book II.

\(^{44}\) See Chapters 20, 54, 55, 74, 120 of Book III.

\(^{45}\) See Chapter 23 of Book IV.
4.2.2 An Analysis of Thomas’ SCG on the Simplicity and the Attributes of God

Thomas’ discussion of how it is possible that an absolutely simple God has a plurality of divine attributes (predicates or names) is found in several chapters of SCG.I (1259-1260).46 This section aims to study these texts and answer our research question concerning the relationship between simplicity and multiple attributes.

In SCG.I.c.14,47 Thomas introduces his approach that conceived God in a negative manner (the method of remotion [via remotionis]). Through this approach, Thomas reminds us of our incapability to know “what God is [divine essence],” and points out that we can only comprehend “what God is not.” Nevertheless, Thomas stresses that, even when applying all the remoto of creaturely characteristics and aspects of “what God is not” in describing God, this still does not “tell us what God is in Himself” (SCG.I.c.14). Thomas states:

Now in considering the divine substance, we should especially make use of the method of remotion. For, by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus we are unable to apprehend it by knowing what it is (quid est). Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not (quid non est). […] However, in the consideration of the divine substance we cannot take a what as a genus [or “we cannot fix upon anything for a genus”]; nor can we derive the distinction of God from things by differences affirmed of God. For this reason, we must derive the distinction of God from other beings by means of negative differences. […] Yet, this knowledge will not be perfect, since it will not tell us what God is in Himself (in se).48

Thomas continues to explain his thoughts on the via remotionis in SCG.I.cc.15-28. He then discusses how these predicates (attributes) can refer to God without contradicting the simplicity of God (throughout SCG.I.cc.29-102). Thomas begins his treatment by discussing the different arguments related to God’s simplicity (SCG.I.cc.16-27); this is followed by studying other attributes: goodness (SCG.I.c.37); unity (SCG.I.c.42); intelligence and knowledge of God (SCG.I.cc.44-71); and also will, love and blessedness of God (SCG.I.cc.72-102). By connecting the study of these attributes with the via remotionis, Thomas shows that the irreducible simplicity of God must be understood by a negative approach, that is, by removing the imperfections of created beings from God. Thomas uses this via remotionis as a proof of God’s simplicity and demonstrates that the successive attributes often presuppose divine simplicity. In these chapters, Thomas reaffirms that the compatibility of simplicity and multiple attributes of God can only be understood by denying creaturely predicates to God and ascribing predicates to Him in an analogical way. According to Thomas, predicates known from God’s created effects cannot be predicated to Him in a univocal sense, nor do they have an equivocal meaning. The following section studies and elaborates how Thomas argues that this is a way to predicate multiple attributes of a simple God.

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46 See the main purpose of Thomas’ SCG in SCG.I.c.19: “We are aiming, then, to set out following the way of the reason and to inquire into what the human reason can investigate about God. In this aim the first consideration that confronts us is of that which belongs to God in Himself [Book I]. The second consideration concerns the coming forth of creatures from God [Book II]. The third concerns the ordering of creatures to God as to their end [Book III]” (p. 78).

47 See also Section 4.3.2.A, below.

48 SCG.I.c.14, pp. 96-97 (emphasis added); cf. ST.I.1a,q3.
A. SCG. Lcc.31-32, 35: the Compatibility between Divine Attributes and Divine Simplicity

Let me begin with Thomas’ main approach, or the principles/categories he uses in discussing the simplicity and attributes of God in the SCG (by which we are also able to answer, in particular, the research question mentioned above). The principles Thomas used to discuss the simplicity and attributes of God can be found in SCG. I.c.31. In this chapter, Thomas proposes an initial division of his understanding on the nature of God into the categories of cause (essentia) and created effecti (created effects of God): Thomas discusses divine simplicity and perfection under the viewpoint of the cause; and he discusses the plurality of God’s attributes and names from the perspective of the created effects of God. Thus, Thomas claims “that the divine perfection and the plurality of divine names are not opposed to the divine simplicity.”\(^49\) According to Thomas, we conceive of God’s attributes as the cause of created effects; the perfections of created effects pre-exist in God in a higher mode.\(^50\) It is the multiplicity of created effects of God which brings with it a multiplicity of names, by which different perfections are designated that in God are just one single perfection. Thomas explains:

From this we see the necessity of giving to God many names. For, since we cannot know Him naturally except by arriving at Him from His effects, the names by which we signify His perfection must be diverse, just as the perfections belonging to things are found to be diverse. Were we able to understand the divine essence itself as it is and give to it the name that belongs to it, we would express it by only one name. This is promised to those who will see God through His essence: “In that day there shall be one Lord, and His name shall be one” (Zech. 14:9).\(^51\)

Thomas provides an analogy to support his claim: “Heat and dryness, which in fire are diverse qualities, belong to the sun through one and the same power.”\(^52\) There is one single power in the sun that causes multiple effects. This analogy of the sun illustrates Thomas’ point that singularity in the cause is by no means incompatible with a plurality of effects. This insight provides also a key to the discussion of the simplicity and attributes of God. Thus, Thomas states:

The perfection of all things, which belong to the rest of things through diverse forms, must be attributed to God through one and the same power in Him. This power is nothing other than His essence, since […] there can be no accident in God.\(^53\)

As Thomas writes, “all perfections found in other things are attributed to God in the same way as effects are found in their equivocal causes.”\(^54\) In connection with this point, Thomas further explains, “God is called wise not only in so far as He produces wisdom, but also because, in so far as we are wise, we intimate to some extent the power by which He makes us wise.”\(^55\) God is called wise, because He is the fountain and cause of wisdom, who

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\(^49\) SCG.I.c.31, pp. 141-143.
\(^50\) Cf. S.T.Ia, q. 13.
\(^51\) SCG.I.c.31, p. 143.
\(^52\) SCG.I.c.31, p. 142.
\(^53\) SCG.I.c.31, p. 141: “Ita et omnium perfectiones, quae rebus aliis secundum diversas formas convenient, Deo secundum unam eius virtutem attribui est necesse. Quae item virtus non est ait in sua essentia: cum ei nihil accidere possit, ut probatum est.”
\(^54\) SCG.I.c.31, p. 141: “alii inventas Deo attribui diximus sicut effectus in suis causis aequivocis inveniuntur.”
\(^55\) SCG.I.c.31, p. 141.
“produces” wisdom and “makes” His creation wise. In SCG.I.c.29, Thomas makes this claim: “The form of an effect, therefore, is certainly found in some measure in a transcending cause, but according to another mode and another way. For this reason the cause is called an equivocal cause. […] even though not in one and the same way” (emphasis added). Thomas points out that the created effects of wisdom in His creation are not predicated univocally of the cause of wisdom (God Himself). In SCG.I.c.32 Thomas uses the sun and the heat as a further example to demonstrate this point that “the heat generated by the sun and the sun itself are not univocally hot.” The point here is that the perfections that humans see in created beings pre-exist in God in a higher, divine mode, that is, not in a univocal manner. Thomas argues:

Now, the forms of the things God has made do not measure up to a specific likeness of the divine powers; for the things that God had made receive in a divided and particular way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal way. It is evident, then, that nothing can be said univocally of God and other things.

Indeed, Thomas later in his SCG.I.cc.34-35 explains that the same attributes (properties) that can be predicated of both God and human beings are neither univocal nor equivocal in meaning, but are ascribed to God by way of analogy. In book II.c.14, Thomas formulates his understanding of the attributes by making this distinction: “From these considerations it is clear, also, that it is not prejudicial to God’s simplicity if many relations are predicated of Him, although they do not signify His essence; because those relations are consequent upon our way of understanding.” Thus, Thomas holds that ascribing a plurality of attributes to God is unavoidable, given that human knowledge (of God) starts with the multiplicity of created things (created effecti). The actual simplicity of God’s essence (the cause that transcends the multiple effects that humans know), then, is beyond the grasp of the human mind.

In SCG.I.c.31 Thomas provides another example. Thomas elaborates in the following way: “For by its single power the intellect knows all things that the sensitive part of the soul grasps through a diversity of powers […] So, too, a ruling power extends to all those things to which diverse powers under it are ordered.” Hence, Thomas concludes, “in this way, therefore, through His one simple being God possesses every kind of perfection that all other things come to possess.”

In addition to arguing about God’s simple essence, that is not known adequately by humans who know a multiplicity of created effects, Thomas makes another observation, which concerns the following five concepts that are not applicable to God—potency, matter, composition, body, accident. Thomas wants to show that divine simplicity and the plurality of

56 SCG.I.c.29, p. 138. Thomas also makes a similar remark in his analogy of the sun and the heat: “The sun causes heat among these sublunary bodies by acting according as it is in act. Hence, the heat generated by the sun must bear some likeness to the active power of the sun, through which heat is caused in this sublunary world; and because of this heat the sun is said to be hot, even though not in one and the same way. […] Yet the sun is also unlike all these things in so far as such effects do not possess heat and the like in the same way as they are found in the sun. So, too, God gave things all their perfections and thereby is both like and unlike all of them.”

57 SCG.I.c.32, p. 143.
58 SCG.I.c.32, p. 143.
59 See SCG.I.cc.31-33.
60 See SCG.I.cc.34-35.
61 See SCG.II.c.14.
62 SCG.I.c.31. pp. 142-143.
63 SCG.I.c.31. p. 143.
divine attributes are not incompatible with each other. He contends, if God is one, of necessity there is no potency, no matter, no composition, no body, and no accident in Him. All of these concepts involve imperfection or multiplicity. Thomas explains that God is one and the same being in His essence; and the attributes are many but there is no division or composition in Him, since “unity itself is the principle of numerical multitude.” Thus, the multiplicity of attributes and names does not impair the unity and simplicity of God, for all attributes are one and the same in His essence; and these attributes are diverse from one another, yet they are not a composite. According to Thomas, the divine attributes are really distinct from one another, but such distinctions do not imply a composition in God. For Thomas, although the many names or attributes of God “signify the same reality, they are yet not synonyms [synonyma] because they do not signify the same notion.” These divine attributes are formally and objectively distinct from one another in God: goodness, power, love, justice are real distinctions in Him. Such understanding appears even greater when we look at Thomas’ De potentia, as expressed by him in the words of Dionysius (and confirmed by the Commentator/Ibn Rushd):

Since all things are comprised in the Godhead simply and without limit, it is fitting that he should be praised and named on account of them all. Simply—because the perfections which are in creatures by reason of various forms are ascribed to God in reference to his simple essence: without limit, because no perfection found in creatures is equal to the divine essence, so as to enable the mind under the head of that perfection to define God as he is in himself. A further confirmation may be found in Metaph. v, where it is stated that the simply perfect is that which contains the perfections of all genera: which words the Commentator expounds as referring to God.

Thomas continues to explain that the division of attributes is our intellectual apprehension that ascribes attributes to God, but this division of attributes is not a composition in God but one and the same perfection in God of Himself. In Thomas’ words:

For just as diverse things are likened through their diverse forms to the one simple reality that God is, so our intellect through its diverse conceptions is to some extent likened to God in so far as it is led through the diverse perfections of creatures to know Him. Therefore, in forming many conceptions of one thing, our intellect is neither false nor futile, because the simple being of God, as we have shown, is such that things can be likened to it according to the multiplicity of their forms. But in accord with its diverse conceptions our intellect devises diverse names that it attributes to God. Hence, since these names are not attributed to God according to the same notion, it is evident that they are not synonyms, even though they signify a reality that is absolutely one. For the signification of the name is not the same, since a name signifies the conception of the intellect before it signifies the thing itself as understood by the intellect.

64 SCG.I.cc.16 (pp. 100-101), 17 (pp. 101-103), 18 (pp. 103-104), 20 (pp. 106-116), 23 (pp. 121-123).
65 See SCG.I.cc.16-18, 20-23.
66 SCG.I.c.77. p. 251.
67 See SCG.I.c.35. p. 149.
68 I will only deal with the term composition as related to divine simplicity in the following section.
69 See SCG.I.c.35. p. 149.
71 See SCG.I.c.35. p. 149. See also S.T.1a, q. 13, art. 4: “For the idea signified by the name is the conception in the intellect of the thing signified by the name. But our intellect, since it knows God from creatures, in order to understand God, forms conceptions proportional to the perfections flowing from God to creatures, which perfections pre-exist in God unitedly and simply, whereas in creatures they are received and divided and multiplied” (emphasis added).
In other words, the multiple divine attributes, according to Thomas, have distinct meanings, based on the different created forms from which they are derived by the intellect—but they are not synonyms. However, since the divine essence is perfect and simple, all the attributes are really identical with the single essence. The distinction between the attributes ascribed to God does not compromise His essential simplicity. Thomas, thus, is able to answer the question how the multiplicity and plurality of the attributes and names is not contradictory to the divine simplicity. The plurality and multitude of attributes and names, thus, is not a composition, nor does it cause a diversity in the divine essence, but it is the result of the limitations of human knowledge. Thomas maintains that God is essentially a simple being (oneness) without parts; and he also upholds both God’s simplicity and the multiplicity of attributes by arguing that those attributes predicated to God’s simplicity exist analogically and in a state of unity in His essence.

B. SCG I.cc.18/58: God is without Composition

In every composite there must be act and potency. For several things [plurality] cannot become absolutely one unless among them something is act and something potency. Now, beings in act are not united except by being, so to speak, bound or joined together, which means that they are not absolutely one. Their parts, likewise, are brought together as being in potency with respect to the union, since they are united in act after being potentially unitable. But in God there is no potency. Therefore, there is no composition in Him.

The preceding Section A has described how Thomas combined ascribing multiple attributes to God with affirming the simplicity of God’s essence: God as a simple essence caused multiple effects that reveal different aspects of His perfection and give rise to different divine names, but these different names are still the names of the simple divine essence. In this section, I point out Thomas’ scattered usage of this approach in other chapters or texts in his SCG, which further help answering our research question. In what follows, I begin by describing the discussion of Thomas on how “God is not [...]”, as far as the idea of composition is concerned (SCG I.cc.18 and 58).

If a plurality of different attributes is predicated of God, it may seem that His whole essence is composed by these diverse attributes. These multiple attributes of God are not synonymous, properly speaking; they are real and distinct predicates of God. If this is the case, do these divine attributes imply a composition of various attributes in God? In SCG I.c.18, Thomas argues that God is the first efficient cause, and that there is not any kind of composition in Him. Thomas’ arguments for rejecting any “composite” in God can be summarized through the following premises (based on SCG I.c.18):

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72 See the discussion of the multitude of the objects of the will that is not opposed to the divine simplicity in SCG I.c.77, p. 250.
73 SCG I.c.18, p. 103.
74 ST I.q3,a.7.
P1: Composition is made up of a plurality of parts (e.g., act and potency) and these multiple parts themselves depend on a composer to unite them;
P2: Every composite is subsequent to its components;
P3: Every composite is potentially dissoluble;
P4: Every composite is a multitude in every unity of all things.
P5: Every genus is comprised under something that is defined or admixed. But this cannot apply to God since God is not contained in a genus;
P6: Every composite is not compatible with the first and highest good, but God’s highest good (perfection) is in Himself, hence it follows that God is indivisible.

Thomas then concludes,
C: Thus, God cannot be composited.

As shown above, Thomas’ conclusion (C) is based on his arguments outlined in P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6. We can now take a closer look at each one of these arguments.

P1: According to Thomas, “in every composite there must be act and potency,” in which “their parts are brought together as being in potency with respect to the union, since they are united in act after being potential unity.” However, “in God there is no potency,” as the notion of potency is utterly a denial of who God is:

Further, just as each thing naturally acts in so far as it is in act, so it is naturally receptive in so far as it is in potency; for motion is the act of that which exists in potency. But God is absolutely impassible and immutable, as is clear from what we have said. He has, therefore, no part of potency—that is, passive potency.\(^{75}\)

Thomas identifies and points out that the following series of composition must be absent from God: substance and accident (\textit{SCG.I.c.23}); genus and difference (\textit{SCG.I.cc.24 and 25}); form and matter (\textit{SCG.I.c.17}); essence and existence (\textit{SCG.I.cc.13 and 22}); and bodily parts (\textit{SCG.I.c.20}). A composite consisting of these components is not absolutely one but a whole made up of two components. However, God is simple without composition; His simplicity is incompatible with an existence based on joint pairs of components.

There is another problem with this idea of composition as well. Thomas remarks that “every composition needs some composer.” In Thomas’ words:

For, if there is composition, it is made up of a plurality, and a plurality cannot be fitted into a unity except by some composer.\(^{76}\)

This notion of an external composer is also incompatible with who God is. God could not be composited by a cause, or a first cause. He exists by Himself. If the first cause were not identical with Himself, then this notion of the first cause is contradictory according to Thomas. As Thomas points out in this chapter, “the composer is the efficient cause of the composite. Thus, God would have an efficient cause. Thus, too, He would not be the first cause” (\textit{SCG.I.c.18}).\(^{77}\)

P2 and P3: Thomas argues that “every composite is subsequent to its components,” or in some way posterior to, and dependent on, its parts. “But God is first being.” Each component possesses the potential of actually becoming joined to another component, or vice versa. This important point is mirrored in Thomas’ statement in P3 that “every composite is

\(^{75}\textit{SCG.I.c.16}, \text{p. 101.}\)
\(^{76}\textit{SCG.I.c.18}, \text{p. 103.}\)
\(^{77}\textit{SCG.I.c.18}: “nihil est causa sui ipsius; esset enim prius seipso, quod est impossible.”\)
potentially dissoluble.” In other words, in composites, the parts are prior to the composite, which is incompatible with God being the primum ens. Moreover, “God is through Himself the necessary being,” so he cannot be “in potency to non-being”, which would be the case if He was composed of parts that could be dissolved from one another.

P4: Here Thomas makes an argument from the perfection of the first cause: “In every composite the good belongs, not to this or that part, but to the whole.” This argument assumes that the first being (God) must be as maximally perfect as a fullness of being; and it also shows that the composition is not compatible with this maximal perfection. “For parts are imperfect in comparison with the whole;” but God is the first and highest good. If God’s perfection arises only from a composition of parts, He “is not Himself the first and highest good.” From the preceding points (P1-4), it follows that all kinds of composition are incompatible with how God is. God is not a composition of matter and form. He is the first efficient cause, there is no cause in God, and He cannot be prior or posterior to His existence. On the contrary, all composites are posterior to their parts, and each composite must have a cause that joins the parts together.

P5: In this chapter, Thomas argues that in every genus there is no admixture in the peak of simplicity, for instance, “in the genus of the hot, fire, which has no admixture of cold.” The argument assumes that “in every genus the simpler a being, the nobler it is […]. That, therefore, which is at the peak of nobility among all beings must be at the peak of simplicity” (SCG.I.c.18). The peak of noble things is not just the simplicity among those genera; but it is the best genus that could be. Thomas then goes on to discuss that God is the first cause of all noble things; therefore, God is free from all composition.

P6: Another argument that Thomas discusses in this chapter is: every composite is not compatible with the first and highest good, but God’s highest good (perfection) is in Himself, and thus it follows that God is indivisible. For Thomas, “goodness” in every composite is “proper to the whole and its perfection.” It is “not to this or that part, but to the whole.” In this premise, Thomas also points out that since God is the first and highest good, it is impossible for God’s perfection to be found neither “in the whole” nor “in any part of the whole” (SCG.I.c.18). God, however, is simple but not as a part (nor as a composed whole).

In sum, according to the arguments developed in SCG.I.c.18 (as shown above), we see that for Thomas, there is no composition in God. God is not a composite being.⁷⁸ Accordingly, for him, multiple divine attributes do not indicate some sort of “composition” of various attributes. God is one and the same single essence. Of course, to be sure, Thomas does not deny that God possesses a multiplicity of attributes. For Thomas, to affirm the plurality of attributes does, however, by no means imply that there is a composition of attributes in God. Rather, it implies that distinct attributes that humans ascribe to God exist in Him in the mode of absolute simplicity. Since God is one, each one of the attributes that are predicated of God is one and the same with His essence. Thomas explains that a plurality of attributes indicates a plurality of relations/significations; however, since these relations or significations of attributes pertain to the one and the same divine essentia, the plurality of relations or significations thereby effected is not a composite of attributes, but are non-composite attributes. Thus, as we have indicated earlier (claim 1), the plurality of attributes is not a composition of attributes, but these are real relations and identical with the singular and same essence of God. Hence, God does not possess the attributes as a composite, but only insofar as they are in the state of perfection (in the highest degree) as one and the same in the divine

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⁷⁸ The divine simplicity is also safeguarded against the notion of composition on the level of an individual divine attribute such as God’s intellect. As Thomas points out in SCG.I.c.58, “God does not understand by composing and dividing;” His essence “knows itself as it is and there is no composition in it.”

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This is why the divine *essentia* thus can be “a plurality of attributes,” while yet being simple.

C. *SCG*.I.c.26: God is not the Universal Formal Cause

Thomas in this chapter of *SCG* argues that the error of those who conceived God as the form of all things is triggered by the consideration of divine simplicity (see F3 below). In other words, simplicity may have been misinterpreted to imply that God is the being of everything. For Thomas, the fact that all existence of beings participate in God does not entail that God is the universal formal cause (*esse formale omnium*). Although He is *ipsum esse*, God is not the universal formal cause of all beings. Thomas argues that only in one being could existence and essence be identical. He maintains, “if [...] the divine being were the formal being of all things, all things would have to be absolutely one” (*SCG*.I.c.26). In this section we are able to ask the question whether Thomas is debating particular views with respect to simplicity, since he explicitly writes against the error of certain persons.

Thomas first puts forward a selection of arguments why this predicate cannot be attributed to God. In order to present Thomas’ arguments in a clear manner, in each of the following point, I first lay out the premise rejected by Thomas, followed by the argument he offers:

R1: The “formal being of everything” is “divided into the being of substance and the being of accident.” But God is neither the being of substance nor that of accident, so He cannot be the universal formal cause.

R2: “If, therefore, the divine being were the formal being of all things, all things would have to be absolutely one.” But all things are both plural and diverse;

R3: “If God is common being (*esse commune*), the only thing that will exist is that which exists solely in the intellect”, since common concepts exist in the intellect only. But God exists not in the intellect only but also in reality;

R4: “If, therefore, the divine being is the being of each thing, it will follow that God, who is His own being, has some cause. Thus, He is not through Himself a necessary being.” But nothing is prior to God and God is being through Himself.

R5: “If, indeed, God is the being of all things, there will be no more reason to say truly that a stone is a being than to say that a stone is God.” But God is incorporeal and incomparable.

Thomas then characterizes four factors why these people came to this error. In order for us to focus on the purpose of this study, we must only concentrate on the discussion of F3 that led them into the error concerning the divine simplicity:

F1: For them, Dionysius’s statement that “The being of all things is the super-essential divinity,” means that “God is the formal being of all things.” But for Thomas this in fact only shows that “there was in all things a certain likeness of

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79 See *SCG*.I.c.26, p. 130: According to his understanding of Isa. 6:1 and Rom. 9:5, Thomas asserts that “If God is high and over all the being,” God is not a universal formal cause.

80 *SCG*.I.c.26, p. 129.

81 *SCG*.I.c.26, p. 131.
the divine being, coming from God.” God is not the formal being of all things.  

F2: For them, since “what is common is specified by addition”, it follows that, if the divine being receives no addition, God is not a “proper being” but “the common being of all things.” Thomas argues that this irrational error ignores the fact that “what is common or universal cannot exist without addition, but is considered without addition.” “God is not common being but proper being; for His being is distinguished from all the rest by the fact that nothing can be added to it.”

F3: For them, if God is at the peak of simplicity, then this absolute simplicity, being our ultimate understanding of things, is God. But, Thomas asserts, “simplicity is predicated of God as some perfect subsisting thing.”

F4: For them, “If God is in things as a part of a thing,” then God lacks its effect. Thomas opposes this because God is the cause of a thing that never lacks its effect. This final factor may leads people to assume that God is the universal cause, as stated in the orthodox expression: “God is in all things.” However, this phrase does not mean that “God is in the thing [as a part of a thing]” but rather that He, being the cause of a thing, is not absent from His effect.

The first set of reasons (R1-R5) focuses on asserting that the divine being is not the universal formal cause; whereas the last four factors (F1-F4) mention factors that may explain why people came to this error.

In R1-R5 Thomas tries to show that God could not be the formal being of all things because of the existence of division, plurality and corporeality in all things. It is impossible to apply these three predicates to God, who is indivisible, simple and unique. In the first argument R1 (as stated above), Thomas identifies two kinds of being (being of substance and being of accident) in the formal being. Thomas argues that “the divine being is neither being of a substance nor the being of an accident. As explained earlier in Section A, both the arguments of R2 and R4 point out that the typical negative attributes (plurality and corporeality) are not predications of God. Although all things, including stone, are created by God and in some way do reflect the characteristics of God, yet they are not identical with God. Elsewhere, Thomas explains this point more clearly: “God is not called a stone, even though He has made stones, because in the name stone there is understood a determinate mode of being according to which a stone is distinguished from God. But the stone imitates God as its cause in being and goodness, and other such characteristics, as do also the rest of creatures.” In R2, R3, and R5, Thomas characterizes some fundamental distinctions between the Creator and creatures. He first defines the concept of the formal being which is common to all creatures:

Moreover, that which is common to many is not outside the many except by the reason alone. Thus, animal is not something outside Socrates and Plato and the other animals except in the intellect that apprehends the form of animal stripped of all its individuating and specifying

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82 See SCG.I.c.26, p. 131. Dionysius, Thomas claims, is rather being interpreted incorrectly, as is evident from another quote of Dionysius that Thomas provides.
83 See SCG.I.c.26, p. 131 (emphasis added).
84 SCG.I.c.26, p. 132.
85 SCG.I.c.26, p. 132.
86 SCG.I.c.26, p. 132.
87 SCG.I.c.31, p. 142.
For Thomas, the formal being that is common to all things exists in the intellect alone. Nevertheless, God exists not only in the intellect but also in reality. Thus, it is impossible for God to be the formal being which is common to all creatures. According to R3, “a principle is naturally prior to that whose principle it is.” If this premise is applied to God, it will become an agent prior to God. But this is not the case. God is neither a principle in the proper sense, nor is anything prior to God; God is simple and the being through Himself (the aseity of God).

The effects of these four factors (F1-4 as stated above) are found among the reasons we already mentioned. For example, F2 is the error that we can identify in R2 and R3. Peter Weigel observes this point:

Common being is without the addition of any determining factors only in thought, where a collective concept of all created acts of existence intellectually prescient from the determinate forms, essences and individual creature. Yet such a ‘thin’ notion of existence never actually subsists anywhere. Esse commune is at most a being of reason for Aquinas, and the charge of Platonism is not warranted. […] By saying divine esse does not admit of any addition, Thomas calls attention to it as a superabundant self-subsisting esse that precludes any further actualization. Thus, it is in a way correct to say God as pure esse lacks properties or any substantive character, but only if by this one means that God lacks the limited and divided features, aspects, or components that creatures have.  

Indeed, this kind of distinction between the Creator and creatures also brings us to the issues involved in Thomas’ views of divine attributes (in relations to RQ1), in which Thomas observes that God has all perfections (unlimited and unified attributes) as one in Him, but not as limited and divided attributes.  

Furthermore, in this chapter of the SCG Thomas mentions “certain persons” as his opponents. In light of the history of the medieval Christian philosophy, Etienne Gilson identifies “Amaury of Bène, David of Dinant in the twelfth century” as the “certain persons”—the main opponents—Thomas seems to refer to. For example, this is shown when Thomas explicitly points out the error of David of Dinant in SCG.c.17 in the following way: “He dared to assert God is the same as prime matter on the ground that, if He were not, He would have to differ from it by some differences, and thus they would not be simple” (p. 102). If the scholars (e.g., Gilson) who refer to Amaury de Bène and David of Dinant are correct, then the misunderstanding of divine simplicity is found on the part of (radical Aristotelian) thinkers with a Christian background rather than with Islamic writers.  

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88 SCG.I.c.26, pp. 129-130.  
89 Peter Weigel, Aquinas on Simplicity, pp. 150-151.  
90 Cf. Thomas, De ente et essentia c.5: “Similarly, although God is existence alone (esse tantum) it is not necessary the other perfections and excellences be wanting. Rather, God has the perfections which are in every genus. […] But, he has these in a more excellent way than all other things, because in him they are one, while in others had diversely. And this is because all these perfections belong to him according to his simple esse. Just as if something could by one quality effect the operations of all qualities, it would have all qualities in that one, so too, God in his esse has all perfections.”  
92 Cf. Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages, p. 240. Gilson observes that “According to a gloss by Henry of Suse (Ostiensis), Amaury had taught that God was all things (dixit quod Deus erat omnia).”
D. *SCG*.L.c.42: God without Partners

In the preceding Section C, we have investigated how Thomas distinguishes the indivisibility and aseity of God from all other created beings: God is not the formal being of all things. In Section B, we analyzed Thomas’ argument that God is not composit. The latter aspect of simplicity plays also a role in Thomas’ argument for the numerical unity of God. There is only one God. Thomas grounds this numerical oneness of God in His non-composite existence and essence:  

If there are two beings of which both are necessary beings, they must agree in the notion of the necessity of being. Hence, they must be distinguished by something added either to one of them only, or to both. This means that one or both of them must be composite. [...] no composite being is through itself a necessary being. It is impossible therefore that there be many beings of which each is a necessary being. Hence, neither can there be many gods [...] the proper being of each thing is only one. But God is His being, as we have shown. There can, therefore, be only one God.

Thomas assumes that if there are two gods, one or both of them must be composite beings, and thus cannot both be a necessary being (God). But God is neither a composite being (as stated in Section B), nor a plurality of gods; He is wholly identical with his being; thus, in Him there is and cannot be many gods, but only one God. Apparently, we see that Thomas grounds the oneness of God in His non-composite being. In order to present Thomas’ argument in a clear manner, in what follows, I lay out some of the arguments that Thomas provides in order to show “that God is one.”

\[ P1: \text{It is impossible to have any admixture of imperfection and many principles in God.} \]

\[ P2: \text{It is impossible that there is composite, accidental and divided being in God.} \]

\[ C: \text{Therefore, God is one.} \]

In P1, Thomas argues that since God is absolutely perfect, in Him there is neither admixture of imperfection nor many principles: “Nothing will be given in which to distinguish the perfect beings from one another.” Also, as shown in P2, Thomas grounds the unique simplicity of God in His non-composite existence and essence. Thomas observes that every composite is merely compiled together; it does not have the greatest unity (that the divine being has), but rather a lesser unity that is attainable for composites. This lower degree of unity would have to be a composite being, or is said to unite and to actualize the potential components, which are in potency with respect to each component. However, as mentioned above, in God there is no potentiality of any kind; all His attributes are only through Himself—He is self-existence, a necessary and actual being.

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93 Cf. *SCG*.I.c.22.
94 *SCG*.L.c.42, pp. 159-164.
95 Though there are many arguments in Thomas’ *SCG*.L.c.42, but I will only deal with those related to RQ1 in this section.
96 *SCG*.L.c.42, p. 158.
97 *SCG*.L.c.42, pp. 158-159.
E. SCG.I.c.54: The Compatibility of Divine Simplicity and Diverse Intelligible Objects

As I have indicated earlier in RQ1 (see Section 4.2.1) predicating multiple attributes to God appears to introduce a problem for simplicity, namely, composition. But as shown in the preceding Section A, Thomas has argued that there is no composition in God. In this present section, I continue to investigate how Thomas formulates another argument in SCG.I.c.54 by showing that the divine essence as simple (unum et idem simplex) can be the proper measure or likeness of diverse things (ratio sive similitudo). Thomas brings up a problem concerning how diverse things can be related to one and the same simple being:

For, since among diverse things there is a distinction by reason of their proper forms, whatever is like something according to its proper form must turn out to be unlike something else. To be sure, according as diverse things have something in common, nothing prevents them from having one likeness, as do man and a donkey so far as they are animals. But from this it will follow that God does not have a proper knowledge of things, but a common one; for the operation that knowledge is follows the mode in which the likeness of the known is in the knower. 98

According to the passage above, things are distinguished according to their proper forms, which are partly similar, partly dissimilar from each other. Thomas here focuses specifically on the common element. For example, human and animal, even according to their proper forms, “have something in common,” so “nothing prevents them from having one likeness, as do man and a donkey so far as they are animals.” From this a problem seems to arise, for “from this it will follow that God does not have a proper knowledge of things, but a common one.” In that case God could not be omniscient. If, on the contrary, God knows all individual things, He Himself must be the measure and epistemological ground of singulars (ipse sit propria ratio singularorum). Thomas then develops this viewpoint:

But the divine essence comprehends within itself the nobilities of all beings, not indeed compositely, but, as we have shown above, according to the mode of perfection (sed per modum perfectionis). […] The intellect of God, therefore, can comprehend in His essence that which is proper to each thing by understanding wherein the divine essence is being imitated and wherein each thing falls short of its perfection. Thus, by understanding His essence as imitable in the mode of life and not of knowledge, God has the proper form of a plant; and if He knows His essence as imitable in the mode of knowledge and not of intellect, God has the proper form of animal, and so forth. Thus, it is clear that, being absolutely perfect, the divine essence can be taken as the proper exemplar of singulars. Through it, therefore, God can have a proper knowledge of all things.99

In order to understand this passage properly, we must realize that for Thomas there is no real distinction between God’s essence and existence, and since He is pure act, his knowledge, too, is pure actual knowing.100 In humans, to the contrary, there are fundamental distinctions between the human subject’s intellect, the act of knowing, and the object of knowledge, and the human being’s knowledge comprises potency and act.101 Thomas points out that

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98 SCG.I.c.54, p. 189.
99 SCG.I.c.54, p. 191 (emphasis added).
100 SCG.I.c.55, p. 194: “The divine intellect is never potentially, but always actually, understanding. Therefore, it does not understand things successively but rather understands them together.”
101 SCG.II.c.53, p. 155: “In the created intellectual substance two principles are found: the substance itself and its being, which, as we have just shown, is not the substance itself. Now, being itself is the complement of the existing substance, for each and every thing is in act through having being. It therefore remains that in each of the aforesaid substances there is composition of act and potentiality.”

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“distinction is the source of plurality,” and asserts that there is no distinction in God’s essence. Since there is no distinction in God on account of His knowledge, there is no reason to claim that God’s self-knowledge, which possesses the proper knowledge of all things, will pluralize His single essence. However, what does Thomas mean when he claims that the divine essence comprehends the “proper exemplar of singulars” of all beings (which is the proper knowledge of all things)? Thomas explains that God does not possess His knowledge of all things through the reception of multiple intelligible forms in His intellect. Rather, God “can comprehend in His essence that which is proper to each thing by understanding wherein the divine essence is being imitated and wherein each thing falls short of its perfection.” In other words, God’s proper knowledge is through His understanding of how His own essence can be “imitated” by creatures. In this way, Thomas can maintain both the simplicity of the divine essence and the divine knowledge of all things.

In SCG.I.c.61, Thomas develops further this view of the divine knowledge of creatures: “The divine intellect through its knowledge is the cause of things. […] The divine intellect, therefore, is related to things as things are related to the human intellect.” As indicated earlier, human knowledge definitely produces a multiplicity in the human mind. But God understands all things [i.e., as they relate to human multiple knowledge] entirely without making Himself a multiple and complex being.

F. SCG.I.c.77: The Compatibility of Divine Simplicity and Multiple Objects of the Will

After Thomas developed arguments in order to show that God possesses a will in SCG.I.cc.72-76, he argues in SCG.I.c.77 that the divine simplicity is not compromised by His willing (in freedom) of many objects of the will. Let me begin by studying the explanation of Thomas concerning the relation between God’s essence, His act of will, and the object of His will. In SCG.I.cc.72-74, Thomas points out that God’s willing (the act of His will) and the ultimate object of His will are identical with His essence. In other words, His willing, and the object of His will signify the same thing—the essence of God. In SCG.I.c.72, Thomas explains this in terms of the inseparable relationship between knowing and willing:

From the fact that God is endowed with intellect it follows that He is endowed with will. For, since the understood good is the proper object of the will, the understood good is, as such, willed. Now that which is understood is by reference to one who understands. Hence, he who grasps the good by his intellect is, as such, endowed with will. But God grasps the good by His intellect, For, since the activity of His intellect is perfect, as appears from what has been said, He understands being together with the qualification of the good. He is, therefore, endowed with will.

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102 SCG.I.c.54, p. 191.
103 SCG.I.c.54, p. 191 (emphasis added).
104 SCG.I.c.73, p. 243: “As to understand is the perfection of the one understanding, so to will is the perfection of the one willing; […] But the understanding of God is His being, as was proved above [SCG.I.c.45]. For, since the divine being is in itself most perfect, it admits of no superadded perfection, as was proved above [SCG.I.cc.23 and 28]. The divine willing also is, therefore, His being; and hence the will of God is His essence.”
105 SCG.I.c.74, p. 244: “The understood good is the object of the will, as has been said. But that which is principally understood by God is the divine essence, as was proved above. The divine essence, therefore, is principally the object of the divine will.”
106 SCG.I.c.72, pp. 239-240.
God’s will never changes as His will is not distinct from His essence: “God’s will, therefore, is His very essence.” Moreover, since there is no composition in God’s essence, “it is not possible that the divine will be something added to the divine substance.”107

In SCG.I.c.74, Thomas indicates that God is identical with the “principal object” of the will, in which the act of will is understood as good. In a similar way, what is “principally understood by God is the divine essence […] The divine essence, therefore, is principally the object of the divine will.”108 To express this in another way, God Himself is the ultimate objective of His will. Thomas provides arguments to support his view on this point: (i) “If, then, the principal object of the divine will be other than the divine essence, it will follow that there is something higher than the divine will moving it;” 109 (ii) “If, then, God should principally will something other than Himself, it will follow that something other is the cause of His willing. But His willing is His being, as has been shown. Hence, something other will be the cause of His being—which is contrary to the nature of the first being.”110 With these arguments in mind, Thomas argues that “the ultimate end is God Himself, since He is the highest good, as has been shown. Therefore, something other will be the cause of His being—which is contrary to the nature of the first being.”111 And “every power is proportioned with equality to its principal object, for the power of a thing is measured according to its objects, […] Now, nothing is proportioned with equality to the divine will save only God’s essence. Therefore, the principal object of the divine will is the divine essence. […] it is further manifest that in the same way He principally wills Himself to understand, to will, to be one, and other such attributes.”112

Moving on to SCG.I.c.75-76, Thomas continues to further develop his understanding of God’s simplicity in relation to His willing Himself (Creator) and willing other things (creatures). Thomas asserts that “in willing Himself God also wills other things.” As shown above, for Thomas, God Himself is the ultimate object of His will, or more precisely, “God Himself is the ultimate end of things” (SCG.I.c.74). It follows that “God wills other things for His own sake as for the sake of the end.”113 Therefore, Thomas identifies and explains through “God wills Himself” and “God wills other things” that God “wills Himself and other things by one act of will.”114 Based on such understanding, in SCG.I.c.77, Thomas argues that God’s simplicity does not prevent His will from willing a multitude of different objects. In Thomas’ words:

It has been shown that God wills other things in so far as He wills His own goodness. Hence, other things are to His will in the manner in which they are comprehended by His goodness. But all things in His goodness are one, since other things are in Him according to His way, namely, “the material immaterially and the many unitedly,” as appears from what has been said. It remains, then, that the multitude of the objects of the will does not multiply the divine substance.115

107 SCG.I.c.73, p. 243.
108 SCG.I.c.74, p. 244.
109 SCG.I.c.74, p. 244.
110 SCG.I.c.74, pp. 244-245.
111 SCG.I.c.74, p. 245.
112 SCG.I.c.74, p. 245.
113 SCG.I.c.76, p. 248; cf. SCG.I.c75, p. 246: “To him it belongs to will the things that are ordered to the end for the sake of the end. Now, God Himself is the ultimate end of things, as appears somewhat from what has been said. Hence, because He wills Himself to be, He likewise wills other things, which are ordered to Him as to the end.”
114 SCG.I.c.76, p. 248.
115 SCG.I.c.77, p. 250 (emphasis added).
In the passage above, Thomas concludes with several important thoughts: God’s will is focused on His own goodness. God’s own goodness comprehends all things, including multiple objects of His will, but they are in God in a simple way. The multitude of objects does not imply plurality in God, but is simple in God. Furthermore, “both the divine intellect and will are of an equal simplicity, for both are the divine substance [see SCG I.c.45, 73].” Hence, “that something be related to many is not opposed to its simplicity, since unity itself is the principle of numerical multitude. Hence, the multitude of the objects willed by God is not opposed to His simplicity” (SCG I.c.77).

G. SCG. I.c.90: The Compatibility of Attributes and Divine Perfection

I will now examine further in SCG I.c.90 how Thomas holds that God’s multiple attributes are properly in Himself without being opposed to the divine perfection. Thomas uses delight and joy as examples to elucidate that, unlike human passions which are on account of sensitive appetites, in God there are delight and joy which are different from human joy. Thomas explains, “If our understanding is delightful because of its perfection, the divine understanding will be most full of delight;” and “God, therefore, through His will supremely rejoices in Himself.” Thomas makes a distinction between intellective appetite and sensitive appetite. For Thomas, in God there are no passions of the sensitive appetite (see SCG I.c.89), which are linked to a body, but He can be ascribed articulations of intellective appetite, which are simple, such as joy and delight. “Since, then, joy and delight are not repugnant to God according to their species, but only in so far as they are passions, and since they are found in the will according to their species but not as passions, it remains that they are not lacking even to the divine will.”

Thomas explicitly identifies elsewhere the plurality of attributes with the divine essence of God. For example, Thomas explains that God is wise, and the wisdom of God is the one and same essence of God. Also, in SCG I.c.38 Thomas makes a similar argument:

In a simple being, being and that which is are the same. For, if one is not the other, the simplicity is then removed. But, as we have shown, God is absolutely simple. Therefore, for God to be good is identical with God. He is, therefore, His goodness.

Thomas contends: “Now, every good is a likeness of the divine good, […] nor does God lose any good because of some good. It remains, then, that God takes joy in every good [both in Himself and in other things]. […] for delight arises from a really conjoined good, […] from this it is apparent that God properly delights in Himself.” For Thomas, this joy and delight can be properly attributed to God in the sense of intellective appetite. As elsewhere expressed by Thomas: Thus in God are found “wisdom, goodness and other like qualities; but each one of them is the divine essence itself and so all of them are one in reality.”

4.2.3 Conclusion

The preceding analysis of the selected chapters of Thomas’ SCG I shows that in his view divine simplicity is very well compatible with the notion of ascribing multiple attributes to

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116 SCG.I.c.90, p. 276.
117 SCG.I.c.90, p. 276.
118 SCG.I.c.38, p. 153.
119 SCG.I.c.90, pp. 276-277.
God. In what follows, I will not repeat and summarize all of his arguments, but point out certain important aspects of his approach to upholding that God is most absolutely simple and has multiple attributes:

(i) **The mode of signifying:** Thomas argues that God possesses all His attributes as properties in the analogical sense. The perfections that humans know from God’s works or effects exist in an eminent way in His simple *essentia* (the first efficient cause). To be sure, all attributes are real and they are not synonymous. They are plural and diverse attributes according to our understanding, but they are one and the same in God Himself. In *SCG*.I.c.29, Thomas gives an example which is helpful for us to comprehend this mode of signifying. Thomas uses Gen. 1:26 (“Let us make man to our image and likeness”) to explain the likeness of creatures to God:

> In the light of this likeness, nevertheless, it is more fitting to say that a creature is like God rather than the converse. For that is called like something which possesses a quality or form of that thing [...]. Thus, the creature has what belongs to God and, consequently, is rightly said to be like God. But we cannot in the same way say that God has what belongs to the creature.\(^{121}\)

Through this example, Thomas points out that the creatures (both male and female) are created by God in His likeness, and possess certain qualities of God, but they are not God, and God is neither male nor female, as the creatures are, even though they are created in His likeness. Similarly, although the divine attributes “imitate” God’s ultimate perfection, they signify God’s ultimate perfection neither equivocally nor univocally.

(ii) **The highest degree of unity:** Thomas emphasizes the fundamental distinction between Creator and creatures. For Thomas, there is no composition of any kind in God, but all kinds of composition are found in human beings. Such a distinction also entails the different degree of unity in the Creator and the creatures. In God (Creator), there is only the highest unity; but there are multiple and different degrees of unity found in creatures. This is mainly because there is no potency in God (He is pure act). Thus, all attributes are in the highest degree of unity in God. In addition, it is impossible to hold that there are two necessary beings in God, since God is the highest being without partners.

(iii) **The highest degree of perfection:** Thomas shows that God is not only wise, but the highest wisdom, He is not only good, but the highest good; in which, all attributes that are ascribed to Him must be in the state of the highest degree of perfection. Nevertheless, although all attributes are in God in the highest degree of perfection, this does not contradict God’s simplicity. God is the most absolute perfect being or exemplar for all attributes that imitate the divine essence; and every attribute (highest perfection) is identical with the one single essence.

(iv) **Who were Thomas’ opponents (gentiles):** Given the genre and purpose of *SCG*.I,\(^{122}\) one would expect to gain more information about the theological debates between Thomas and the gentiles, particularly the Islamic thinkers.\(^{123}\) In this work, Thomas may have

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\(^{121}\) See *SCG*.I.c.2. Thomas clearly stated that: “I have set myself the task of making known, as far as my limited powers will allow, the truth that the Catholic faith professes, and of setting aside the errors that are opposed to it” (p. 62).

\(^{122}\) See the discussion of the possible opponents of Thomas in Mark D. Jordan, “The Protreptic of Against the Gentiles” in his *Rewritten Theology: Thomas after His Readers* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 89-115. Jordan makes a comparison between Thomas’ *SCG* and Raymon Marti’s *Dagger of the Faith (Pugio Fidei)* (1278), and points out that “Marti uses Thomas against errors arising from the reading of Aristotle and the Peripatetics. Thomas supplies most of Marti’s argument on the eternity of the world, God’s knowledge of singulars, and the resurrection of the dead. When it comes to a detailed consideration of the claims and
had certain opponents in mind when discussing the relationship between multiple attributes and divine simplicity. With respect to the doctrine of God, in general, some opponents are indicated by name in Thomas’ refutation of their objections, such as Arians, and Sabellians. In SCG.Ic.26, we have identified other opponents (particularly Amaury de Bène and David of Dinant), who Thomas criticized for misunderstanding divine simplicity and considering God the formal cause of all things. Thomas argued: “their reasons also failed because they did not observe that what is most simple in our understanding of things is not so much a complete thing as a part of a thing. But, simplicity is predicated of God as of some perfect subsisting thing” (SCG.Ic.26, p. 132). Nevertheless, in our examination of SCG I no evidence has emerged that Thomas argued explicitly against the Islamic view of the unicity of God. In other words, apparently there was no actual debate between Thomas and Muslim thinkers at this point; but the formulation of Thomas’ theory of divine simplicity (as well as other selected thinkers) provides valuable insights for a comparative study (see final chapter).

We now proceed to the next research question: How does Thomas discuss the relationship between the one essence of God and the plurality of Persons?

4.3 The Simplicity and the Trinity of God

4.3.1 Preliminary Remarks

In what follows, I analyze the arguments provided by Thomas in his SCG to answer the following research question (RQ.2): How does Thomas discuss the relationship between the one essence of God and the plurality of Persons? In order to conduct a close textual reading of the SCG for exploring and analysing Thomas’ doctrine of the Trinity, I begin with a brief introduction from the vantage point of the Condemnation of 219 Propositions in 1277 (4.3.2). This condemnation occurred after Thomas’ death and so it happened after Thomas completed the SCG. It is relevant to our question, however, since the 1277 campaign against Averroism and radical Aristotelianism included issues concerning the Trinity. Thus, the question becomes relevant whether Thomas, in his own apology against the Pagans, already

counter-claims of competing canons, or to the intricacies of Islamic and Jewish theology, borrowings from Thomas almost disappear” (p. 93). After his close analysis of the protreptic structure of Against the Gentiles (SCG), Jordan concludes that the SCG should not be read as “a manual for field-training missionaries,” or “a book to be given to potential converts” (p. 91), but rather as a work which “presents the virtues of Christian wisdom above all by requiring that its readers practice them” (p. 115). See also Thomas Murphy, “The Date and Purpose of The Contra Gentiles,” The Heythrop Journal, vol. X, no. 4 (October 1969): pp. 405-415.

124 See Mark D. Jordan, “The Protreptic of Against the Gentiles,” p. 93: As Mark D. Jordan observes, the “external comparisons are confirmed internally by scattered remarks in SCG about Islamic religion. In the ‘prologue’ to the work (SCG.Icc.1-9), there are two pertinent passages.” These two pertinent passages are: (1) SCG.Ic.2, p. 62; and (2) SCG.c.6, pp. 73-74. But none of these two passages indicate explicitly that Thomas is arguing against the Islamic view of the unicity of God.

125 For the text of Condemnation of 219 Propositions, unless otherwise noted, all Latin and English quotations in this study will be cited from the modern edition by David Piché and Claude LaFleau, La condamnation parisienne de 1277, Texte latin, traduction, introduction et commentaire (Paris: J. Vrin, 1999) and an English translation of the Mandonnet edition: Ernest L. Fortin and Peter D. O’Neill, “Condemnation of 219 Propositions,” in eds. Joshua Paren and Joseph C. Macfarland, Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook, 2nd ed. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 322-332. Hereafter abbreviated as Condemnation of 1277, and cited according to proposition number, the original list in parentheses at the end of proposition, and page number (Condemnation of 1277, Proposition 185 [1], p. 331). Cf. the edition arranged systematically by Pierre Mandonnet, OP, Siger de Brabant et l’averroïsme latin au XIIIe siècle, pt. 2, Textes inédits, 2nd ed. (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de l’Université, 1908), pp. 175-191. Pierre Mandonnet not only put the list of 219 condemnation into a new order, and numbering, but also distinguished the 179 philosophical theses from the 40 theological theses.
tackled the trinitarian issues that turned out to be controversial in 1277. I then proceed to analyze how Thomas answers the research questions posted above through examining the two aspects revealed in the selected chapters of *SCG*, namely, the “opposed relation” of the divine *Persons* (4.3.3.i); and the aseity of divine *Persons* (4.3.3.ii). Finally, I end our examination with a conclusion (4.3.4).

### 4.3.2 The Trinity and the Paris Condemnation of 1277

In the thirteenth century, the relationship between philosophy and Christian faith was especially controversial due to the disputes between radical Aristotelianism (mainly influenced by Ibn Rushd) and Christian theologians at the University of Paris and elsewhere. As writes Edward Grant,

> Aristotelian natural philosophy and metaphysics provided students and teachers of the thirteenth century with philosophical tools of analysis that were applied with great fervor to all areas of human thought. Aristotle and his Arabian commentators, especially Averroës, who was himself known as “the Commentator,” reigned supreme during the middle decades of the thirteenth century and were zealously studied at the University of Paris and elsewhere. It was not long before the views held by some masters of arts on a number of controversial issues became obnoxious to the theologians at Paris.

Thus, between 1270 and 1274, the lists of condemned philosophical propositions were published: the Thirteen Propositions of 1270 particularly in opposition to radical Aristotelians led by Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia. Finally, in 1277, Pope John XXI instructed the bishop Étienne

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126 I compare Thomas’ doctrine of the Trinity with that of the “targeted” group which the *Condemnation* was believed to be directed to, namely Giles of Rome’s *Errores Philosophorum*. See critical text with notes and introd. by Joseph Koch, trans. John O. Riedl (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1944). This is to investigate whether Thomas has the Aristotelian philosophers (esp. Ibn Rushd) in mind, and whether he was responding to them when he wrote his *SCG*. It is important for us not to overlook the different literary and historical circumstances which could help us to discover whether they motivated Thomas to treat the doctrine of divine simplicity in a fuller detail in his *SCG*.


128 See Denfile and Chatelain, *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* (Paris: Delalain, 1889), 1/432: pp. 486-487. For an English translation, see Ralph McInerny, *Thomas against the Averroists: On There Being Only One Intellect* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993), p. 9. These thirteen condemnations of 1270 were first issued by the bishop of Paris, Étienne Tempier on December 10, 1270. Seven years later he issued the extended version of the condemnations, namely, the *Condemnation of 1277*. See also John F. Wippel, “The Condemnation of 1270 and 1277 at Paris,” *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 7 (1977): pp. 179-181. Wippel points out that four of the thirteen errors in the condemnation of 127 are clearly directed against Siger’s *Quaestiones de anima* and his *Quaestio utrum haec sit vera: homo est animal*: “(1) that the intellect of all men is numerically one and first man; (5) that the world is eternal; (6) that there never was a first man; (8) that after death the separated soul does not suffer from corporeal fire” (Wippel, p. 179).


130 See Wippel, “The Condemnation of 1270 and 1277 at Paris:” pp. 169-201, esp. pp. 173-182. Wippel observes that three philosophical movements arise at the Parisian scene during the late 1260’s and 1270’s: (i) The Aristotelian philosophy developed by Thomas; (ii) the New Aristotelian or so called the Latin Averroism led by Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, and (iii) the Neo-Augustinian movement led by John Pecham
Stephen Tempier of Paris to investigate the controversies arising from the University of Paris. Stephen formed a Commission of sixteen theologians, including Henry of Ghent, in an attempt to resolve the controversy. Stephan and his commission drew up a condemnation of 219 propositions on March 7, 1277.

The purpose of this section is neither to make any claims about the historical backgrounds and context, nor to describe the modern scholarly debate about some propositions that were directed against Thomas in the medieval age. Rather, attention will be given mainly to two Propositions: 185 (1) and 186 (2) in which the doctrine of the Trinity and the eternal generation of the Word are rejected. Did the formulation of these two Propositions have any specific link to Islamic thinkers such as Ibn Rushd?

Propositions 185 (1) and 186 (2) have to do with the incompatibility between the Trinity and simplicity.

Proposition 185 (1): “That God is not triune because Trinity is incompatible with the highest simplicity; for where there is a real plurality there is necessarily addition and composition. Take the example of a pile of stones.”

Proposition 186 (2): “That God cannot beget his own likeness, for what is begotten from something has some origin on which it depends; and that in God to beget would not be a sign of perfection.”

and Henry of Ghent. Indeed, in 1270, Thomas also wrote his De Unitate intellectus contra Averroistas in which he challenged one of Siger’s most notorious positions (i.e., unicity of the intellect).

While I am aware of the historical debate of “Who was condemned on March 7, 1277?” I do not intend to provide a detailed description of this historical debate due to the focus of this present study, but only to make some references to it that are directly relevant to the theme of this chapter. For a detailed account of this historical debate, see Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and the Condemnation of 1277,” The Modern Schoolman, 72 (1995); p. 237.

The number in parentheses at the end of the proposition is the number of the original list. In other words, the first Proposition (1) of the 219 propositions is directed explicitly against the theological doctrine of the Trinity—the incompatibility between the Trinity and the Simplicity of God.
According to the *Proposition 185* (1), the Trinity is not compatible with the highest simplicity; and the multiplicity of realities implies composition in God. *Proposition 186* (2) rejects the eternal generation of the Son (and by implication also the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son). One of the numerous commentators of the *Condemnations of 1277*, Roland Hissette, states that most likely Stephan and his commission had Ibn Rushd and Maimonides in mind when condemning the *Proposition 185* as their theories of simplicity was reflected in this proposition. Hissette points out that *Proposition 185* (1) is directed against a known doctrine of Ibn Rushd, that was mentioned already in the *Errores philosophorum* compiled by Giles of Rome (1273/1274):

§4,1: Again he (Ibn Rushd) erred when he denied that there is a Trinity in God, saying in the same twelfth book that some ‘have thought that there was a Trinity in God and they have tried to avoid the difficulty by saying that God is both three and one, and they did not know how to avoid it because when a substance is numbered the aggregate will be one through the one added intention.’ On this account, according to him, if God were three and one it would follow that He would be composite, which is incongruous.

Moreover, Hissette also assumes that the *Proposition 185* (1) is directed against the errors of Maimonides, again referring to Giles of Rome:

§12,1: For he (Maimonides) held that there is no multiplicity in God, either real or mental, as is clear from book I *On the Exposition of the Law*, chapter LI. It follows from this that there is no Trinity in God since three *Persons* are three realities. Thus, in the same book, chapter LXXI, he speaks almost decisively of learned Christians sweating in their inquiry into the nature of the Trinity, as though it were a silly thing to believe in the Trinity.

§12,4: Again he erred in regard to the proper attributes of the *Persons*, for he believed that the Word and the Spirit of God express only the essence of God. Thus in book I *On the Exposition of the Law*, in his explanation of the psalm which states, ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them by the spirit of his mouth.’ he says that in God Word and Spirit mean only the divine will or the divine essence by which the heavens were made, even though they are taken to refer to separate persons.

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In sum, clearly, both Ibn Rushd (an Islamic philosopher) and Maimonides (a Jewish philosopher) adopted a view of the simplicity of God which disagrees with, and stands in contradiction to, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Ibn Rushd concentrates on the basic logic of simplicity, according to which if one posited three realities in God, “it would follow that God would be composite.” This is the main reason why Ibn Rushd denies that God is both three and one. Ibn Rushd echoes Aristotle’s arguments in Metaphysics, book XII when he rebukes that “some [Christians] have thought that there was a Trinity in God and they have tried to avoid the difficulty by saying that God is both three and one, and they did not know how to avoid it because when substance is numbered the aggregate will be one through the one added intention.” Accordingly, God cannot be the composition of three Persons. Aristotle also explains why compositized substances cannot apply to absolute simple being: “If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God’s essential actuality is life most good and eternal [He is the act and the intellect which is by itself and possesses a perfect and eternal life].”

Ibn Rushd comments that “if the thinker is living because his act of life, the thing which thinks by its intellect its own essence, not by its intellect something else, as happens with our own intellect, this thing is the living (thing) which possesses the most excellent life. Therefore life and knowledge are the most distinctive attributes of God, and this God is living and knowing.” He further points out that Christians misinterpreted this passage by adopting the doctrine of the Trinity:

It does not save them from [between] to say that it (i.e., the substance) is three and one because if the substance is multiple, the compound is one in the sense of unity superimposed on the compound. […] this doctrine implies that it is composite and every compound is originated, unless they claim that there are things which are compound in themselves, […] they would be things passing from potentiality into actuality by themselves and moved by themselves, without mover.

Then, Ibn Rushd corrects the errors of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity by asserting that God is one single essence:

So one must understand that what we have said about Him, namely that He is living and that He possesses life, is one single concept with regard to the subject, but two with the regard to the point of view, not that they denote the same concept in all respects, as happens in the case of synonyms, for instance ba’īr [a camel regardless of its sex] and jamal (camel), nor that

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Expositione Legis, exponens illud Psalmi: ‘Verbo Domini caeli firmati sunt et spiritu oris eius omnis virtus eorum’ dicit Verbum et Spiritum in divinis sumi solum pro divina voluntate vel eius essentia qua caeli sunt facti, cum tamen ea personaliter sumantur’’” (p. 60).


144 See also chapter 3 on the Doctrine of Divine Unity (Al-Tawḥīd) in the Thought of Ibn Rushd.


they express a meaning in the same way as the derived word designates the same thing as the first pattern with an additional sense. [...] As for the things which are form without matter, the attribute and the thing to which it belongs refer in their case to the same thing, ontologically one, but double to its designation, I mean attribute and subject.  

In other words, Ibn Rushd holds that if there is a Trinity in God, then this God cannot be considered a simple God, but must a composite God.  

Having seen that the doctrine of the Trinity was a part of the thirteenth-century debate between Christian theologians and Islamic and Jewish writers, we can now proceed to examine whether Thomas had the Arabian / Aristotelian Philosophers (especially Ibn Rushd) in mind when he defended in his SCG that the doctrine of the Trinity is compatible with the highest simplicity of God. To this I now turn.

4.3.3 An Analysis of Thomas’ SCG on the Simplicity and the Trinity

The preceding section has shown that the Trinity was an issue in the Condemnation of 1277 in Paris. An important question is whether the rejected propositions on the Trinity were foreshadowed in Thomas’ SCG IV (1264). The aim of this section is to investigate how, according to Thomas, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three *Persons*, and yet this plurality of *Persons* is one single God. According to Thomas, the meaning of “the relation” between three divine *Persons* is an important theological concept to be discussed in order to answer this important question. For Thomas, the divine *Persons* have distinct *proprietates* in “opposed relation” to the three *hypostases*. In other words, the three divine *Persons* are distinguished from one another by their “opposed relations” and distinct “*proprietates*.” Thomas asserts that while the principle of “opposed relations” and the distinct “*proprietates*” between the *Persons* leads to the plurality of the divine *Persons*, the common *essence* between the *Persons* does not lead to a plurality of *Persons*. This also leads us to investigate the following questions which are crucial for a systematic analysis of Thomas’ doctrine of the Trinity: (1) whether SCG provides evidence that Thomas fought the same battle against the same opponents as Giles of Rome and the 1277 condemnation? (2) According to Thomas, why do the three divine personae not constitute three gods, but one God? Or, how may a doctrine of the Trinity in some way be compatible with divine simplicity? (3) What can we conclude from the results of our preceding investigations? How does our finding in this section fit in Thomas’ theory of divine simplicity as sketched out in this Chapter?  

Some important preliminary remarks are needed first. The most important chapters or passages in SCG, in which Thomas discusses the issues related to the research questions we mentioned earlier, are: Chapters 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 31, and 39 of Book IV. Obviously, there is no space in this chapter for an extensive study of all of these texts, and also since some of Thomas’ essential positions are repeated throughout book IV, I restrict my analysis to Chapters 8, 14, 18, 24, 25, 26 of Book IV, as these chapters appear to be the more representative and significant chapters/texts in Thomas’ development of his arguments.

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150 See Giles of Rome: *Errores Philosophorum*, trans. John O. Riedl, p. 20: “Ulterius erravit negans trinitatem in Deo esse, dicens in dicto XII quod aliqui putaverunt trinitatem esse in Deo et voluerunt evadere per hoc et dicere quod sunt tres et unus Deus, et nesciverunt evadere, quia cum substantia fuerit numerata, congregatum erit unum per unam intentionem additam” (p. 20).

151 I have made a survey through the Latin database of Thomas’ SCG in “Export from the Library of Latin Texts—Series A” (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2014), http://www.brepols.net (accessed Oct-Dec 2014), and have realized that the key terms that are relevant to the research questions of this study, such as *simplicitas*, *simplex*, *unita*, *pluralita*, *composite*, *additio*, and *tres persanae*, are especially shown in these selected chapters.
in defense of this doctrine (especially when considering our research questions). As we will see, the arguments of Thomas which are related to this research question are mostly found in these selected chapters of Book IV; hence they enable us to find out whether a theological opponent such as Ibn Rushd played a role in Thomas’ discussion of the Trinity.

As Thomas states, the SCG is written “in order to defend it [the Christian faith] from the attacks of the unbelievers” (SCG.IV.c.19). Hence, it seems plausible that Thomas could be involved in the same or similar debates as in those implied in the Propositions 185 (1) and 186 (2) of the 1277 condemnation, when defending the doctrine of the Trinity and the eternal generation of the Word. We learn from the SCG that Thomas was facing criticism concerning the divine generation and procession:

If, therefore, the Son of God is begotten, He is not eternal, it seems, as one going from potency to act; nor is He true God, since He is not pure act, but something which has potentiality. […] if the Father and the Son are two Persons, it seems impossible that they are one God. Opposed predicates, furthermore, show a plurality in that of which they are predicated. […] the Father is God unbegotten and generating, but the Son is God begotten. Therefore, it does not seem possible that the Father and Son are one God. These, then, and others like these are the arguments by which some whose will it is to measure divine mysteries by their own reason strive to attack divine generation. But, because truth is strong in itself and is overcome by no attack, it must be our intention to show that the truth of faith cannot be overcome by reason.  

Although in this passage Thomas does not identify which particular group was opposing the doctrine of the Trinity and the divine generations, based on his elaboration of the oneness of God that excludes the pluralities of Persons, it seems obvious that Jews and Muslims were opposed. When encountering the question of why the three divine Persons of the divine nature do not make three gods, but one God, Thomas argues that the “divine mysteries” of the plurality of Persons in God’s single essence do not imply polytheism, but monotheism. If we were to “measure” the three Persons by reason and any kind of mathematical hypotheses, we may come up with a conclusion of many and plural gods, instead of one God. However, if we turn to God’s revelation in Scripture, we see that the numerically three divine Persons are numerically one and the same essence and one single God. In SCG.IV Thomas states: “when all things are carefully considered, it is clear and manifest that sacred Scripture proposes this for belief about the divine generation: that the Father and Son, although distinguished as Persons, are nevertheless one God and have one essence or nature.” He also writes that “there is […] an identical nature in the Son and the Holy Spirit and, consequently, the Father, since it has been shown that the Father and the Son are one nature.” For Thomas, the divine Persons are numerically three distinct Persons in their

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152 SCG.IV.c.10, pp. 76, 79 (emphasis added).
153 Cf. Section 4.4.2, above.
154 Thomas states in SCG.I.c.9 and SCG.IV.c.1 that the theological approaches to Christian doctrines are agreed on this double truth: “Truth cannot be truth’s contrary” (see also SCG.IV.c.8). Thomas insists that on the one hand, the mysteries of the Trinity must be proved from the “sacred Scripture;” on the other hand, this doctrine does not oppose to natural reason. In other words, the use of reasoning (or philosophy) is subservient to the doctrine revealed by the Scripture, and hence “reasoning” will not oppose to biblical doctrines, but explain biblical doctrine in which “the human mind will be elevated to gaze perfectly upon the things revealed” (SCG.IV.c.1).
155 SCG.I.c.3. According to Thomas “Some truths about God exceed all the ability of the human reason. Such is the truth that God is triune.” Cf. for Thomas, “It is impossible to arrive at a cognition of the Trinity of the divine Persons by means of natural reason.” (S.T. Ia, q. 32)
156 SCG.IV.c.10, p. 75 (emphasis added).
157 SCG.IV.c.17, p. 111.
divine relations, but they are numerically one without distinction in the unity of a simple essence.\textsuperscript{158}

In spite of the alleged Aristotelians’ view of the Trinity as indicated in 4.3.2, Thomas defended the trinitarian faith against three major accusations that he mentions by name in his SCG.IV: the errors of Arianism,\textsuperscript{159} Sabellianism,\textsuperscript{160} and Photinus:\textsuperscript{161}

Therefore, the Catholic faith, keeping to the middle road, holds with Arius and Photinus against Sabellius that the Person of the Father is other than the Person of the Son, that the Son is begotten, but the Father entirely unbegotten; but with Sabellius against Photinus and Arius that Christ is true and natural God, the same in nature as the Father, although not the same in Person. And from this, also, an indication of the Catholic truth can be gathered. For, as the Philosopher says, [Prior Analytics II, 2] even falsehoods give witness, for falsehoods stand apart not only from the truth but from one another.\textsuperscript{162}

In this passage Thomas points out that according to the Catholic faith, the true faith confesses that there is a real subsisting relation, but one without a division, between the divine Persons in God (i.e., the Father is entirely unbegotten, but the Son is begotten); and he affirms that there is one single essence in God (the essence of Father and the essence of Son are the same nature). For Thomas, this “middle road” of the Catholic faith is an appropriate biblical interpretation of the Trinity, especially if one does not want to fall into the errors of the Sabellians while rejecting the Arians. In other words, the real relation of the threeness of Persons in God must not be confused with a plurality of gods in the divine essence. The threeness of God is neither “the likeness (homoiousios) of God” (as with the Arians), nor “no distinction in God” (as with Sabellius). According to Thomas, the Catholic faith is not only not contradicted by natural reason, it is also beyond natural reason. Thomas explains:

Since, however, truth cannot be truth’s contrary, it is obvious that the points of scriptural truth introduced by the Arians to confirm their error cannot be helpful to their teaching. For, since it was shown from divine Scripture that the essence and divine nature of the Father and Son are numerically identical, and according to this each is called true God, it must be that the Father and Son cannot be two gods, but one God. For, if there were many gods, a necessary consequence would be the partition in each of the essence of divinity, just as in two men the humanity differs in number from one to the other; and the more so because the divine nature is not one thing and God Himself another. This was shown above. From this it follows necessarily that, since there exists one divine nature in the Father and the Son, the Father and the Son are one God. Therefore, although we confess that the Father is God and the Son God, we are not withdrawing from the teaching which sets down that there is only one God, which we established both by reasonings and by authorities in Book I. Hence, although there is one only true God, we confess that this is predicated of the Father and of the Son.\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{158} SCG.IV.c.14, p. 100: “There it was shown that in God are the perfections of all beings, not in any composition, but in the unity of a simple essence, for the diversity of perfections which a created thing acquires by many forms is God’s in His one and simple essence.” Cf. Giles of Rome, Theorems on Existence and Essences, trans. Michael V. Murray (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1949). This model of the Trinity is also adopted by Giles of Rome: “For, by not speaking about a plurality which is found in related things, which kind of plurality is present in the divine Persons, because such plurality is possible without composition and potentiality […]” (p. 31).

\textsuperscript{159} SCG.IV.c. 6.

\textsuperscript{160} SCG.IV.c. 5.

\textsuperscript{161} SCG.IV.c. 4.

\textsuperscript{162} SCG.IV.c.7, pp. 61-62.

\textsuperscript{163} SCG.IV.c.8. p. 62 (emphasis added).
As this passage shows, Thomas clearly confessed the oneness and the threeness of God. He emphasized both the plurality of the divine *Persons* and their essential unity. God is one simple essence and a Trinity of divine *Persons*.

How did Thomas argue for the compatibility of the Trinity with divine simplicity? In order for us to proceed in a constructive way, we can identify a few claims Thomas used in discussing the simplicity and the Trinity of God in his *SCG* (through which we are also able to answer particularly the research questions mentioned above) before we move into a detailed investigation and study of them in the next section.

The claims Thomas used to answer the questions formulated above concerning divine simplicity and the Trinity of God can be found in *SCG*.IV.cc. 8. 14, 18, 24, 25 & 26. In these chapters, Thomas develops his arguments on the basis of two fundamental claims:

(i) **The divine Persons (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) have real relative distinctions among themselves, but there are no real distinctions in the Godhead;**

(ii) **Each divine Person is really identical with the whole of divine essence, yet we can distinguish the three divine Persons from one another by means of their unique properties.**

Through these two claims, Thomas asserts that when we speak of the divine *relations* of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the plurality of the three *Persons* (in terms of relations and the unique property of each Person) is indicated; but when we speak of the divine *essence* of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it is indicated that each divine *Person* is identical and the same (in terms of essence, the fullness of deity, and the aseity of God). In short, through applying these two claims, Thomas firmly holds that each *Person* is identical and the same (in terms of essence, the fullness of deity, and the aseity of God). With these twofold claims, Thomas insists that Christians are able to confess the doctrine of the Trinity without compromising the simplicity of God. Having set the stage for studying these two claims, I now turn to the first claim.

**Claim 1: The divine Persons (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) have real relative distinctions from one another, but they are not real distinct in the Godhead.**

As mentioned above, according to Thomas, the plurality of the divine *Persons* (i.e., the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God) is revealed by God Himself through the Christian Scriptures. These three divine *Persons* do not constitute three gods, but one and the same God. Thomas also stated clearly that human reason cannot comprehend “how” or “what” the mysteries of the three divine *Persons* are. The Christian faith professed the three divine *Persons*, who are not contradicted by the simplicity of God. In his words, “we must treat of the things about God Himself which surpass reason and are proposed for belief: such is the confession of the Trinity.” Thus, in the following, I will examine the selected chapters of Thomas’ *SCG*.IV, in order to find out why the three divine *Persons* do not constitute three gods, but one God; and how Thomas discusses the Trinity as a doctrine that is compatible with the divine simplicity.

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164 See Thomas’ elaboration on the deity of the Son in *SCG*.IV.cc.3, 13, 26; and on the deity of the Holy Spirit in *SCG*.IV.cc.15, 17, 26. Cf. According to the classical formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity that is confessed in the Athanasian Creed (in the late fifth or early sixth century), is as follows: “[…] we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; […] for the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three gods, but is all one God, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.”

165 *SCG*.IV.c.1, p. 39 (emphasis added).
(a) *The divine Persons are really distinct from each other but without division: the “Opposed Relations”*  

In his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, Thomas outlines the traditional reasoning concerning the *divine relations* in the Godhead (*essence*), namely, “the opposition of relations”: The Father is related to the Son by reason of *paternity* (*R1*); the Son is related to the Father by His *sonship* (*R2*); the Father is related to the Holy Spirit by *spiration* (*R3*); and the Holy Spirit is related to the Father by *procession* (*R4*).\(^{166}\) Thomas summarizes these four meanings of relations as follows:

And thus, in accord with the origin of the Son from the Father, there are two relations, one in the *originator*, the other in the *originated*: to wit, *paternity* and *sonship*; and there are two others in reference to the Holy Spirit: namely, *spiration* and *procession*.\(^{167}\)

Thomas emphasizes, these real distinctions of relation in the Godhead are linked to three really distinct divine *Persons*, but do not divide the one single essence, nor separate the divine *essence* from the divine *Persons*. Thomas further explains the complex distinctions in the Godhead:

Therefore, *paternity* and *spiration* do not constitute two *Persons*, but pertain to the one *Person* of the Father, for they have no opposition to one another. Therefore, neither would *sonship* and *procession* constitute two *Persons*, but would pertain to one, unless they had an opposition to one another. But there is no opposition to assign save that by way of origin. Hence, there must be an opposition of origin between the Son and the Holy Spirit so that the one is from the other.\(^{168}\)

In other words, there are real distinct relations between the divine *Persons* as stated above. Thomas continues to elucidate such distinction between the divine *Persons*:

Now, manifestly, the Son and the Holy Spirit agree in their *being from another*, since each is from the Father. And in this the Father suitably *differs from each*, in that He can have no birth-origin [*innascibilis*]. Therefore, if the Holy Spirit be *distinguished* from the Son, this must take place by *differences* which *per se* divide this being from another. And such, indeed, can only be differences of the *same genus*—namely, pertaining to origin—so that one of them is *from the other*. One concludes, then, *that the distinction of the Holy Spirit from the Son requires that He be from the Son*.\(^{169}\)

We understand from this that according to Thomas, the divine *Persons* are distinct from each other by relations of origin. Furthermore, Thomas points out that the distinction of real relation in the divine *Persons* cannot be described as synonymous with the distinctions in created things, “since they [divine *Persons*] are entirely immaterial.”\(^{170}\) In addition, Thomas carefully uses the term “principle/proceeding” to elaborate the relationship between the divine *Persons*, instead of “cause/effect,” because: “For the divine nature, one and the same, which the Son receives by His birth, the Holy Spirit receives by His proceeding. It remains, therefore, that the distinction of each origin can be only on the part of the principle.”\(^{171}\) Thus,

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166 SCG.IV.c.24, pp. 137-138.
167 SCG.IV.c.24, p. 138 (emphasis added).
168 SCG.IV.c.24, p. 138 (emphasis added).
169 SCG.IV.c.24, p. 138 (emphasis added).
170 SCG.IV.c.24, p. 138 (emphasis added).
171 SCG.IV.c.24, p. 139.
the distinctions between the divine Persons consist in subsisting relations only. But if one looks to the divine essence in the Godhead, there is no division, but “one subsisting essence.” Thomas explains,

There are, therefore, many things subsisting if one looks to the relations; there is but one subsistent thing, of course, if one looks to the essence. And on this account we speak of one subsisting God, because He is one subsisting essence; and we speak of a plurality of Persons, because of the distinction of subsisting relations. […] In divinity, therefore, one must not speak of one Person by reason of the unity of the subsisting essence, but of many Persons by reason of the relations.  

In addition, while the Son is generated by the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son:

Manifestly, of course, the principle of the origin of the Son is the Father alone. If, therefore, the principle of the procession of the Holy Spirit is the Father alone, the procession of the Holy Spirit will not be other than the generation of the Son; thus, neither will the Holy Spirit be distinct from the Son. Therefore, that there may be otherness in processions and otherness in those proceeding, one of necessity says that the Holy Spirit is not from the Father alone, but from the Father and the Son.

Thus, in his final treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in SCG IV.c.26, Thomas concludes:

From what has been said, then, one must hold that in the divine nature three Persons subsist: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one God, distinguished from one another by relations only. For the Father is distinguished from the Son by the relations of paternity and innascibility; the Son from the Father by the relation of sonship; the Father and the Son from the Holy Spirit by spiration, so to say; and the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son by the procession of love, by this He proceeds from each of Them.

In sum, we learn that Thomas begins the development of his doctrine of the Trinity by pointing out the “real subsisting relations” between the three divine Persons through four “opposed relations.” He explains through the “opposed relations” that the real subsisting relations do not proceed from a plurality of essences of God, but one single essence of God. As Muller observes, “An important element of Thomas’ doctrine of the Trinity is his fairly traditional identification of the personal relations of paternity, filiation, and procession as constitutive of the real distinctions in the Godhead, while at the same time insisting on the simplicity of God.”

(b) The divine Persons are distinct by “personales proprietates”

In relation to what is said above, Thomas also explains that each divine Person has his own peculiar proprietas (property), which is to be considered as an incommunicable proprietas: i.e., the personal proprietas of the Father is being “not begotten;” the personal proprietas of

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172 SCG IV.c.14, p. 99; cf. SCG IV.c.14, p.103: “From the fact that in God there is unity of essence and distinction of relations, it becomes manifest that nothing stops one’s finding opposites in the one God, at least those opposites which follow the distinction of relation: begetting and begotten, for instance, which are opposed relatively, and begotten and unbegotten which are opposed as affirmation and negation. For wherever there is a distinction one must find the opposition of negation and affirmation.”

173 SCG IV.c.24, p. 139.

174 SCG IV.c.26, p. 143 (emphasis added).

175 Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 4, p. 47.
the Son is “begotten,” and the personal *proprietas* of the Holy Spirit is “proceeding.” In Thomas’ words:

*The Father is unbegotten, but the Son is begotten of the Father:* From the fact that the Father is said in the Scriptures “to give!” to the Son—from which it follows that He “receives”—one cannot show any indigence in Him.” But this is required by His being the Son, for He could not be called Son if He were not begotten by the Father. For everything which is generated receives from the generator the nature of the generator. Therefore, by this giving of the Father to the Son is understood nothing but the generation of the Son in which the Father gave the Son His nature.\(^\text{176}\)

*The Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but proceeds from the Father and the Son:* Of course, that in the name of the Holy Spirit the essence of the Father and Son is designated so as to be personally distinguished from neither of them conflicts with what divine Scripture hands on to us about the Holy Spirit. It says that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father” and that He receives from the Son (John 15:26; 16:14). And this cannot be understood of the divine essence, since the divine essence neither proceeds from the Father nor receives from the Son. One must, then, say that the Holy Spirit is a subsisting *Person*.\(^\text{177}\)

We learn from this that for Thomas, each *Person* in God has its own distinctive property, but such “real subsisting relations” between the properties of the three divine *Persons* is neither dividing the three *Persons* as if they were parts\(^\text{178}\)—it is a distinction without division. Thus, when Thomas discusses the incarnation of the Son, he points out that the Son has his individual *proprietas* (compared to the Father and the Holy Spirit):

It is clear also from this that, although the Son is incarnate, neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit, for all that, need be incarnate, since the Incarnation did not take place by a union in the nature in which the three divine *Persons* are together, but in hypostasis or supposit (*suppositum*), wherein the three *Persons* are distinguished.\(^\text{179}\)

Thomas further explains the character of the relation between the personal *proprietas* of God by stressing that the *proprietas* of the Father is not the same as the *proprietas* of the Son, since the Father is the Father, the Son is the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit. Hence, each *proprietas* belongs to a *Person* of the Trinity individually:

It remains true, then, that, when the Father is said to be in the Son and the Son in the Father, *the Father and Son are not identical in supposit*. One can see from this that *the essence of the Father and the Son is one*. For, once this is given, it is very clear in what way the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father. For, since the Father is His essence, because in God essence is not other than what has essence, as we showed in Book I, it follows that in anything in which the essence of the Father is the Father; and by the same reasoning in anything in which the essence of the Son is the Son is. Hence, since the essence of the Father is in the Son and the essence of the Son in the Father, because the essence of each of the two is one essence (as the Catholic faith teaches), it clearly follows that the Father is in the Son

\(^{176}\) SCG.IV.c.8, p. 65 (emphasis added).

\(^{177}\) SCG.IV.c.18, p. 114 (emphasis added).

\(^{178}\) See SCG.IV.c.9, pp. 74-75: Unlike created beings which are always in composition and parts, God is without parts. Thomas explains, “For, if there were one *Person* of the Father and the Son, one could not say suitably that the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, since properly the same supposit [*suppositum*] is not said to be in its very self; this is said only with reference to its parts. For, seeing that parts are in a whole, and that what is proper to parts can be attributed to a whole, sometimes a whole is said to be in itself. But this manner of speech does not suit speech about divinity, in which there can be no parts, as was shown in SCG.I.”

\(^{179}\) SCG.IV.c.39, p. 190. *Suppositum* is here understood as an equivalent of hypostasis.
and the Son in the Father. Thus, the selfsame saying (John 14:11) confutes the error of Sabellius as well as that of Arius.\(^{180}\)

Although the Holy Spirit is, of course, true God and has the true divine nature from the Father and the Son, He need not, for all that, be a son. For son is said of one because he is begotten. [...] Hence, the Holy Spirit, although He has the divine nature from the Father and the Son, cannot, for all that, be called Their son.\(^{181}\)

The above passages point out that, when we distinguish the distinct properties of the three divine \textit{Persons}, we must quickly return to the unity of God’s nature. For the essence of the Father is the one and same single essence with the essence of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit—the three divine \textit{Persons} are one and the same God. In order to help his readers to understand this mysterious relationship between the essence and \textit{Persons}, Thomas gives an enlightening example through his understanding of the unity of the deity and humanity in Christ:

And thus, as in the Trinity there is a plurality of \textit{Persons} subsisting in one nature, so in the mystery of the Incarnation there is one \textit{Person} subsisting in a plurality of natures.\(^{182}\)

For the union in person took place in such wise that what was proper to each of the natures remained, namely to the divine and to the human, as was explained above. Therefore, even when Christ suffered death and other things proper to humanity, the divinity remained incapable of suffering, although by \textit{the unity of person we say that God suffered and died}. And somewhat of an instance of this appears in us because, although the flesh dies, \textit{the soul remains immortal}.\(^{183}\)

As pointed out by Thomas, the two natures of Christ are not complex parts of divine essence and humanity, but “each of the natures remained” in Christ; and He is one single divine \textit{Person} as the Son.

\textbf{Claim 2: Each divine \textit{Person} is really identical with the whole of divine essence, yet we can distinguish the three divine \textit{Persons} from one another by means of their unique properties.}

Let us now turn to another claim we can identify in Thomas’ discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, concerning the one subsisting essence of God, or more precisely, the God of Himself.\(^{184}\)

\textit{(a) The fullness of the deity in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit}

For Thomas, the divine essence is assumed to be undivided in the divine \textit{Persons} of the Godhead: “For the divine \textit{Persons}, since they agree in essence, cannot be distinguished

\(^{180}\) SCG.IV.c.9, pp. 74-75.
\(^{181}\) SCG.IV.c.23, p. 133.
\(^{182}\) SCG.IV.c.39, p. 190.
\(^{183}\) SCG.IV.c.55, pp. 242-243.
\(^{184}\) See SCG.IV.cc.18 and 26. When Thomas refers to divine relations of the \textit{personae}, he solely applies the aseity of God (God of Himself/the existence of God) to the Father, and not to the Son nor to the Holy Spirit. But when Thomas refers to the \textit{essentia} of the Son and the Holy Spirit (as we shall see below), he seems to assign the aseity of God to the Son, the Holy Spirit, as well as the Father. It is interesting to note the agreement between Thomas and Calvin on this point, Cf. \textit{Calvin’s doctrine of the aseity of the Son} in Chapter 5.
except by relation of origin;”¹⁸⁵ and the one and the same essence of God belongs wholly to each of the Persons: “the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one in nature, and in each of these the Person is perfect, simply because the act of understanding and the act of will are the divine being itself.”¹⁸⁶ In other words, Thomas acknowledges that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He also explicitly affirms the deity of divine Persons in connection to God’s essence: “Whatever relating to Divinity is said of one of the Three must be understood of all, because they are one God.”¹⁸⁷ On this basis Thomas states:

For the Persons are not distinguished from one another except by relations, as is clear from the things said above. Therefore, all the fullness of divinity is the Son, numerically identical with that in the Father, but with the relation of birth, as it is in the Father with the relation of active generation. Hence, if the relation of the Father be attributed to the Son, all distinction is removed. And the same reasoning holds for the Holy Spirit.¹⁸⁸

In other words, Thomas intends to stress that each divine Person is fully God and not partially God—for the three divine Persons are one and the same God, not three gods. Additionally, Thomas points out that each divine Person is the essence of God, an essence that is irreducibly one:

In this same way it is clear that the truth of divine generation is not ruled out by this: in God there can be no distinction of a plurality of subsistents. The divine essence, subsistent though it be, cannot for all that be separated from the relation which must be understood to be in God, because the conceived Word of the divine mind is from God Himself speaking. For the Word, too, is the divine essence, as was shown, and God speaking—from whom the Word is—is the divine essence; not a first and a second, but an essence numerically the same. […] There are, therefore, many things subsisting if one looks to the relations; there is but one subsistent thing, of course, if one looks to the essence. And on this account we speak of one subsisting God, because He is one subsisting essence; and we speak of a plurality of Persons, because of the distinction of subsisting relations.¹⁸⁹

In this passage Thomas clearly differentiates the plurality of Persons from the unity of essence in the Godhead. As Thomas affirms, when the divine Persons are referred to, or viewed through, the perspective of “opposed relation,” three real subsisting relations between the Persons are to be distinguished (as shown in 4.3.3.i). But when the divine Persons are referred to, or viewed, without the perspective of “opposed relation,” the three Persons are numerically one and the same essence in the Godhead. In short, Thomas is asserting that the single essence is not divided by the three Persons; the three Persons are one and the same single essence. They differ in their relations:

Therefore, the Father must be related both to the Son and the Holy Spirit as a principle to that which is from the principle. He is related to the Son by reason of paternity, but not to the Holy Spirit; for then the Holy Spirit would be the Son, because paternity is not said except of a son. […] And thus, in accord with the origin of the Son from the Father, there are two relations, one in the originator, the other in the originated: to wit, paternity and sonship; and there are two others in reference to the Holy Spirit: namely, spiration and procession. Therefore, paternity and spiration do not constitute two Persons, but pertain to the one Person of the Father, for they have no opposition to one another. Therefore, neither would sonship and

¹⁸⁵ SCG.IV.c.26, p. 143.
¹⁸⁶ SCG.IV.c.26, p. 146.
¹⁸⁷ SCG.IV.c.23, p. 130.
¹⁸⁸ SCG.IV.c.26, p. 145 (emphasis added).
¹⁸⁹ SCG.IV.c.14, p. 99.
procession constitute two *Persons*, but would pertain to one, unless they had an opposition to one another.\(^{190}\)

Furthermore, it is clear that the following two quotations of Thomas are other arguments for the approach to the divine *Persons* that focuses on the interpersonal principles:

Moreover, the Father and the Son, unity of essence considered, do not differ save in this: He is the Father and He is the Son. So, anything other than this is common to the Father and the Son. But to be the principle of the Holy Spirit is not included in the notion of paternity and of sonship, for it is one relation by which the Father is Father, and another by which He is the principle of the Holy Spirit, as was said above. Therefore, to be the principle of the Holy Spirit is common to the Father and the Son.\(^{191}\)

Furthermore, whenever one thing is not opposed to the essential intelligibility of another, there is no impossibility—unless, perhaps, accidentally—about their coming together. But to be the principle of the Holy Spirit is not contrary to the intelligibility of the Son: not in so far as He is God, because the Father is the principle of the Holy Spirit; nor in so far as He is Son, because the procession of the Holy Spirit is other than that of the Son. It is, of course, not repugnant to have what is from a principle according to one procession be the principle of another procession. It follows, then, that it is not impossible for the Son to be the principle of the Holy Spirit. But that which is not impossible can be. “In divinity being and possibility do not differ.” Therefore, the Son is the principle of the Holy Spirit.\(^{192}\)

In his explanation of the deity of the Holy Spirit, Thomas seems to make a clearer connection between the divine *Persons* and the essence of God. Thomas states that when one speaks of the Holy Spirit in relation to His essence, the Holy Spirit is God of Himself; when one speaks of the Holy Spirit in relation to His *Person*, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son:

Of course, that in the name of the Holy Spirit the essence of the Father and Son is designated so as to be personally distinguished from neither of them conflicts with what divine Scripture hands on to us about the Holy Spirit. It says that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father” and that He receives from the Son (John 15:26; 16:14). And this cannot be understood of the divine essence, since the divine essence neither proceeds from the Father nor receives from the Son. One must, then, say that the Holy Spirit is a subsisting *Person*.\(^{193}\)

(b) The aseity of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

Having gained an understanding of how Thomas explains the fullness of the deity in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I now examine whether Thomas uses the doctrine of the aseity of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit to defend the oneness of God. This is an important investigation since, although Thomas does not in this passage of his *SCG* explicitly express the doctrine of the aseity of the Son (as *a se*) and the Holy Spirit (as *a se*), his emphasis on the fullness of deity in each divine *Person* implies the aseity of the divine *Person*. In a passage quoted earlier, Thomas writes:

It says that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father” and that He receives from the Son (John 15:26; 16:14). And this cannot be understood of the divine essence, *since the divine*
essence neither proceeds from the Father nor receives from the Son. One must, then, say that the Holy Spirit is a subsisting Person.\footnote{SCG.IV.c.18, p. 114 (emphasis added).}

Traditionally, when Christian thinkers speak of the aseity of God (God being of Himself), they seem to relate aseity to the one God, to His essence, rather than to the divine Persons, since God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are not the self-begotten God. Thomas, however, stresses the divine essence of each Person. In other words, when referring to the essence of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit “neither proceeds from the Father nor receives from the Son.” But when referring to the Holy Spirit as a subsisting Person through the opposed relation between the divine Persons, the Holy Spirit is not God of Himself, but proceeds from the Father and receives from the Son.

In addition, Thomas also explicitly speaks of the eternal deity of Christ by making a parallel connection between the distinct Person and the common essence, as the Persons are really identical with the most simple essence of God. According to Thomas, this connection shows clearly the operation of the Father through the Son:

The saying also, then, “the Son cannot do anything of Himself,” does not point to any weakness of action in the Son. But, because for God to act is not other than to be, and His action is not other than His essence, as was proved above, so one says that the Son cannot act from Himself but only from the Father, just as He is not able to be from Himself but only from the Father. For, if He were from Himself, He would no longer be the Son. Therefore, just as the Son cannot be the Son, so neither can He act of Himself. However, because the Son receives the same nature as the Father and, consequently, the same power, although the Son neither is of Himself nor operates of Himself, He nevertheless is through Himself and operates through Himself, since just as He is through His own nature received from the Father, so He operates through His own nature received from the Father. Hence, after our Lord had said: “the Son cannot do anything of Himself,” to show that, although the Son does not operate of Himself, He does operate through Himself, He adds: “Whatever He does”—namely, the Father—“these the Son does likewise.”\footnote{SCG.IV.c.8, p. 67 (emphasis added); cf. Peter Lombard, Sentences, 32.3.3: “The Son acts through Himself, but not by Himself; in the same way, the Son is to be called wise through Himself, but not by Himself. Similarly, too, He is said to be, or that He is, God through Himself, as they say, but not by Himself or from Himself.” See also the discussion of the aseity of Christ between Peter Lombard and Thomas in Brannon Ellis, Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 90-96.}

Furthermore, Thomas also makes a similar understanding of Christ’s deity through the one and the same essence of the Father and the Son.\footnote{SCG.IV.c.18, p. 114 (emphasis added).} Thomas explains, “one cannot show that the Son is less than the Father except in His human nature.”\footnote{SCG.IV.c.8, p. 69. Thomas points out that the “lesser” in Christ’s flesh refers to the “hiddenness” under the weakness of Christ’s flesh, not the full deity of Christ.} For Thomas, the Son is the one divine essence together with the Father: “since the essence of the Father is in the Son and the essence of the Son is in the Father, because the essence of each of the two is one essence.”\footnote{SCG.IV.c.9, p. 73 (emphasis added).} In this way Thomas safeguards the oneness of God by affirming the coequal
deity in the Persons of Christ and the Father. Consequently, he rejects the errors of Sabellius and Arius: “Thus, by asserting that the Father has given to Him He therefore confesses that He is the true Son—against Sabellius. Yet, from the greatness of that which is given He confesses that He is equal to the Father—so Arius is confounded.”199

4.3.4 Conclusion

Thomas carefully answers the question of the relation between the one essence of God and the plurality of Persons. He considers the divine simplicity to be very well compatible with the plurality of the divine Persons in God, and he also affirms that both the doctrine of divine simplicity and the doctrine of the Trinity are doctrines revealed in the Scripture. The following are some of the significant results found in the study of this chapter (which will also be continued in Chapter 6).

First, in 4.3.1 and 4.3.2, I have briefly introduced the Condemnation of 1277 in Paris, particularly the Propositions 185 (1) and 186 (2), as well as the treatise on the Errores philosophorum by Giles of Rome. These texts revealed that the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the eternal generation of the Word were a subject of debate with major anti-trinitarians (i.e., Ibn Rushd and Maimonides) at the end of the thirteenth century. It is a fact that Thomas, when discussing the Trinity contra gentiles in his SCG IV (1264), seems to be conducting an explicit polemic against Christian heresies (Arianism, Sabellianism), rather than against non-Christian religious or philosophical objections, particular the Arabian Aristotelians. As Gilles Emery also has observed, Thomas “pays attention to the Islamic rejection of the Trinity, but, on this occasion his efforts at documentation were rather more limited.”200 Thus, this suggests that the Jewish and Islamic philosophical objections were, for Thomas, not relevant enough to be dealt with in an explicit manner. However, this section has also shown that there are similarities between the objections/arguments of Ibn Rushd and the objections/arguments refuted by Thomas (such as the objection that, if the Trinity is believed, the idea of composition in God is implied).

Second, in 4.3.3.i, I have found that on the one hand, Thomas discusses the plurality of God’s Persons by means of the concept of the “oppositional relation” (i.e., paternity and sonship/filiation; and spiration and procession) in the Godhead. On the other hand, he discusses the unity of God’s Persons by referring to the single divine essence in the Godhead. With this in mind, Thomas concludes that, “although God is substantially predicated of the Father and the Son, it does not for all that follow that, if the Father and the Son are a kind of plurality, they is a plurality of gods. For they are many by reason of the distinction of subsistent relations, yet one God, nevertheless, by reason of the unity of subsistent essence.”201 Thus, for Thomas, the simplicity and the Trinity of God are non-contradictory when one holds these twofold claims. In Thomas’ words, “There are, therefore, many things subsisting if one looks to the relations; there is but one subsistent thing, of course, if one looks to the essence. And on this account we speak of one subsisting God, because He is one subsisting essence; and we speak of a plurality of Persons, because of the distinction of subsisting relations.”202

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199 SCG.IV.c.8, p. 66.
201 SCG.IV.c.14, p. 103.
202 SCG.IV.c.14, p. 99. Cf. When Thomas discusses the doctrine of the Trinity in his S.T. Ia, q. 28, he explicitly states that there are real distinctions in God. In his words, “there must be real distinction in God, not, indeed, according to that which is absolute—namely, essence, wherein there is supreme unity and simplicity—but according to that which is relative” (S.T. Ia, q.28, art. 3). Thus, as shown in this chapter, when Thomas
Third, in 4.3.3.ii, I have also identified Thomas’ claim that each divine Person is really identical with the whole of divine essence, yet we can distinguish the three divine Persons from one another by means of their unique properties. I have presented a survey of Thomas’ doctrine of divine simplicity and the Trinity through his discussion on the following two crucial points: (a) the fullness of the deity in the three divine Persons; (b) and the aseity of God in each Person. For Thomas the numerical oneness of God is an important aspect for maintaining the confession of the Trinity. This is explicitly shown in Thomas’ confession that each divine Person is fully God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; but at the same time Thomas affirms that the three divine Persons do not constitute three gods, they are one and the same God. The reason is that there is only one subsistent / essentia in the Godhead, not three essentiae. Through such an analysis, Thomas asserts that, while the principle of “opposed relations” and the distinct “proprietates” between the Persons leads to the plurality of the divine Persons, the common essence shared by the Persons does not lead to a plurality of gods. Furthermore, Thomas also carefully and implicitly ascribed the aseity of God to each Person when he discusses the fullness of God in each Person. This enables us to understand how Thomas maintains the oneness of God, while also confessing the threefold of God in his SCG. For Thomas, when one attributes the distinct proprietates to each divine Person, these proprietates are not ascribed to the divine essence; and when speaking of the divine Persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit, Thomas points to the relations of begetting and proceeding, but at the same time also recognizes the one identical essence of each divine Person (i.e., the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one and the same God).

In short, Thomas’ understanding of divine simplicity through the application of the two claims that we mentioned can be summarized in the following concluding statement:

With regards to the relationship between the doctrine of divine simplicity and the mystery of the Trinity, Thomas argues that God is truly (realiter) three Persons distinct by relations; but as far as God’s single essence is concerned, the three divine Persons are not in real distinction. Each of these three divine Persons is distinct from the other Persons, yet undivided in the divine essence, and they all possess the quality of aseity (a se) independently of each other.

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argues for the doctrine of divine simplicity, he also affirms that this doctrine does not necessary rule out divine attributes; more importantly, Thomas’ God is three divine personae in God’s simplicity.

203 See SCG.IV.c.26. Cf. S.T.Ia, q.28, art. 3.
John Calvin on the Divine Simplicity in relation to God’s Attributes and Persons
(from selected passages of Calvin’s Commentaries in connection with his Institutes)

I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendor of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one.

Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 40: Oration on Holy Baptism

5.1 An Overview of the Chapter

This chapter focuses on John Calvin (1509-1515), a French-Swiss Reformed theologian who held pastoral and teaching positions in Geneva, and one of the “second-generation codifiers” of Reformed Christianity, together with Pierre Viret and Heinrich Bullinger. His doctrine of God, especially his doctrine of divine simplicitas, is an important dogma for contributing to a fruitful engagement between Christianity and Islam. However, to date no one has produced an extended study of Calvin’s formulation of divine simplicity intended to contribute to interfaith discussion. Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck informs us, “This doctrine of God’s simplicity was the means by which Christian theology was kept from the danger of splitting God’s attributes from His essence and of making them more or less independent from, and opposed to, His essence.” The doctrine of divine simplicity is, to put it simply, a conjunction of these three claims: (i) God is a simple essence without any composition; (ii) God has distinct essential attributes, but these exist perfectly without parts

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4 In this study I attempt to demonstrate that monotheism is fundamental to Calvin’s doctrine of God, especially his dogma concerning the irreducible oneness of the Trinity.


in His simplicity; and (iii) the one simple being of God exists in three distinct divine Persons. The central question, then, is: How are these essential attributes and Persons of the Trinity related to God’s single essence?

This chapter seeks to explore Calvin’s answer to this central question. I limit the scope of this chapter due to two considerations. First, I limit myself to examine only the selected works of Calvin which are related to the central question and are crucial for understanding his articulation of the solution. Second, I consider the irreducible identity of God—God’s aseity (αὐτοσιαν, a se ipso, or derived as autotheos, self-existent God, “God of Himself”)—an important attribute in connection with Calvin’s discussion on this topic. I investigate how divine aseity emerged throughout Calvin’s approach in answering the central question mentioned above. The exploration and investigation of this chapter will demonstrate that, on the grounds of divine aseity, Calvin vigorously maintains the simplicity of God by stressing the predication of all the divine attributes equally for each of the Persons of the Trinity; and on the account of His aseity, every attribute of God is identical with His single essence (essentia). If we hold to the principle as Calvin that each of the divine Persons assumes the aseity of God essentially, this same principle may be applied to all other divine attributes.

5.1.1 An Outline of the Inquiry

This chapter proceeds in three parts (Sections 5.2-5.4). In Section 5.2, I will briefly explore the approach to Calvin’s works, in which I explain the reasons why I chose Calvin’s biblical commentaries and his Institutes (1536 Latin Edition, 1541 French Edition, and 1559

7 In the following sections of this chapter, I deal mainly with this central question by examining Calvin’s biblical commentaries on selected passages. I explain later, in Section 5.2.1 (Textual Considerations: Analysing Calvin’s Biblical Commentaries and the Institutes), why I am focusing on Calvin’s biblical commentaries rather than on the most characteristic work of Calvin, namely the Institutes of the Christian Religion (Institutes). Of course, like anyone else who examines Calvin’s doctrine of God, I consulted the Institutes and often referred to it explicitly in this study.

8 In this study, I limit myself to examine the following: Calvin’s biblical commentaries, especially on the selected passages in chronological order: Rom. 8:9-11 (1536-1539/1540), Eph. 4:5-6 (1548), Heb. 1 and 11:3 (1549), John 1 (1550-1553), Gen. 1 (1550-1553/1554), Matt. 28:19 (1553-1555), Exod. 3:14 and 34: 6-7 (1564), Dan. 7:13 (1559-1560/1561), and Ezek. 1:25-26 (1563-1564/1565); and Calvin’s theological works: Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Latin Edition, 1541 French Edition, and 1559 Edition. I will explain why these two sources are considered in Section 5.2.1 Textual Considerations; later in each section where the selected passage are examined, I will explain in detail why I selected these particular Bible texts.

9 Throughout this chapter, whenever ‘aseitas’ is employed with reference to God’s existence of Himself, I employed ‘aseity’, unless context or flow requires an alternative (such as ‘autóonía,’ ‘a se ipso,’ ‘self-existence,’ or ‘autotheos’).

as the selected texts for my research (5.2.1). I also identify and define what Calvin means when he uses the theological terminology of divine simplicity in the context of the sixteenth century (5.2.2). In Section 5.3, the core of this chapter, I explore and analyze the doctrine of divine Simplicity in the broader context of Calvin’s work, focusing on the selected passages from the commentaries in connection with his Institutes. Since the doctrine of divine simplicity in Calvin’s works is significantly integrated throughout, not only in the commentaries, but also in the Institutes, this section investigates his commentaries as well as the Institutes, in order to have a fuller view of his understanding on the divine simplicity. In this last part, I also examine whether Calvin’s view of divine simplicity in relation to the divine attributes and Persons presents a solution that is sufficiently coherent and biblical. Calvin connects his arguments for the distinctiveness of God’s Persons with the divine attributes—particularly the divine aseity in each Person—without compromising the simplicity of God. Following this, I argue that Calvin successfully develops the divine aseity in connection to God’s attributes and Persons to provide a satisfying answer to the question of the relation between God’s Trinity and simplicity. Lastly, I end our examination with an evaluation (Section 5.4).

5.2 Introduction to Calvin’s view of Divine Simplicity

5.2.1 Textual Considerations: Analysing Calvin’s Biblical Commentaries and the Institutes

John Calvin’s Institutes was—after Melanchthon’s Loci—the most influential systematic-theological work of the Reformation. Today’s Calvin scholars emphasize that studying Calvin’s commentaries plays an invaluable role, since the Institutes were developed in tandem with his biblical exposition. In our study of his doctrine of God this proves to be especially important. As Richard A. Muller points out, “Readers of the Institutes might

according to volume number, chapter and page number [COR 13: 11-15]. Parenthetical references to the Latin text of Calvin’s commentaries will follow, taken from CO or COR.


See Erik de Boer, The Genevan School of the Prophets: The Congrégations of the Company of Pastors and their Influence in the 16th Century Europe (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012), p. 152; R. Ward Holder, John Calvin and the Grounding of Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 20-23. Both de Boer and Holder observe that Calvin uses some key passages of the Bible (e.g., Gen. 1 and John 1) to explain his view on divine simplicity in relation to God’s multiplicity of attributes and the Trinity. See also Elsie Anne McKee, “Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin’s Institutio: A Methodological Suggestion,” in Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr., eds. Elsie Anne McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), pp. 154-172, esp. p. 156. McKee also indicates that there are various reasons to include an analysis of Calvin’s commentaries on the selected passages that served as “cross-references” in his various versions of the Institutes.

In this study, I have decided to adopt a theological approach to investigate Calvin’s view of divine simplicity by examining the selected scriptural passages of Calvin’s commentaries in connection with the various versions of the Institutes which illuminate his thoughts on divine simplicitas. This approach to unfolding Calvin’s view of divine simplicity is enlightened by Elsie Anne McKee, Elders and The Plural Ministry: The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin’s Theology (Geneva: Droz, 1988); and idem, “Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin’s Institutio: A Methodological Suggestion,” pp. 154-172. Cf. an analysis of different approaches to Calvin’s theology in Brannon Ellis, Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): pp. 4-9.
easily gain the impression that Calvin had little interest in a discussion of the divine essence and attributes. Quite to the contrary, Calvin elaborates at considerable length on these issues in his commentaries—most notably in *the Harmony of the Last Four Books of Moses*, which was begun in 1559 and therefore is not reflected in editorial strata of the *Institutes*. In other words, Calvin’s doctrine of divine simplicity cannot be properly understood apart from his exegesis and sermons on this theme. In short, Calvin’s concern is doctrinal, and therefore focuses more on how one should talk about the Trinity. Calvin firmly argues that the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical, and he cites numerous passages from the Old and the New Testaments to support his claim. Thus, it is the aim of the following sections to show that by examining the selected passages from Calvin’s commentaries in connection with his *Institutes*, a more complete picture of Calvin’s theology of divine simplicity will emerge. Furthermore, it is important for us not to overlook the different literary and historical circumstances which influenced the development of Calvin’s view of divine simplicity in his biblical commentaries. For example, I noted that Calvin frames his formulation of doctrine of divine simplicity and the Trinity in detail over against the clearly oppositional theories (e.g., anti-trinitarian theory of the Michael Servetus). This must therefore be added to the analysis of their controversy and debate (see 5.3.4.a & b). For these reasons, to get an understanding of Calvin’s view of divine simplicity, his biblical and theological works will be examined in this research. This examination of Calvin’s selected works on divine simplicity makes no claim to be a full study. It is intended as a complement to a more biblically-oriented treatment of this topic.

5.2.2 Calvin’s Theological Terminology of the Divine Simplicity in its Sixteenth Century Context

We now turn to Calvin’s reception and development of the language and terminology of divine simplicity in the context of the sixteenth century. In light of his confession of faith in the *Genevan Catechism* (1545), Calvin defended and clarified his teaching on this topic in a conscious dialogue with these orthodox creeds, in which he offers a traditional statement of confessional witness to the oneness of the triune God: the God whom he proclaimed is “the one essence of God [Quoniam in una Dei essentia]” in three Persons, and “these three distinct Persons constitute one Godhead [si in una divinitate distinctas constituamus has tres personas].” Calvin discusses the distinctions in the Trinity of Persons with reference to

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15 Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, pp. 101-108, 174-188. In fact, Muller indicates that there are different genres of Calvin’s works: commentary, sermon, treatise, and *Institutes*, and that we must not “reject or disparage the significance of a position taken in a commentary or sermon, simply because that view is not treated in the *Institutes,*” for example, concerning the relationship between essence and attributes. Muller argues, that “to know the whole Calvin one must read the whole Calvin, and then some” (p. 182).

16 See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pp. 273-275. Although Calvin deals with the concept of divine simplicity with brevity, Calvin’s idea of God is more related to God’s knowledge, rather than to God’s being. He does not deny but affirms “the being of God” by following the pattern of the classical doctrine of God (i.e., Augustine, Anselm and Thomas), and believes that God exists supremely and is the reality who determines all things. In other words, Calvin affirms the traditional attributes of God.

17 Calvin, *Institutes* (1559). Hereinafter cited in the text by book, chapter and article (1.5.9); Calvin carefully speaks about it, as it would be a danger to speak about God’s being: “[It is] not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of God’s essence, which we ought more to adore than meticulously to search out.”

18 Calvin’s articulation of divine simplicity and the Trinity is properly understood as a defense of historic Christian orthodoxy as formulated in the Christian creeds. His exegetical works on this doctrine, however, are not a restatement of Patristic trinitarianism. This will be further developed below.
divine simplicity, and then stresses that the triune distinctions do not compromise the simplicity of the divine essence. For Calvin, the triune God is the irreducible threeness of the Persons existing eternally in the irreducible oneness of God’s essence.

Calvin’s definition of simplicitas is further developed in the Institutes. In the Institutes (1559), the phrase “In the one essence of God [Unicam Dei essentiam ab ipsa]” is explained with profound clarity. Calvin writes:

For since the essence of God is one, simple and undivided, and He contains all in Himself, without portion or derivation, but in integral perfection […] the Father, although distinct in His proper nature, expresses Himself wholly in the Son. […] The same reasoning applies to the Holy Spirit, […] but this is not a distinction of essence.\(^\text{19}\)

To put this in another way, Calvin describes his understanding of the unity of simplicity as follows: God is without parts; wholly all that He is (“all in Himself” or a se ipso—which corresponds to aseitas: “God of Himself”), and each Person of the Trinity is “God of Himself.” However, the triune God is not composed of three distinct gods in essence, but the one, simple, and undivided essence of God that exists in three Persons.\(^\text{20}\) In order to clarify this doctrine of the irreducible oneness of the triune God, Calvin consistently uses this standardized language of divine simplicity throughout the Institutes and his commentaries. In the Institutes, he writes:

For in each hypostasis the whole divine nature is understood, with this qualification—that to each belongs His own peculiar quality.\(^\text{21}\)

This consistent language demonstrates how the essential divine attribute—later called aseity—plays a fundamental role in Calvin’s discussion of the unity that the Son and the Holy Spirit share with the Father.

Calvin’s reflections on divine simplicity and the Trinity are necessarily interrelated, as demonstrated when he quotes Gregory of Nazianzus:

I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendor of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one (I.13.17).\(^\text{22}\)

We see that for Calvin, it is important to understand, and hold together, both the oneness and threeness of God as revealed in the Bible. This necessary tension demands a focus on the distinctions between one essence and three Persons. In what follows we will explore Calvin’s use of the terms Una Essentia and Tres Personae in his articulation of trinitarian monotheism, as well as his use of unitas (unity) and simplicitas (simplicity) in describing the relation of the Persons to the essence of God.

\(^{19}\) Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.2 (emphasis added): “Nam quum simplex et individual sit essentia Dei, qui totam in se continet […] quamvis sua proprietate distinctus […] se totum in Filio expressit […]Hae c porro distinctio non est essentiae.”

\(^{20}\) See Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.2. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF): “There is but one only, living, and true God […] In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance” (WCF, Chapter 2, I. III).

\(^{21}\) Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.19; OS3: 132: “Siquidem in unaquaque hypostasi tota intelligitur natura, cum hoc, quod subset sua uniuique proprietas.” Cf. Institutes (1541), p. 211: “For all the divine nature must be understood to be in each Person, with the characteristic which is fitting for each other.”

\(^{22}\) Calvin also cites this phrase of Gregory of Nazianzus as an important reflection on the unity of the Trinity in his commentaries: i.e., John 1:1. See also Erik Alexander de Boer (ed.), Ioannis Calvini Varia: Congrégations et Disputations (Geneva: Droz, 2014), COR VII/1.
Una Essentia (One Essence), Tres Personae (Three Persons)

Let us begin by looking at the term “essence,” derived from the Latin *essentia*, which refers to the “whatness” or quiddity of a thing—it is those properties that make a “being” precisely what it is in itself (*per se*), and not something else; whereas substance (*substantia*) indicates simply what a thing is. Thus, *substantia* (what a thing is) is distinguished from *essence* (what it is in itself). *Essence* is commonly used by Christian and Muslim theologians when describing God as one, simple and undivided. Hence, it came to mean more or less what it means in the Greek: *ousia* (being). With this working definition, the language of “essence” was adopted to describe the three *Persons (personae)* in the divine *essence/ousia* (being of God/Godhead) in the early Christian and the Reformation doctrine of God. Calvin’s position on divine simplicity in relation to the Trinity can be located in the 1536 edition of his *Institutes*, particularly in his discussion “of Christian faith, where the Apostles’ Creed is explained.” In this section Calvin attempts to deal with the confusions over the use of the terms *ousia, hypostaseis, essentia, and persona* to describe the triune God in the context of the sixteenth century:

Persons who are not contentious or stubborn see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be one God. For the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God; and there can be only one God […] three are named, three described, three distinguished [*tres nominantur, tres describuntur, tres distinguuntur*]. One therefore, and three: one God, one essence [*Unus itaque, et tres, unus Deus, una essentia*] […] not three gods, not three essences [*Non tres dii, non tres essentiae*]. To signify both, the ancient orthodox fathers said that there was one *ousia*, three *hypostaseis*, that is, one *substantia*, three *subsistentiae* in one *substantia* [*substiantiam unam, tres in una substantia subsistentias*] […] The heretics bark that *ousia, hypostaseis, essentia, persona*, are names invented by human decision, nowhere read or seen in the Scriptures. But since they cannot shake our conviction that three are spoken of, who are one God, what sort of squeamishness is it to disapprove of words that explain nothing else than what is attested and sealed by Scripture […] yet, […] we ought surely to seek from Scripture a rule for thinking and speaking […]. But what prevents us from explaining in clearer words those matters in Scripture which perplex and hinder our understanding, yet which faithfully

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24 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Triunity of God*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 173. Muller observes that the terms *substantia* and *essentia* are more or less equivalent in their application to God: “The individual being (substantia) of God is inseparable from the identity or whanness (essentia) that God is.”


26 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* of vol. 2: *God and Creation*, p. 298. We see in Bavinck’s work the usage of the fixed scheme: “There is in God but one being (ousia), one essence (essentia), one nature (*unitas naturae*); and there are three *Persons (personae)*, a Trinity of *Persons (personae)*. Within that being (ousia) these three *personae* are one, consubstantia, coessentia, and they reciprocally exist in each other.”

serve the truth of Scripture itself, and are made use of sparingly and modestly and not at the wrong occasion?28

In this quotation we see Calvin’s clear defense of the distinction between essence-appropriate and Persons-appropriate. In short, according to Calvin, in terms of essence or ousia, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one and the same God of Himself (a se)—“the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God”—but in relation to Persons or hypostaseis, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three distinct subsistences (subsistentiae)—“three are named, three described, three distinguished.” The distinction between Father, the Son, and the Spirit does not divide God into “three essences,” but signifies the Persons or hypostaseis in “one essentia”—“there can be only One God.”29 As such, if each Person is identical to God of Himself (aseitas), then a unity of essence is maintained.

At this juncture, this brief survey demonstrates that Calvin’s vocabulary for the concept of one essence is rooted in the classical doctrine of God.30 Now, in order to apprehend the complex relationship of the unity and the Trinity of God, we must also try to answer the following questions: What is the meaning of Person? And what is the relation between essence and Person? In Latin, persona fundamentally means a “mask;” which was used to describe the role of an “actor.”31 In other words, it refers “to the condition, quality, or capacity in which a person acted, and in jurisprudence it meant a person’s standing before the law.”32 At a later stage, Person began to be used to express both the self-existent and rational nature.33 However, basically, the definition of the term Persona (interchangeable usage with the Greek terms, hypostasis or prosopon) was used by Christian theologians not as a “mode of existence of finite being,” but rather a “subsistentia,” an essential feature of the quality of self-existence. The theological use of the term personae (plural form of persona) begins with Tertullian, who used it for describing the distinct relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as three hypostases, sharing one ousia (Cf. I.13.6). As indicated earlier, the Christians’ view of God, according to the classical formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity that is confessed in the Athanasian Creed (in the late fifth or early sixth century), is as follows:

We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; […] for the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but is all one God, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.

A similar trinitarian formula is operational in Calvin’s thought: “Our conviction [is] that three [personae] are spoken of, each of which is entirely God, yet that there is not more

29 Cf. Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.12.3: Calvin writes, “If we wish to have one God, we should remember that we must not pluck away even a particle of His glory and that He must retain what is His own. Therefore Zechariah, when he speaks of the restoration of the church, eloquently asserts not only that ‘God will be one’ but also that ‘His name will be one’ [Zech. 14:9 p.], in order no doubt that He may have nothing in common with idols.”
30 See Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600), pp. 211-225.
31 Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics of vol. 2: God and Creation, p. 301.
32 Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics of vol. 2: God and Creation, p. 301. Cf. Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 4, p. 177: Muller indicates, persona “might come from the Chaldaic roots prm, ‘a garment,’ or prs, ‘to divide or make distinct’; or from the Greek perizomuo; or prosopon.”
33 See Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.2-4, and Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics of vol. 2: God and Creation, pp. 301-302: According to Bavinck, the term persona expressed two things: self-existence and rationality. Bavinck points out that this is its meaning in scholasticism, as well as in the works of the older Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed dogmatics.
than one God” (I.13.2; cf. OS3: 110). Thus, the term Person is used by Christians not in the modern sense of “individual persons,” which are distinct from one another in self-existence and rationality. In contrast, when the term Person is used to refer to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it points to the fact that there are real “distinctions” of three Persons (or three subsistences or three prosopa), but not a distinction of ousia or essence. In other words, Christian theologians affirm the irreducible unity in terms of ousia in God of Himself and the real distinctions among the three Persons in God of Himself. However, given the categories and framework of modern thought, such an interpretation of three Persons without multiplying the one essence hardly seems plausible. Thus, we must not read Person with the contemporary understanding of “individual person.”

Generally, a distinction is made between the nature of a human person and the person himself/herself. For example, when we say that Socrates was a philosopher in Athens, Plato was a philosopher in Athens, and Aristotle was a philosopher in Athens, does it mean that they are not three Athenians philosophers, but only one? We know the answer is “no.” Although Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all possess the same human nature, as individual persons they are each distinct and separated from that nature and from each other. Or, to put it in another way, “Human beings, one in one essence, are numerically many.” Nevertheless, the trinitarian claim of the three Persons (Greek term hypostaseis/prosopa) in God’s essence is not the same as how individual persons are generally understood. In the triune God, the term Persons is understood differently. Following Gregory of Nazianzus, Calvin writes,

> Let us not, then, be led to imagine a Trinity of Persons that keeps our thoughts distracted and does not at once lead them back to that unity. Indeed, the words “Father,” “Son,” and “Spirit” imply a real distinction—let no one think that these titles, whereby God is variously designated from his works, are empty—but a distinction, not a division.

According to Calvin, the distinction between the divine essence and the three Persons in God have its mysterious aspect, in his words, “a distinction, not a division.” In other words, the three Persons are really distinct from each other (the Father is not the same Person as the Son, the Son is not the same Person as the Spirit), but they are not distinct in essence/ousia (they are the same in essence). This “distinction” is not a division of essence, but of Persons/hypostases (cf. I.13.2), or more precisely, “they (the three Persons) are differentiated by a peculiar quality [proprietate quadam esse distinctos]” as indicated earlier (cf. I.13.5). In other words, the proprietates of each of the three Persons must be distinguished from the divine attributes which the three share.

Calvin makes a careful distinction between the Persons through their relation to God’s essence. Such understanding of “a distinction, not a division” in three distinct Persons is shown clearly in many parts of Calvin’s Institutes. For example, with reference to the terminology of Person, Calvin uses the term ‘subsistence’ (subsistentia) simply as Person to distinguish God’s essence and his divine Persons.

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34 See Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.2 and Calvin’s commentary on Hebrews 1:3, below.
35 See Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics of vol. 2: God and Creation d, pp. 299-300; see also Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 4, p. 175.
36 As shown above, Calvin often quotes a passage from Gregory of Nazianzus to reflect on the Trinity.
37 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.17; cf. OS3: 131 “Veram certe distinctionem insinuant Patris, Filii, et Spiritus vocabula, […] sed distinctionem non divisionem.”
38 See Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics of vol. 2: God and Creation, p. 300. Bavinck asserts, “[w]hatever distinctions may exists in the divine being, they may not and cannot diminish the unity of the divine nature.” Cf. Calvin, Comm. Heb. 1:3, I will discuss Calvin’s exposition the term of hypothesis in his commentary on Hebrew 1:3, below.
Person, therefore, I call a “subsistence” in God’s essence, which, while related to the others, is distinguished by an incommunicable quality. By the term “subsistence” we would understand something different from “essence” \[essentiam\].

Calvin further clarifies the meaning of “distinctions among the three Persons, not a division in God”:

Indeed, this is not a distinction of essence, which it is unlawful to make manifold. Therefore, if the testimony of the apostle obtains any credence, it follows that there are in God three hypostases/Persons. […] for we shall presently prove that the Holy Spirit is God, and yet it is necessary for Him to be thought of as other than the Father.

These sorts of considerations only remind us that there are certain “distinctions” belonging to each Person which are not the same among the Persons of the Trinity. But we cannot apprehend what kind of “distinction” exists between the Persons of God. Similar to essence, such a definition of Person can seem paradoxical as well. God comprises three distinct Persons, but each of these is in fact an inseparable Person in God’s essence; each Person is in fact identical with the one divine essence. In addition, it is worth noting that, contrary to Plantinga’s analysis of the concept of the social Trinity, Calvin writes:

It is clear from our writings that we do not separate the Persons from the essence, but we distinguish among them while they remain within it. […] If the Persons had been separate from the essence, the reasoning of these men might have been probable; but in this way there would have been a Trinity of gods (or three divine members in the Trinity), not of Persons whom the one God contains in Himself […] For those who want to make a Trinity of these three—essence, Son, and Spirit—are plainly annihilating the essence of the Son and the Spirit; otherwise the parts joined together would fall apart, and this is faulty in any distinction. Finally, if Father and God were synonymous, thus would the Father be the deifier; nothing


41 This careful theological reflection formulated by Calvin of a “distinction among the three Persons, not a division in God” is crucial for all genuine Christians. This is indeed a labyrinthine or incomprehensible part of the central trinitarian doctrine which people often begin to solve by imagining possible analogies; but Calvin attempts to draw us to adore God’s glorious being, rather than speculation (cf. 1536, Chp. 2. Faith, p. 50). Some sought to resolve the central trinitarian problem by proposing the model of social trinitarian, such as Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., (see “The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity,” pp. 51-53 in which Plantinga explains that the “Father, Son, and Spirit are members one of another” […] each persona “possesses the whole generic divine essence and a persona essence that distinguishes that persona from the other two […] for the Father has essentially the property of being permanently related to the Son in an ineffable closeness akin to a parent/child relation…The Trinity has three ‘members’ but remains one God”). Some contemporary theologians, such as R. Scott Clark, attempt to explain the distinction in the ontological Trinity by indicating that “there are certain attributes which belong to each trinitarian persona which are not shared among the personae of the Trinity […] These properties, unique to each persona, distinguish (not separate) each persona from the others” (see R. Scott Clark, “The Splendor of the Three-in-One God: The Necessity and Mystery of the Trinity,” http://rscottclark.org/2012/09/the-splendor-of-the-three-in-one-god-the-necessity-and-mystery-of-the-trinity-2/ [accessed Sept-Dec 2014]). I would argue that these theories concentrate on presenting a coherent theory, rather than demonstrating the relevant biblical passages that warrant the Trinity. It is crucial for us to be aware that thinking of the distinction in certain attributes in personae or “members one of another” in the Trinity would fall into the danger of dividing the personae of the Trinity. In my opinion, the theories of Plantinga and Clark tend to be a major threat to the doctrine of divine simplicity. Thus, the concept of the social Trinity is incompatible with divine simplicity.

would be left in the Son but a shadow; and the Trinity would be nothing else but the conjunction of the one God with two created things. 

Indeed, Calvin’s main argument for the doctrine of the Trinity, as shown above, is obviously referring to his profound sense of the essence and consubstantiality of the distinct Persons. The Person of Son, and also the Person of Spirit, contains in Himself the whole essence of God (or God of Himself/aseitas). This is a vital aspect of the simplicitas Dei (even though Calvin does not use the term itself). Having quoted from Augustine, Calvin inserts a clear declaration on this subject (or a standardized phrase of the divine simplicity),

Christ with respect to Himself is called God; with respect to the Father, Son. Again, the Father with respect to Himself is called God; with respect to the Son, Father. In so far as He is called Father with respect to the Son, He is not the Son; in so far as He is called the Son with respect to the Father, He is not the Father; in so far as He is called both Father with respect to Himself, and Son with respect to Himself, He is the same God.

Another relevant term in relation to Person which deserves our attention is homoousios, one of the important theological concepts developed to protect the integrity of the divine simplicity. The Greek term homousious was used by Athanasius at the Council of Nicea to define Christ’s divinity as homoousios to the Father. This term was later applied by the Cappadocian Fathers to the Holy Spirit to define that both the Son and the Holy Spirit are the same in subsistence (homoousia) as God the Father. The term homousios is used by Calvin as a test of orthodoxy: “Here impiety boiled over when the Arians began most wickedly to hate and curse the word homoousios” (I.13.4). In Calvin’s words, the Nicene Fathers “truly affirmed that a Trinity of persons subsists in the one God, or, what was the same thing, subsists in the unity of God” (I.13.4). Notably, in light of the historical perception of the term homoousios, Calvin utters a word of caution, “Let them learn to beware, lest, when they have to resist Arians on the one hand and Sabellians on the other, while indignant that the opportunity to evade the issue is cut off, they arouse some suspicion that they are disciples either of Arius or of Sabellius” (I.13.5) However, for those who hardly perceive the terms properly, Calvin suggests,

When we hear “one” we ought to understand “unity of substance;” when we hear “three in one essence,” the Persons in this Trinity are meant.

Hence, what we have to confess here is: The Father is God, the Son (Jesus Christ) is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, though they are three distinct Persons (homoousios), yet they are one

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43 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.25.
44 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.19.
45 See the Nicene Creed (AD 325): “We believe in one God […] and in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only begotten, that is, from the ousia of the Father, God from God, […] begotten not made, homoousia with the Father, […]”
46 See Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600), pp. 200-225.
47 See Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.20; see also François Wendel, Calvin: The Origins and Development, p. 165.n47: François Wendel indicates that “apart from the Institutes, Calvin’s most complete treatises are his Declaration for the maintenance of true faith held by all Christians, of the Trinity of Persons in one God, against the detestable errors of Michael Servetus, Opp., 8, pp. 453-644.” Michael Servetus (1511-1553) who rejected the trinitarian doctrine has been identified by Calvin as an Arianist (I.13.22).
48 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.5; cf. OS3: 116: “quum unum audimus, intelligendam esse substantiae unitatem […] quum tres audimus in una essentia, personas notari in hac Trinitate.”
and the same substance (substantia/ousia) in God. Consequently, Calvin’s definition of “una essentia, tres personae” safeguards monotheistic and trinitarian doctrinal claims. Having gained an overall understanding of the relation between essence and Persons, there are a few more terms related to the definition of essence which require our attention. To these I now turn.

The Plurality of Divine Names/Attributes and Divine Simplicity: We begin by exploring Calvin’s usage of the names of God (nomina Dei) and divine attributes (attributa divina). Calvin asserts, “He calls the Father the beginning of all deity, because He is from no one; and wisely considers that this divine name is especially ascribed to the Father, because if the beginning comes not from Him, the simple unity of God (simplex Dei unitas) cannot be conceived” (1.13.29; OS3: 151). Another example, in his commentary on Psalm 83:18: “Thy name Jehovah יְהוָה,” Calvin comments,

His sacred name Jehovah יְהוָה […] implies that being / essence, or really to be, is in a strict sense applicable to God alone. [...] When the Prophet attributes to the God of Israel, as well as essence of Deity as the name (nomina); for unless all the idols of the heathen are completely abolished, he will not obtain, alone and unshared, the name of Jehovah יְהוָה.

For Calvin, God cannot give His divine name to others. This divine name belongs only to God in and of Himself. Herein Calvin’s interest in divine attributes as a term preferable to the divine names is shown; and he believes that while we cannot comprehend God’s essence, nonetheless God reveals something of it to us, which he refers to as divine attributes, especially the distinct divine attributes that represent God of Himself, such as His eternity (aeternitatem) and his self-existence (καὶ αὐτοσίαν). In light of the history of dogmatics, we understand that the divine essence (of God Himself) and the many attributes are distinct from one another, yet together they describe the one single essence of God. In his commentary on Romans 1:21, Calvin explicitly associates certain attributes (proprietates) as the characteristic marks of the one God, namely, eternity, power, wisdom, goodness, truth, righteousness, and mercy:

No conception of God can be formed without including His eternity, power, wisdom, goodness, truth, righteousness, and mercy. [...] Those, therefore, who have formed a conception of God ought to give Him the praise due to His eternity, wisdom, goodness, and justice. Since men have not recognized these attributes in God, but have conjured up an imaginary picture of Him as though He were an insubstantial phantom, they are justly said to have wickedly robbed Him of His own glory.

49 See R. Scott Clark, “The Splendor of the Three-in-One God,” (accessed Sept-Dec 2014). According to R. Scott Clark’s observation of the Trinity in Athanasian Creed, he says “whatever it is which makes the Father to be God, is that which makes the Son and the Spirit to be God.”


51 Paul Helm, Calvin: A Guide for the Perplexed, p. 39. As Paul Helm rightly observes, “So Calvin knows that God is eternal, self-existent and all-good, but he does not know what God is; he does not comprehend the divine essentia of which eternity, self-existence and complete goodness are aspects. Only God knows, in this comprehensive, immediate sense, what God is.”

52 Cf. Calvin, Institutes (1559), 1.13.7, 8, 9. Calvin indicates the everlasting Wisdom, eternity, highest power, and righteousness are the characteristic marks of the one God [quod unius Dei proprium est].

53 Calvin, Comm. Rom. 1:21, p. 32.
As shown above, for Calvin, these seven divine attributes demand that we worship and to glorify the only God. This plurality of attributes in God does not constitute many gods, but one single and incomparable God (e.g., Isa. 48:11). For example, in saying God is eternal, God is power, God is wise, God is good, God is truthful, God is just, God is love, Calvin does not say that these are seven attributes of parts of the essence of God, but of the one God. In Calvin’s discussion of the divine names and attributes in the Institutes 1.10.2, he indicates that each of God’s properties, such as kindness, goodness, mercy, and so forth are the union of all with his eternity and self-existence (καὶ αὐτούς ἐκαθαρίζει). Thus, for Calvin, the attributes of God do not multiply his essence, but are the indivisible unity and identity in God’s essence.

In fact, it is worth noting that Calvin often used the term “glory” or “majesty” as the most proper and natural attributes of God. For Calvin, God creates the world for his own glory: “God’s essence is incomprehensible; hence, His divineness far escapes all human perception. But upon His individual works He has engraved unmistakable marks (insignes) of His glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance” (I.5.1). It is the glory of God alone, as it is revealed to His creatures, that we can know. In connection to this, Calvin points to the Bible text: “the Lord is wrapped in light as with a garment” (Ps. 104:2); in commenting especially on the “garment”, Calvin says,

Thereafter the Lord began to show Himself in the visible splendour of His apparel, ever since in the creation of the universe He brought forth those insignia whereby He shows his glory to us. […] And since the glory of His power and wisdom shine more brightly above, heaven is often called his palace. […] The reason why the author of The Letter to the Hebrews elegantly calls the universe the appearance of things invisible is that this skilful ordering of the universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible. […] The apostle declares this more clearly: What men need to know concerning God has been disclosed to them for one and all gaze upon His invisible nature, known from the creation of the world, even unto His eternal power and divinity.

For Calvin, the insignes of God’s glory are His power (potentiae) and wisdom (sapientiae); and these two insignes (of God’s incomprehensive essence) are made knowable to human beings. As discussed earlier, these insignes seem to be parallel with the distinct proprietate quadam (property or quality) of the three Persons; and the wisdom and power refer to the Word (the Logos) and the Holy Spirit. In fact, Calvin in his commentary on Gen. 1:26 also

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54 Cf. Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, volume 2: God and Creation, p. 118. Bavinck writes, “Each attribute is identical with God’s being: He is what He possesses.”

55 In my opinion and observation, Calvin’s usage of “the glory of God” in the Institutes refers to the essentia of God as one. It came to my knowledge later that the same observation is made by Parker and Alexandre Ganoczy. See T. H. L. Parker, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1969), p. 82: “That God reveals His glory means: God reveals Himself as God;” see also Alexandre Ganoczy, The Young Calvin, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), pp. 188-189: Ganoczy indicates, “One may assert without hesitation that for Calvin ‘glory to God alone’ is the foremost and most basic principle, under whose aegis he undertakes his entire reform program.”

56 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.5.1 (emphasis added); cf. O33: 45-46: “Et quoniam plenius sursum refulget potentiae et sapientiae eius Gloria […] invisibilium rerum spectacula […] ad aeternam asque eius virtutem et divinitatem.”

57 See Calvin, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996). In Col. 1: 15, Calvin comments, “let us note that the word ‘image’ us not use of His essence, but has a reference to us. For Christ is the image of God because He makes God in a manner visible to us. At the same time, we gather also from this His ὄμοιωσία, for Christ would not truly represent God if He were not the essential Word of God. […] For in Christ He shos us His righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power, in short, His entire self” (p. 308).
distinguishes between the essential wisdom of God, common to all Persons of the Trinity and the biblical hypostatization of “Wisdom.”

Aseitas (God of Himself): Another important notion that requires our attention is aseity. Bavinck informs us,

Scholasticism [e.g., Anselm and Thomas] as a whole fell in line with this view, also treating this attribute [independence of God] under the name of the “infinity” or “spiritual greatness” of God, or under that of the “aseity” of God, meaning that as the “supreme substance,” God is “what He is through or by His own self.” Later Roman Catholic theologians as a rule also proceeded from this aseity or independence. In this regard the Reformation [e.g., Luther and Melanchton] introduced no change.

Calvin, too, on the name of YHWH, described God as the absolutely existent one and as “spiritual essence.” In the Institutes I.10.2 and I.14.3, Calvin clearly ascribes the important attribute of “self-existence” (αὐτουσἰα, or rendered as aseitas) to characterize the incomparable God as distinct from all idols: “For, since nothing is more characteristic of God than eternity and self-existence—that [αὐτουσἰα]—that is, existence of Himself [a se ipso existentia], so to speak—do not those who attribute this to the devil in a sense adorn Him with the title of divinity?” Here, Calvin identifies the eternity and self-existence of God as one of the most remarkable attributes to witness to the essence of God, and these attributes also witness to the deity and eternity of Christ (I.13.7-13) and the Holy Spirit (I.13.14-15). For this reason, it is safe to say that the divine attributes and names are a plurality of properties in our knowledge of God, but the incomparable simplicity of the divine attributes is determinative for His essence.

Again, this concept of aseity in each Person of the Trinity, stressing the equality of the Persons, emerged from Calvin’s discussions of the unity and the Trinity of God in light of the equality of the Spirit of Christ and the Father. The equality of the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God (without any distinction in God’s essence) is a key concept for Calvin in discussing the oneness of God. In Calvin’s thought, the Holy Spirit is not only equal with the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God, but is also of “one essence and the same eternal divinity” in God. In Calvin’s words:

The Spirit is sometimes referred to as the Spirit of God the Father, and sometimes as the Spirit of Christ without distinction. This is not only because His whole fullness was poured on Christ as our Mediator and Head, […] but also because the same spirit is common to the Father and the Son, who have one essence, and the same eternal deity.

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58 See the discussion of “properties” that are peculiar to the Persons of the Trinity in light of Calvin’s commentary on Gen. 1:26, below. See also Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 3, p. 386: Muller indicates, “the Reformed orthodox also recognize a distinction between the biblical hypostatization of Wisdom, traditionally identified as the Logos or Word, and the attribute of wisdom often predicated of God is Scripture without any personal implication.”

59 Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, volume 2: God and Creation, p. 151.

60 See the analysis of Calvin’s commentary on Exodus 34: 6-7 below.


62 Cf. discussion on Rom. 8:9 below.

63 Calvin, Comm. Rom. 8:9, pp. 164-165, and CTS. Rom. 8:9, pp. 369-370; cf. COR13.8:9.160-161; CO49: 145: “sed quoniam idem Spiritus Patris et Fili communis est, quorum una est essentia, et eadem aeterna deitas.” I will discuss this passage below.
The aseity of the Son and the Holy Spirit has proven to be important aspect of Calvin’s thought, for each Person shares the same one essence as the Father, and each Person is God of Himself or “tota natura.” As a result, the unity of essence is maintained.64

5.2.3 A Concluding Summary

In speaking of the unity of God (unitas Dei) and simplicity of God (simplicitas Dei), Calvin carefully uses the above terms to address our research question: How does Calvin relate the oneness of God’s essence to the plurality of divine attributes (and the three divine Persons)? Having affirmed God’s essentiae unitas in the exclusive sense of God, Calvin insists that “when we hear ‘one’ we ought to understand ‘unity of substance’” (I.13.5).65 Calvin also points out that the Christian confession of the divine unity emphasizes the irreducible oneness of the triune God.66 For example, Calvin refers to the early Christian theologians who “loudly responded that three properties must truly be recognized in the one God […] that a Trinity of Persons subsists in the one God, or, what was the same thing, subsists in the unity of God” (I.13.4). Calvin also asserts: “Therefore, since that there is one God, not more, is regarded as a settled principle, we conclude that Word (the Son) and Spirit are nothing else than the very essence of God” (I.13.16). Apparently, for Calvin, this inclusive aspect of the divine unity (unitas Dei) was the guarantee of the unity of the Trinity.

Furthermore, Simplicitas Dei denotes the absolute perfection and independence of God’s attributes, which means that God is loving, God is wise, God is omnipotent, God is omniscient, God is omnibenevolent—and this is true of other divine attributes—but God is not the sum of the divine attributes (as that would pluralize the oneness of essence), but God is His attribute(s). To put it in another way, God’s attributes are identical with and inseparable from His essence.67 Such an understanding of the divine simplicity in relation to the divine attributes is adopted by Calvin as well. Arie Baars indicates that “Calvin underscores the unity of God’s being in several ways. In this connection he uses words such as unity (unitas), being ‘undivided,’ and simplicity (simplicitas). With these words, he wants to indicate the following. Within the being of God, there can be no question of any kind of separation or division”68 in conjunction with the affirmation that the externally directed works of the Trinity are “undivided” (“Opera Trinitatis Ad Extra Sunt Indivisa”).69 To this I now turn.
5.3 Divine Simplicity in Calvin’s Commentaries and the Institutes

5.3.1 Preliminary Remarks

The preceding section has defined the meanings of *essentia, personae, attributa Dei, unitas Dei* and *simplicitas Dei* and also pointed out Calvin’s scattered usage of these terms in his *Institutes* and commentaries. As noted, the overall aim of this dissertation is to understand Calvin’s doctrine of divine simplicity with particular reference to God’s self-existence (aseity) in the Trinity, and to show that Calvin’s theory of divine simplicity must be understood as a cause in the triune God that each *Person* is the self-existence of God. As stated earlier, those who attempt to understand Calvin’s views on the relationship of divine *simplicitas* to the divine *attributes* and *Persons* of the Trinity from the *Institutes* alone will be somewhat disappointed by Calvin’s sparse attention to this doctrine in that work. But, as Muller rightly points out, “Calvin elaborates at considerable length on these issues in his commentaries.” Muller also explains that for Calvin, “divine simplicity functions [… ] as a biblical revealed divine attribute and as a basic rule of God language identifying as God non-composite, particularly for the sake of a right understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the unity.” For this reason we continue our investigation by turning to the most fundamental texts that Calvin chooses to discuss divine simplicity in his commentaries, also in connection with his *Institutes*.

Obviously, there is not sufficient space in this chapter for an extensive study of Calvin’s commentaries and all the Bible texts where Calvin discusses divine simplicity and related issues. Hence, I have restricted my analysis to the following passages which appear to be the most representative and significant texts in Calvin’s development of his trinitarian doctrine: Rom. 8:9-11; Eph. 4:5-6; Heb. 1 and 11:3; John 1; Gen. 1; Matt. 28:19; Exod. 3:14; Dan. 7:13, and Ezek. 1:25-26. I do not intend to make structural claims about the way in which these texts shaped the doctrine of divine simplicity in Calvin’s *Institutes*. I merely suggest that there are theological links between these texts and the distinctive emphasis on this doctrine in Calvin’s commentaries. These selective texts will be examined in the historical order of Calvin’s commentaries. Subsequently, this examination also enables us to encounter Calvin’s polemics with theological opponents in different periods of his life concerning this particular doctrine of God (including Pierre Caroli, Michael Servetus, Giovanni Valentino Gentilis, and Giorgio Blandrata of Piedmont). The table below provides a synopsis of the content in the following sections:

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70 See Section 5.2.1 Textual Considerations above.
71 Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, p. 153.
72 Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, p. 274; cf. McKee, “Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin’s Institutio: A Methodological Suggestion,” pp. 154-172: McKee indicates, “Many scholars remind their readers that Calvin was also a great exegete, […] too often, however, these two aspects (Calvin’s *Institutes* and commentaries) of the reformer’s work are treated separately, and the exegetical (and other) works are neglected in favour of the orderly and comprehensive textbook, the *Institutes*” (p. 154).
73 These include Gen. 1; Exod. 3:14, 20:3, 34:6-7; Ps. 45:6; Isa. 6:1, 9:6, 44:6; Ezek. 1:25-26; Dan. 7:13; Joe. 2:32; Zech. 13:7; Matt. 28:19; Luke 1-2; John 1, 4:24, 5:32, 8:16, 14:10 and 16, 15:26, 17:5; Acts. 2:21; Rom. 8:9-11, 14:11; 1 Cor. 8:4-6, 12:4-6, 11; Eph. 4:5-6; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1, 11:3; 1 Pet. 1:10-11; 2 Pet. 1:21; James 1:17; and other important texts.
74 For a discussion about the controversy between Calvin and Giovanni Valentino Gentilis, see Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, pp. 165-167, and Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, pp. 52-54. Also, Gijsbert van den Brink, “Calvin and the Early Christian Doctrine of the Trinity,” in Henk van den Belt, ed., *Restoration through Redemption: John Calvin Revisited* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 15-30. Van den Brink points to the critical remark about the content of the Creed by Calvin in *Expositio impietatis Valentini Gentilis* (CO 9: 368): “But the words of the Council of Nicea resound ‘God from God.’ This is a hard saying, I acknowledge. However, no one is better able to remove any ambiguity or a more capable interpreter
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<th>Sermons</th>
<th>The Institutes</th>
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In what follows, I will examine Calvin’s commentaries on these selected texts, with attention to the various editions of the Institutes, the parallel sermons, the congrégations, and his theological opponents, wherever necessary. When relevant, I will also address historical circumstances that affected Calvin’s writings.

5.3.2 Discourse of the Divine simplicity in Calvin’s Expositions (1536-1539): Romans 8:9-11 (1536-1539/1540, 1556)

This section will focus on Calvin’s exposition of Romans 8:9-11, exploring Calvin’s theological link between divine simplicity and the perichoresis of the Spirit.

than Athanasius, who dictated it. And certainly the counsel of the Fathers was no other than that the Son in terms of origin is led out from the Father as far as his Person is concerned; it was in no way to oppose his being-of-the-same-essence and deity. And do, according to his essence, he is the Word of God without beginning; according to his Person, however, the Son has a beginning from the Father” (p. 20).


The young Calvin composed the first edition of his commentary on Romans (1536-1539/1540) after his trinitarian debates with Pierre Caroli (b. 1480, d. after 1545) in the cathedral of Lausanne on May 2, 1537. Seventeen years later Calvin revised his third and final edition of the commentary on Romans (1556), after his polemic work against the antitrinitarian theologian Michael Servetus (1511-1553) at Geneva in 1553. Given that the goal of his biblical commentary was “brevity,” Calvin does not make a polemic, that was directed at the contemporary situation, a central goal of his exposition. However, in places or sections where Calvin senses that potentially heretical explanations of a certain passage may be possible, he addresses them briefly. Moreover, it is important to consider how his comments on Romans interacted with his writing of the Institutes (1536, 1539/1541, and 1559). In the Institutes of 1536, Calvin uses Rom. 8:9-11 as a clear pericope to explain the equality and distinctiveness of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father and the Son in the Trinity.

Paul most clearly of all explained this whole mystery [referring to the confession of triune God], when He without distinction referred to the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead. For if there is one Spirit of the Father and of the Son, Father and Son must be one. Again, it is fitting that the Spirit Himself be “one” with the Father and the Son, since no one is different from His own spirit.

We see in the final edition of Calvin’s Institutes (1559) that he retained a large portion of the text of the 1536 Institutes and 1539/1541 Institutes to support his argument:

For this reason, the Son is said to come forth from the Father alone; the Spirit, from the Father and the Son at the same time. This appears in many passages, but nowhere more clearly than in chapter 8 of Romans, where the same Spirit is indifferently called sometimes the Spirit of abbreviated as Comm. Rom. and cited according to chapter number, and page number; and Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1947). Hereafter abbreviated as CTS. Rom., and cited according to page reference. Parenthetical references to the Latin text of Calvin’s commentaries will follow, taken from CO or COR. After having arrived in Geneva and served as a “reader in Holy Scripture,” Calvin began his lectures on the Pauline Epistles in 1536 (See Jean-François Gilmont, John Calvin and the Printed Book, pp. 45-46). It was most likely that Calvin contemplates writing his first commentary of Romans in 1536, when he sought refuge in Basel (See Calvin, Comm. Rom., pp. 1-4; cf. COR13, 7; and Wulfert de Greef, The Writings of John Calvin, pp. 75-76; cf. COR13, p. XI). We cannot be certain when Calvin actually wrote his commentary on Romans, but we can be certain that the original Latin version was likely completed between the early summer of 1536 and October 1539. It was first published in Strasbourg in March, 1540, and the final revised version was published in 1556 (see COR13, pp. XII-XVI).


See Calvin, Comm. Rom., p. 3.

Pierre Caroli’s name is not mentioned in Calvin’s Commentary on Romans, but there are some allusions in the text which suggest that Calvin very much aware of Caroli in writing the commentary.

Or as an entry key that give access to the hidden mystery of the Trinity. As shown in Calvin’s foreword to his commentary on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: “When any one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.”

Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 45.
Christ [v. 9], sometimes the Spirit of Him “who raised up Christ […] from the dead” [v. 11]— and not without justification.  

However, the changing theological situation in Calvin’s debates with Servetus between 1548 and 1556 influenced the summary of some polemical passages in the final edition of Calvin’s *Commentary on Romans* (1556) and the *Institutes* (1559). Thus, we see in his comments on Rom. 1:3 and Rom. 8:9 that he turns these two verses against Servetus:  

In addition, Paul not only declares that Christ had real flesh by these expressions, but he also clearly distinguishes between Christ’s human and divine nature, thus refuting the blasphemous nonsense of Servetus, who assigned to Christ flesh that was composed of three uncreated elements.

Now they [Servetus and others] are compelled from their own presupposition to concede that the Spirit is of the Father alone, because if He is a derivation from the primal essence, which is proper only to the Father, He will not rightly be considered the Spirit of the Son. *Yet this is disproved by Paul’s testimony, where he makes the Spirit common to Christ and the Father [Rom. 8:9].*

The above comparative survey suggests that in his earlier theology (1536-1539), Calvin began to view Rom. 8:9-11 as an essential text for understanding the equality of the three distinct *Persons* through the *perichoresis* of the Holy Spirit. The attention devoted to this text both in his earlier commentary on Romans and the later editions of the *Institutes* (1559) reflects its importance to Calvin for understanding the unity of the Trinity.

Calvin uses Rom. 8:9-11 to clarify the distinction of the three *Persons* while maintaining their unity. Calvin’s exegetical comments on this pericope should be understood as an interrelated dialogue between the *Institutes* and *Romans*. This is especially so, because a large portion of the text of the commentary remains in the 1536 *Institutes*. When Calvin expounds this pericope in his commentary, he remarks on verse 9:

The Spirit is sometimes referred to as the Spirit of God the Father, and sometimes as the Spirit of Christ without distinction. This is not only because His whole fullness was poured on Christ as our Mediator and Head, so that each one of us might receive from Him his own portion, but also because the same Spirit is common to the Father and the Son, who have one essence, and the same eternal deity.

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82 Calvin, *Institutes* (1559), I.13.18; cf. OS3: 132. Indeed, this portion is inserted from *Institutes* French 1541 or Latin 1539, see *Institutes* (1541), pp. 210-211: “For that reason the Son is said to be produced by the Father; the Spirit by both Father and Son, something often repeated in Scripture but more clearly in the eight chapter of Romans than any other passage; there the Holy Spirit is sometimes called the Spirit of Christ, sometimes the Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead, without distinction.” Calvin only added a passage of 1 Peter 1:11 in *Institutes* (1559), I.13.18: this “also testifies that it was by the Spirit of Christ that the prophets prophesied, even though Scripture often teaches that it was the Spirit of God the Father.”

83 See the similar remark in COR13, p. XVI. Parker indicates the reference to Michael Servetus (a new treatment to the controversy about the Trinity) only occurs in Calvin’s latest edition of this commentary in 1556.

84 Calvin, *Comm. Rom.* 1:3, p. 16; cf. COR13. 1:3:16; CO49: 10: “Porro his verbis non modo veram carnis essentiam Christo asserit Paulus, sed humanam in eo naturam a divina clare distinguat: atque ita refutat impium Serveti delirium, quia carmen affixit Christo ex tribus increatis elementis compositum.” I will take up Calvin’s debate with Servetus in detail in Section 5.3.3 on Genesis 1 (1550-1553/1554).


Calvin’s comments show that Rom. 8:9-11 is crucial to the interchangeability (perichoresis) of the Spirit of Christ and of God the Father, and to the identification of the Spirit Himself as the one divine essence. Calvin insists, however, that we must not distinguish the Spirit from one and the same eternal divinity of the Father and of the Son. What makes the distinctions in the Trinity is the economics and Person of the Spirit. To the minds of Calvin’s opponents (especially Servetus), this distinction of God’s Persons was confused with the distinction of God’s essence, Servetus maintained that the Spirit is “a derivation from the primal essence,” which is the only “essence giver” (I.13.23). For Calvin this meant that to his opponents the Spirit was not equal to the Father in relation to His essence. He saw this confusion regarding the distinction between “God’s Persons” and “God’s essence” as the heritage of heretics. Calvin answered the confusion of his opponents with the following argument: There is no distinction in divine essence. If there was, there would be three separated essences of God. Although the connection of the Spirit with the Father and the Son is inseparable—“without distinction” between them in relation to God’s essence “(called sometimes the Spirit of God the Father, and sometimes the Spirit of Christ)”—there is “one essence and the same eternal deity” between the three Persons. Calvin also explains this in the Institutes I.13.19: “The Son is one God with the Father because He shares with the Father one and the same Spirit; and that the Spirit is not something other than the Father and different from the Son, because he is the Spirit of the Father and the Son.” For Calvin, Rom. 8 also indicates that the Spirit is not only coequal with the Father and the Son in terms of essence, but also in terms of being a distinct Person from the Father and the Son. Such understanding is shown clearly in Calvin’s comments to Rom. 8:9-11, in which he states that the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit who gives life to the law,” “the Spirit of regeneration,” “the Spirit of regeneration life,” and that “the Spirit retains eternal power.” These titles of the Holy Spirit suggest His own peculiar property (or proprietas).

5.3.3 Discourse of the Divine simplicity in Calvin’s Expositions (1540-1552): Ephesians 4:5-6; Hebrews 1:3 and 11:3

a. Ephesians 4:5-6 (1548/1558-59)88

In this section, our concern is to explore how Calvin’s uses Eph. 4:5-6 as one of the passages, which he paired with the baptismal formula of Matt. 28:19 in his Institutes to defend the oneness of God in relation to his trinitarian doctrine. In order for us to gain an understanding of Calvin’s full treatment of Eph. 4:5-6, we need to study his Commentary on Ephesians

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and his sermon on Ephesians (1558-1559), through which we will also see the theological issue emerged in Calvin’s view of divine simplicity.

Calvin uses Eph. 4:5-6 as a much stronger argument to defend the Trinity of Persons and to put Arians and Sabellians to silence. For Calvin, this text clearly indicates the oneness (one essence) and threeness (three Persons) of God. The Bible text of “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God” shows that

\[ \text{One Lord [Unus Dominus]: [...] Whenever you read this word ‘one’ here, understand it as emphatic, as if he said ‘Christ cannot be divided; faith cannot be rent; there are not various baptisms, but one common to all; God cannot be divided into parts [God cannot cease to be one, and unchangeable. [...] The unity of faith, which is here mentioned, depends on the one eternal truth of God, on which it is founded.} \]

\[ \text{One baptism [Unum baptisma]: [...] one baptism is common to all, [...] a much stronger one [argument] will be that the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, are one God; for it is one baptism, which is sanctified by the triune Name. [...] We must necessarily acknowledge that the ordinance of baptism proves the three Persons in one essence of God [tres personas in una Dei essentia].} \]

\[ \text{One God and Father [Unus Deus et Pater]: This is the main argument, from which all the rest flow. Whence comes faith? Whence baptism? Whence the government of Christ. [...] By the Spirit of sanctification, God pours Himself forth through all the members of the Church, embraces all in His government, and dwells in all. But God is not consistent with Himself, and therefore we cannot but be united together into one.} \]

For Calvin, Paul here links the unity of the Church to the triune God—“one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father.” Hence, it is an important proof for Calvin to demonstrate the oneness of the triune God in mirroring the unity of His church. The repetition of the notion of “one” in Eph. 4:5 shows the constant affirmation of the singularity of God in Calvin’s doctrine of God. The singularity of God is essentially identical with the confession of one God, one faith, and one baptism. As shown above, Calvin explains “one Lord” as the lordship of Christ in the Church, who “cannot be divided” and ought to “unite us;” and it is because “the unity of faith” depends on “the one eternal truth of God,” than “faith cannot be rent.” Furthermore, “there are not various baptisms” but “one baptism.” Thus, “we are initiated into one soul and one body.” Here, in Eph. 4:5, Calvin explains that “one baptism” is also signifying the oneness of the triune God: “the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, are one God; for it is one baptism, which is sanctified by the triune Name. [...]”

89 Calvin probably begun his collected commentary work on the Pauline Epistles of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians by October 1546, completed it by February 1548 (the date of the dedication), and published in Geneva in the same year (See Introduction and The Dedicatory Epistle in Comm. Eph., pp. v, 1-2.). Later this collected work of the Pauline Epistles was slightly revised in 1551, and thoroughly revised in 1556 (Comm. Eph., p. v). But, notably, there was no change in the text of Eph. 4:5-6 between the 1548 and 1556 versions. Additionally, Calvin also preached 48 sermons on Ephesians in 1558 and 1559 (See Comm. Eph., p. v).

91 Calvin, Comm. Eph. 4:5, pp. 172-173; cf. CTS. Eph. 4:5, p. 269; COR16: 221. I will move back and forth between the two English translations of Calvin’s commentary based on varying levels of faithfulness to the original.
92 Calvin, Comm. Eph. 4:5, p. 173; cf. CTS. Eph. 4:5, pp. 269-270; COR16: 221.
93 Calvin, Comm. Eph. 4:5, p. 173; cf. CTS. Eph. 4:5, pp. 269-270; COR16: 221-222.
94 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.16; cf. Institutes (1536), p. 44: Calvin used Eph. 4:5 as one the important scripture passages to support the first three parts of the Creed in his first Institutes (1536, pp. 44-58) to vindicate the oneness of God through a reverent discussion of the Trinity.
Baptism possesses such force as to make us one; and in baptism, the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is invoked. Will they (Arians and Sabellians) deny that it is one Godhead who is the foundation of this holy and mystic unity?” Again, he asserts that “We must necessarily acknowledge that the ordinance of baptism proves the three Persons in one essence of God.”

Above all, God of Himself is a triune God, the foundation of “the spiritual unity,” thus, “we cannot but be united together into one.”

Considering the purpose and aim of this present chapter, it is necessary for me to further explore the “fuller treatment” of Calvin’s trinitarian doctrine as shown in his preaching on Eph. 4:5 at Geneva in 1558-59. When turning to “one baptism,” Calvin preaches that

By baptism we put on Jesus Christ and are joined to Him, […] in which the name of Jesus Christ is always invoked, as He is our redeemer. We are baptized in the name of the Father, as the author of our salvation; in the name of the Son, as of Him who has performed all that belonged to our redemption; and in the name of the Holy Spirit, by whom we are sanctified, to possess and enjoy the incomprehensible benefits that are purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Calvin continues to try his best to make the spiritual doctrine “visible” by elaborating the “visible sign” in “one baptism” in the following way:

But the apostle brings us back to this visible sign, by which God represents Himself to us, according to the infirmity of our flesh. For in baptism we see the water, which shows us that we are washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. For since by nature we are unclean, and utterly rejected and cursed by God, in the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ we are reconciled to God His Father, and through Him are called to the glory of heaven and renewed by the power of His Holy Spirit.

After preaching on the text of “one Lord, one faith, and one baptism,” Calvin concludes that all these point toward the triune God. Calvin asks, “What is God?” and continues to answer this question with his standardized phrase of the divine simplicity (as already indicated earlier): God is the triune One—“God is not only the Father, but Jesus Christ is joined with Him, and also the Holy Spirit. So then, let us note that there is truly a unity in the essence of God, and that although there is distinction of Persons, yet God is neither separated nor divided in Himself.” There is but one baptism in the triune Names; moreover, this baptismal formula depicts the redemption of the triune God, who accomplishes the trinitarian redemption: the Father as “the author of salvation,” the Son as “the redeemer,” and the Holy Spirit as “the sanctifier.” But notably, what is remarkable here is that Calvin places the Son (Christ) in the center of redemption, through Him alone we will be united with the triune God and others members of the church. This exploration echoes with his commentaries on 1 Cor. 1:10-13. Those who are united to Christ are also united to the triune God and are therefore one.

95 Calvin, Comm. Eph. 4:5, p. 173; cf. CTS. Eph. 4:5, pp. 269-270; COR16: 221.
96 Calvin, Sermons on Eph. 22: 4:1-5, pp. 328-332, cf. S. besonders Calvins Sermon 22 sur ‘l’Epitre aux Ephésiens in CO51: 521-525. Calvin’s sermons were first printed in French in 1562, then later in English in 1577 by Arthur Golding. The present revised text is based on the English translation in 1577.
100 Calvin, Comm. 1 Cor. 1:10-13, p. 30: For the question of “why does Paul say that the Corinthians have been baptized in the name of Christ, when Christ Himself directed the apostles to baptize in the triune Names,” Calvin answers “that God the Father, having placed us by His unmerited goodness in His Church,
Now, let us turn to the Institutes. In his first Institutes (1536), Calvin already developed his argument of this text together with Matt. 28:19,\textsuperscript{101} and then he brought forth the argument into his commentaries on Ephesians (1548/1556) and other editions of the Institutes (1539/1541 and 1559) to defend the oneness of the triune God, in which he elucidates:

We will bring forward only one proof but one that can stand for a thousand. Paul so connects these three—God, faith, and baptism, that one may reason from one to another. Because there is one faith, from it he proves there is one God; because there is one baptism, thence also he shows there to be one faith […] to look upon the one God, to be united with Him, to cleave to Him—from this it is easily established that if there are many faiths, there also must be many gods. […] Yet no one can confess faith, except in the one God. Therefore, as we are baptized into one faith, so our faith believes in one God. And baptism is one and faith is one, for that reason that both belong to the one God.\textsuperscript{102}

Calvin only slightly revised his understanding of the text in the Institutes (1539/1541) with the following remark:

from that it is clear that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are included in one same divine essence, since we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. […] Now if it ought to be taken as fixed among us that there is only one God, we conclude that the Son and the Holy Spirit are the divine essence itself. That is why the Arians went far astray in their ideas; while they conceded to Jesus Christ the title of God, they took away from Him the divine substance.\textsuperscript{103}

Calvin then inserted the passages from his earlier Institutes (1536, 1539/1541) and commentaries on Ephesians (1548/1556) into the Institutes (1559, I.13.16). In other words, Calvin’s full-blown articulation and explanation of the oneness the triune God is consistently shown throughout the various editions of his Institutes, commentaries, and sermons. In sum, for Calvin, the irreducible oneness of God is more clearly and known more familiarly in three Persons: “Moreover, because God more clearly disclosed Himself in the coming of Christ, thus He also became known more familiarly in three Persons” (I.13.16, Calvin inserted a clear declaration on this subject in the Institutes of 1559).\textsuperscript{104}

To summarize briefly, before I proceed to the next Bible text: our study on Calvin’s exposition of Eph. 4:5-6 shows the clear and inevitable strong argument of Calvin to defend the oneness of the triune God. On one hand, the distinction of three Persons within one God had been intuitively grasped from the clear testimony of “visible sign” (one baptism) through the triune Name. On the other hand, the confessions of one Lord, of one faith, and of one baptism also points toward the irreducible oneness of divine essence. Again, the oneness and

\textsuperscript{101} See the examination of Calvin’s comments on Matthew 28:19, below.
\textsuperscript{102} Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 44; OS1: 71.
\textsuperscript{103} Calvin, Institutes (1541), pp. 208-209; cf. Institutes (1539) in CO1: 488-489: “Ex quo patrem, filium et spiritum in una Dei essentia continerit plane constat: quando in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti baptizamur […] verbum et spiritum non aliud esse quan ipsum Dei essentiam, constituimus.”
\textsuperscript{104} Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.16; OS3: 129: “Quia autem Christi adventu clarius se patefecit Deus, ita etiam in tribus personis familiarius innotuit.”
threeness of God is maintained in Calvin’s view of divine simplicity through his exposition of this text.

b. Hebrews 1 and 11:3 (1549)

We see in the Dedication of Hebrews one of the concerns of this present study: “[...] a full discussion of the eternal divinity of Christ [uberem de aeterna Christi divinitate [...] disputationem], [...] and as these things are so explained in it.” As we proceed, it becomes clear to us that instead of simply accepting the trinitarian exposition of Justin, Tertullian, and Irenaeus, Calvin in his first Institutes (1536) explains the distinction of the trinitarian terms, ousia (essence) and hypostasis (Person) in light of Heb. 1; and later Calvin uses Heb. 11:3 to explain the invisibility of the divinity that is revealed in this world through “Wisdom” (the Son) and “Power” (the Spirit). Let me begin our study on this part by examining Calvin’s comments on Heb. 1:3 in which he carefully distinguished the terms of “personæ” (hypostasis) and “essentia” (ousia):

The radiance in the substance (essence) of God [Dei essentia] is so mighty that it hurts our eyes, until it shines on us in Christ. It follows from this that we are blind to the light of God unless it illuminates us in Christ [...] As I have already said we must have a similar understanding of the image: while God is incomprehensible to us in Himself, yet His form appears to us in the Son. [...] Indeed the apostle goes even further and says that the substance of the Father is in some way engraved on Christ. The word ὑποστάσεως which along with others I have translated as substance, denotes (in my opinion) not the esse or the essence of the Father, but the Person. It would be absurd to say that the essence of God is impressed on Christ, since the one and the same is the essence of both. It is, however, true and appropriate to say that whatever is peculiar to the Father is also expressed in Christ, so that he who knows Him also knows whatever is in the Father. The orthodox fathers also take hypostasis in this sense, as being threefold in God, the ousia being one [ut triplex in Deo sit, unica vero oúσία] [...] Hence we infer that the Son is one God with the Father, yet is nonetheless to be appropriately distinguished in such a way that each has His own subsistence.

To Calvin, the apostle calls the Son the image of “the hypostasis” (Person) of God his Father, not of “the essentia” of God his Father. It is because the single essence of the Son is the same essence of the Father. Herein, Calvin provides a clear definition of the trinitarian

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106 The exact period of time that Calvin worked on his commentary on Hebrews is unknown. See R. Michael Allen, “The Perfect Priest: Calvin on the Christ of Hebrews,” in Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier (eds.), Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles of the History of Interpretation (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 120-121. We know that it was first published in Latin and French in 1549; later it was published with the Catholic Epistles in 1551 and twice with the Pauline Epistles (1551, 1556).

107 Calvin, Comm. Heb., p. ix; cf. CO13: 281-282: “The Epistle addressed to the Hebrews contains a full discussion of the eternal divinity of Christ, His supreme government, and the only priesthood and as these things are so explained in it.”

terms: Christ is “God of Himself” (self-existent/aseity) in relation to His essence, but as the Son from God the Father (filioque) in relation to His hypostasis. With this definition, then, when Christians confess that Christ is God, the Holy Spirit is God, the Father is God, yet they are not three gods, but one and the same God. For example, Calvin uses this text in his Institutes (1559) to underline Christ’s aseity in numerous ways: “For since the essence of God is simple and undivided, and he (Christ) contains all in Himself, without portion or derivation, but in integral perfection;”109 and “unchangeable, the Word (Christ) abides eternally one and the same with God, and is God Himself [perpetuo unum idemque manet apud Deum, et Deus ipse est].”110 and “Christ was the true Jehovah [Christum esse verum Jehovah].”111 In other words, the essence of God is not distinct or transferrable, but the Persons of God are distinct. Each divine Person is God of Himself in relation to the same and one essence, but it has a distinct property (peculiar proprietate) in relation to the three hypostases (or subsistences).

This text also provides us with another important aspect: The distinctness and equality of the Persons in Calvin’s discussion of the Trinity in Hebrews. Although the hypostasis of the Father has His distinct property with the Son in relation to the hypostasis, yet “whatever is peculiar to the Father is also expressed in Christ, so that he who knows Him also knows whatever is in the Father.”112 For Calvin, there is an irreducible oneness concerning the three hypostases and one essence. He further expounds the mystery of the unity of essence and the Trinity in the following way:

It must be noted that there is a distinction of Persons, not only in respect of men, but also in God Himself, between the Father and the Son. Unity of essence requires that what is of the essence of God is as much of the Son as of the Father: and therefore whatever belongs to God alone, is common to both. This does not prevent each having the property of His own Person. […] Hence we infer that the Son is one God with the Father, yet is nonetheless to be appropriately distinguished in such a way that each has His own substance.113

However, Calvin in the Institutes (I.13.25) reflects on the problem of no distinction between the Father and God’s essence: “If Father and God were synonymous, thus would the Father be the deifier; nothing would be left in the Son but a shadow; and the Trinity would be nothing else but the conjunction of the one God with two created things.” In his commentary on Heb. 1:3, Calvin elaborates his Christology in relation to the divine simplicity in a more detailed manner:

Although it is not the apostle’s purpose here to discuss the nature of Christ in Himself, but His nature as He reveals it to us, nevertheless he sufficiently refutes the Arians and the Sabellians by attributing to Christ what belongs to God alone, and at the same time distinguishing two separate Persons in the Father and the Son.114

Furthermore, Calvin often identifies “three Persons” as “three properties” (I.13.4: “esse in Deo uno tres proprietates”), but also emphasizes that these properties, which are

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109 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.2. Cf. Institutes (1541), p. 214: “Christ contains that essence in Himself completely, not partially, and not because it was transferred to Him but He has it unreservedly.”
110 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.7; OS: 118, Calvin inserts this paragraph from the Institutes of 1539.
111 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.9; OS: 121.
112 Calvin, Comm. Heb. 1:3, p. 8. Cf. Institutes (1559), I.13.23: Calvin notes: “the subtle distinction that what is proper to God is transferred to Christ, because He is the splendor of His glory.”
113 Calvin, Comm. Heb. 1:3, pp. 7 and 9.
differentiated in each Person, are not the essential “attributes” (or virtues) of God.\footnote{I will further explain this remark of “proprietates” later in Calvin’s commentary on Gen. 1: 26, below.} For Calvin, the properties (proprietates) apply to the trinitarian differences, attributes to the virtues of the triune God as a whole. Then, what are the kind of properties (proprietates) that differentiate each Person? Calvin explains,

“Person,” therefore, I call a “subsistence” in God’s essence, which, while related to the others [persona], is distinguished by an incommunicable quality [proprietate incommunicabili distinguitur] […] Now, of the three subsistences [or persona] I say that each one, while related to the others, is distinguished by a special quality [proprietate distingu]i. This “relation” is here distinctly expressed: because where simple and indefinite mention is made of God, this name pertains no less to the Son and the Spirit than to the Father. But as soon as the Father is compared with the Son, the character [proprietas] of each distinguishes the one from the other. Thirdly, whatever is proper to each individually, I maintain to be incommunicable because whatever is attributed to the Father as a distinguishing mark cannot agree with, or be transferred to, the Son. […] that there is a kind of distribution or economy in God which has no effect on the unity of essence.\footnote{Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.6; OS3: 116.}

According to Calvin, the three Persons are distinct in “relation” and there is certain incommunicable “mark” as regards their different properties, but this is not a “division” of three Persons (I.13.6). For example, the Word [Christ] as begotten (filiation) of the Father before time, the Spirit as procession (processio) of the Father and of the Son; and each property which belongs to the Person of the Trinity individually (Cf. I.13.6: “as distinguishing mark cannot agree with, or be transferred”). In his Institutes, Calvin uses Heb. 1:3 to demonstrate the distinguishing mark between the Persons of the Father and the Son:

[…] the Father created all things through the Word. This He (the Father) could not have done without being somehow distinct from the Word. Furthermore, it was not the Father who descended upon the earth, but He (Christ or the Word) who went forth from the Father; that the Father did not die, nor did He arise again, but rather He who had been sent by the Father.\footnote{Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.17; OS3: 116. Cf. see Calvin’s commentary on John 1:3 and 1:18, below.}

In the Institutes (1559, in a passage that occurs already in the edition of 1539), Calvin discusses the Trinity that consists of three distinct Persons, called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the following way: “To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things (principium, fons); to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things (sapientia, consilium); but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity (virtus et efficacia)” (I.13.18).\footnote{OS3: 132 “Ea autem est quod Patri principium agendi, rerumque omnium fons et scaturigo attribuitur: Filio sapientia, consilium, ipsaque in rebus agendi dispensatio: at Spiritui virtus et efficacia assignatur actionis.”} Calvin does not further define the category “persona,” but by demonstrating the distinct “disposition” (dispensatio) or “property” (proprietate quadam) of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in a more detailed way than in the previous versions of the Institutes (1536, 1541), “we observe to be expressed in Scripture.”\footnote{Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.18; OS3: 132. “Quam tamen Scripturis notatam distinctionem animadvertimus.”} Herein, Calvin indicates that this doctrine of the three “properties” (proprietates) does not teach three gods, but only One: “For in each hypostasis the whole
divine nature is understood, with this qualification—that to each belongs His own peculiar quality. The Father is wholly in the Son, the Son wholly in the Father [...] the Son has both divinity and essence from Himself, and thus has one beginning with the Father.”

Additionally, Calvin also explicitly uses Heb. 1:6 and 10-12 to note the distinct properties (or titles) of Christ; but he also immediately affirms the equality of Christ with the Father as “eternal God, everlasting God, Creator of heaven and earth, the Majesty”:

Christ is above the angels, namely, because the angels are commanded to worship Him. It follows, therefore, that Christ is their Head and Chief [...] that Christ is eternal God, and that what is true of God is justifiably applied to Christ.¹²¹

The matter under discussion is not the glory of God, but the proper attributes of Christ [...] Indeed I admit that Christ is not mentioned by name in the whole of the psalm [as apostle’s quoted in this verse]. Nevertheless it is clear that the allusion is such that no one can doubt that it is His kingdom that is expressly commended to us. Therefore everything that is contained in this passage [as well as in this Psalm] is to be applied to His Person. Only in Christ has this been fulfilled. [...] that He is God everlasting, Creator of heaven and earth, that His being is eternal, free from all change, by which His majesty is exalted to the highest and He is removed from the order of all created things.¹²²

In his Institutes (1559), Calvin refers the divine titles in Heb. 1:6 and 10 to Christ alone: “Obviously the titles of God that the apostle in the Letter to the Hebrews confers upon the Son are the most glorious of all” (I.13.11). “These things [the testimonies of the apostle in Heb. 1:10] are appropriate only to the sole God; nevertheless, he contends that they are proper titles of Christ” (I.13.23).¹²³ And then Calvin refers to another text, namely Heb. 11:3, to stress the threeness of God, or the distinct Persons of the Trinity in light of His eternal goodness, wisdom, power.

In the whole architecture of His world God has given us clear evidence of His eternal Wisdom, Goodness, and Power and though He is invisible in Himself [et quum in se sit invisibilis] He shows Himself to us in some measure in His work. The world is therefore rightly called the mirror of divinity [Divinitatis speculum nominatur] not because there is enough clarity for men to know God by looking at the world but because He makes Himself clear to unbelievers in such a way that they are without excuse for their ignorance. On the other hand believers to whom He has given eyes to see discern the sparks of His glory as it were shining out in every individual creature. The world was founded for this purpose, that it should be the sphere of divine glory.¹²⁴

Calvin comments that in Heb. 11:3 the hiddenness of God (the invisible essence of God) was mirrored in the “architecture/framework/theatre” of this world through His eternal virtues (attributes), namely, wisdom, goodness, and power.¹²⁵ We often discuss these eternal

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¹²⁰ Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.19; OS3: 132-133 “Si quidem in unaquaque hypostasi tota intelligitur natura, cum boc, quod subset sua unicuique proprietas. Pater totus in Filio est, totus in Patre Filius [...] nunc Filium a seipso et divinitatem et essentiam habere asseverant, adeoque unum esse cum Patre principium.”


¹²³ Cf. Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 45; OS1: 71 “He must be the one eternal God [Unum igitur aeternum illum Deum esse operatur], who elsewhere denies he will give his glory to another. Yet, [...] he had his own brightness with the Father before the world was made—the distinction between them is shown.”


¹²⁵ See Calvin, Institutes (1541), p. 30. This is called “the invisible divinity” on p. 35. Calvin says, “That is why the apostle, when writing to the Hebrews, fittingly calls the earthly world ‘the mirror of things
virtues merely as attributes of God, but in my opinion, for Calvin, these three eternal virtues in this passage are implied by the three distinct Persons in the Trinity. Or to put it this way: These eternal divine virtues of God are here to describe and express the “indivisible” image of the Father (Goodness), the Son (Wisdom), and the Holy Spirit (Power). These three “indivisible” Persons always work together without separation. To put it in another way, Calvin insists that God only manifests His invisible nature in the image of the world through the Trinity, but not the essence of God’s mystery. The reason for considering this text, which will be a refrain in this section, is to demonstrate the indivisibility of God’s Persons in His creation.

Let me summarise before turning to the next section. Calvin indeed is a remarkable interpreter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He carefully makes a clear distinction, while also stressing the equality when he speaks about the oneness and threeness of God in Heb. 1:3, 6, 10, and 11:3. Apparently, for Calvin, when one speaks of “threeness,” it is about “the distinction but not division” in relation to God’s Persons; when one speaks of “oneness,” it is about the one and the same essence of God that is shared by these three Persons of the Godhead (“God of Himself/asceity”). Nevertheless, for Calvin, both the oneness and the threeness of God must not be separated when thinking and speaking about the triune God. As shown above, I have demonstrated the conceptuality that ties the divine simplicity and the Trinity together, which we found in Calvin’s commentary on Hebrews, as well as in his Institutes. The study and observation presented above allows us to see that by using the trinitarian terms (hypostasis and ousia) in light of scriptural passages, Calvin has successfully safeguarded the oneness of the triune God. In sum, a close examination of Calvin’s commentary on the selected texts in Hebrews reveals that Calvin’s interpretation of the Son of God as the self-existence of God (asceity) does not compromise the distinction of the divine Persons.

5.3.4 Discourse of the Divine simplicity in Calvin’s Expositions (1550-1559): John 1; Genesis 1; and Matthew 28:19

In 1550 Calvin presented a study of John 1:1-5 to the congrégation; later this presentation was published as an introduction to the Plusieurs sermons by Cornrad Badius in 1558. According to the observation of Erik de Boer, “[i]t seems clear that it was Calvin who every
time introduced the exegesis of a new series at least beginning in 1550, particularly Calvin’s presentations are the most part introductions to a new series to the congrégations from 1550 to 1564, such as the Gospel of John (1550), Exodus-Deuteronomy (1559), Joshua (1563), and Isaiah (1564) are the surviving texts that “formed part of a comprehensive project (the connection between the Bible studies at the congrégation and Calvin’s program of biblical exposition in his commentaries) comparable to the recording of his sermons by the first scribe of Geneva.” This remark is indeed crucial for our exploration why Calvin shifted his focuses at that point in time (between 1550 and 1555) to his commentaries on John, Genesis and the synoptic Gospels. Did Calvin himself, as Helmut Feld suggests, expounded the Fourth Gospel to defend his doctrine of Christology from the christological and trinitarian attack of Servetus? Though such investigation is interesting, we simply lack sufficient information to determine the real circumstances under which Calvin wrote his commentary on the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, our study below shows that one of the possible reasons for Calvin to concentrate on the fourth Gospel is due to the claim of Servetus. Also, Spinard’s name is mentioned a few times in Calvin’s commentary on John 1:1-18 (1553), but not in the introduction to the congrégation (1550/1558).

Calvin’s commentaries on the Gospel of John and Genesis show his extended treatments of this doctrine, and the selected texts of these two books play an important role as the main texts for Calvin’s doctrinal formulations (as shown in 5.2.2). For example, if we compare the earlier editions of the Institutes of 1536 and 1539/1541 with the Institutes of 1559, we learn that Calvin intensively uses the main texts from the Gospel of John in his trinitarian formulation in the Institutes of 1559. Now, in order for us to sufficiently grasp Calvin’s view of the divine simplicity, as revealed in John 1 and Genesis 1, it is necessary, therefore, that in the following sections we provide an overview of Calvin’s debates with these two anti-trinitarians (Caroli and Servetus), who raised some major doctrinal issues which are related to the concern of this present study.

a. The Debates between Calvin and Caroli

In February 1537, Calvin, Guillaume Farel, and Pieter Caroli debated the usage of the terms “Trinity” and “Person” in the formulation of God’s trinitarian nature. In 1537, Caroli

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129 Ioannis Calvini Varia. I, pp. XVII-XVIII (emphasis added). Erik de Boer indicates that Calvin “chose which book would be expounded next in the congrégations, and his commentaries were published shortly after the completion of a series: on the Gospel of John in 1553, the Harmony of Exodus-Deuteronomy in 1559, and Joshua in 1564” (p. XVIII).
130 See the discussion with Servetus as possibly one of the main motivations for Calvin to comment on the Fourth Gospel, by Helmut Feld in COR11/I: xi and by Erik de Boer in Ioannis Calvini Varia. I, p. 28; see also Barbara Pitkin, “Calvin as commentator on the Gospel of John,” pp. 167-168.
131 In this section, I will not make any claims about the historical causality, or attempting to discover Calvin’s motives in defending the doctrine of Trinity in his commentary on John.
132 Ioannis Calvini Varia. I, p. 28.
133 Ioannis Calvini Varia. I, p. 28.
135 Pieter Caroli was a doctor of theology and one of the first priests to decide for the Reformation.
136 Brannon Ellis provides a detailed account and analysis of Calvin’s engagement in polemical discussions concerning the trinitarian doctrine:—first with Pierre Caroli (1537-1540 and 1545), then with several ministers in Neuchâtel (1543-1545), and finally with the anti-trinitarian Valentine Gentile (1558-1561). See Ellis, Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son, pp. 37-63. See also R. C. Gamble,
argued that Calvin and Farel did not formulate their understandings of the doctrine of the Trinity according to the traditional creeds such as the Athansian and Nicene creeds, and charged them for committing the error of Arianism and Sabellianism. As it is shown in one of his epistolae (letters) to Simon Grynaeus, Calvin once again points to the first French edition of his Catechism to provide arguments to refute Caroli’s accusation:

Our Catechism, recently published in French, has provided us with enough evidence to be contrary [...] We testify that we embraced the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, under one essence of the Godhead; [...] We taught, certainly, that Christ is the true and natural Son of God, who had possessed the like essential deity with the Father from all eternity, [...].

Notably, the main point of the debate between Calvin and Caroli does not just involve the use of trinitarian terms; rather it relates to Calvin’s assertion of the aseity of Christ. Hence, Caroli also challenged Calvin’s Christology, and particularly rejected Calvin’s claim that Christ “always possessed His existence of Himself.”

Calvin’s responses to the accusation of Caroli can be found in his various letters. For example, in the letter mentioned above (esp. 40), Calvin clarifies why he affirms the doctrine of the aseity of Christ, that “Christ is Jehovah, who from eternity owed Being to Himself.”

Then Caroli challenged the following phrase in the confession: Christ is Jehovah, who from eternity owed Being to Himself. This objection too could immediately be rejected with sufficient evidence [...] Certainly, if the distinction between the Father and the Word be attentively considered, we shall say that the one is from the other. If, however, the essential quality of the Word be considered, in so far as He is one God with the Father, whatever can be said concerning God may also be applied to Him, the second Person in the glorious Trinity. Now, what is the meaning of the name Jehovah? What did that answer imply which was spoken to Moses? I am that I am. Paul makes Christ the author of this saying. [...] Nothing, indeed, could have been set forth more plainly than the statement in our Confession, that Christ is that eternal Word begotten of the Father before all time. Therefore, of a truth, unless we please to imagine a twofold Deity, it behoves that we speak concerning His essence no otherwise than as concerning the essence of the one God.


140 For the translation of Caroli’s view of Calvin, see Ellis, Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son, p. 48; cf. CO7: 325.


A full version of Calvin’s explanation of the aseity of the Son is encapsulated in his debate with the anti-trinitarians, which is reflected in his commentary on Jn 1:1.143 We also find Calvin’s response to the two major accusations (i.e., Arianism and Sabellianism) of Caroli towards himself, Farel, and also other ministers, in a clarification letter Calvin and other Geneva ministers wrote to the Zurich ministers (Geneva, 30 August 1537; ep. 48):

Initially Caroli produced about ten objections to our confession. [...] In the final instance he only dared to accuse us, first, of passing over the terms ‘Trinity’ and ‘Persons’ in silence in our confession, and secondly, of maintaining that Christ owed His divine nature to Himself alone [the aseity of Christ] [...] We, however, wish the use of such terms to be free in the church, and we advocate the Confessio Helvetica Prior [the First Helvetic Confession], which uses the term ‘Persons’ of the Trinity [...] Conceding Caroli’s demands would make our belief suspect and ruin the result of our ministry. We could prove our innocence only by producing our confession [...] The way we deal with Christ’s divinity and with the distinction between the Father and the Son acquits us of Caroli’s charge. Our view finds support in Cyril of Alexandria [...] Calvin’s Institutes (1536) supported his innocence.144

We also see a clear declaration in the letter Calvin and Farel wrote to the Council of Bern (Geneva, circa 17 Aug or 22 Sept 1537) that:

[Farel and Calvin] accept the terms ‘Trinity’ and ‘Persons’. They will make every effort, as they always have done, to prevent the abolition of these terms in their church. Neither in their writings nor in their lectures and sermons will they give up these terms and they will teach others not to avoid them.145

Furthermore, Calvin also delivers an important treatise on May 14 (it appeared in print entitled Confessio Genevensium Praedicatorum De Trinitate in 1537),146 in which Calvin declares that he and Farel have no objection to the use of the trinitarian words (e.g., “Trinity” and “Person”).147 Rather what he opposed is the compulsory use of certain words.148 Calvin summarizes his argument in response to those who argued that his trinitarian doctrine contained heretical Arianism (particularly Caroli):

We believe and worship the one God whom the Scriptures proclaim, and indeed we conceive of Him as He is there described to us: as truly an eternal essence, infinite and spiritual, who alone possesses the power of subsisting in Himself and of Himself, and who bountifully gives [subsistence] to all creatures. We reject the Anthropomorphites with their corporeal god, and also the Manicheans with their two Principles. In this one essence of God (una Dei essentia) we acknowledge the Father with His eternal Word and Spirit. While we employ this distinction of names, we do not imagine three gods, as if the Father was something else than the Word. Neither on the other hand do we understand these to be empty epithets by which God is variously designated from His works. But at one with the ecclesiastical writers we hold these to be three hypostases or subsistences in the most simple unity of God, who, though constituting one essence, are nevertheless not conflagated with one another (Latin: sed una cum ecclesiasticis scriptoribus aut simplicissima Dei unitate sentimus has tres hypostases, id

143 See the discussion of Calvin’s Comm. John 1:1, below
147 Calvin’s and Farel’s understanding of the Trinity does not subscribe to the classical trinitarian term of the Athanasian Creed as demanded by Caroli.
148 See comment in Wulfert de Greef, The Writings of John Calvin, p. 159.
est subsistentias, quae tametsi una essentia constent, nor tamen inter se confunduntur); therefore, though there is one God, the Father with His Word and Spirit, nevertheless the Father is not the Word, nor is the Word Himself the Spirit […] This is the sum of the matter: in what has been confessed above we have recognized the eternal, spiritual, infinite essence of God, the Father with His Word and Spirit, in such a way that the Father is neither conflated with the Word, nor the Word with the Spirit. […] Before He (Christ) clothed Himself in our flesh, this eternal Word was begotten from the Father before the ages. He is true God, one with the Father in essence, power, majesty—even Jehovah, who has always possessed it of Himself that He is, and has inspired the power of subsisting in other beings (Verbum illud aeternum fuit, ex Patre ante saecula genitum, verus Deus, unus cum Patre essentiae, potentiae, maiestatis, adeoque ipse יהוה qui a seipso simper habuit ut esset, et aliis subsistendi virtutem inspiravit).149

Several years later, in 1545, Caroli challenged Calvin again over the use of the terms autotheos and a se ipso or aseitas in the discussion of the divinity of Christ.150 Calvin then published a work (written by his colleague Nicolas des Gallars) entitled Pro Farello et collegis eius adversus Petri Caroli columnias defensio Nicolai Gallasii (CO, VII: cols. 289-340) in which the ministers of Geneva responded to the accusation of Caroli. The author argues:

When we are speaking of the Christ all that is proper to God is rightly ascribed to Him, because respect is there had to the divine essence [but it does not raise the issue of] the distinction between Father and Son. In this sense it is true to say that Christ is the One and Eternal God, existing of Himself (a se ipso existentem) […]. [Calvin] asserts both truths—both that Christ is of the Father as He is the second Person, and that He is of Himself if we have respect to the divine essentia simpliciter (simply).151

Besides, Calvin also appealed to the teachings of Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine, and commented that “neither of these fathers would deny that Christ has life and immortality of Himself or that, as God, He was self-existent: the names and attributes that refer to the divine essence or substance belong equally to each of the divine Persons—so that Christ is from another only as concerns His Person, not as concerns His essence, which is underived.”152 Calvin insisted that “the divinity of Christ” is to be understood in the sense of divine essence: “the Son is God, exists of Himself” (Cf. I.13.25). In such a way, Calvin had in a remarkable way pointed out the full equality of the three Persons in the essence of Godhead, as well as their distinctive character in the Persons of God. Notably, it is possible that during the period of 1537-1545, Calvin also responded to Caroli with regard to other

149 See Jean Calvin, “Confessio Genevensium Praedicatorum De Trinitate (1537),” pp. 146, 148-150 (CO9: 704 and 706-707); see the citation and translation in Ellis, Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son, pp. 41-42 (emphasis added); cf. Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13 and Calvin’s commentary on John 1, below.
150 See Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 4, p. 325.
151 John Calvin, Pro Farello et collegis eius adversus Petri Caroli columnias defensio Nicolai Gallasii, in CO7, cols. 322-323; see the citation and analysis in Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 239-240. In addition, Calvin also admits that he has problems with the Nicene Creed: “As you see we find some verbiage (battologia) in these words: ‘God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God.’ Why this repetition? Does it give some extra emphasis, or a greater liveliness? You see that it is more fit to be sung as a hymn than as a confessional form, in which it is preposterous when there is one syllable too much” (CO7, cols. 315-316). See this citation and translation in Van den Brink, “Calvin and the Early Christian Doctrine of the Trinity,” p. 19.
152 John Calvin, Pro Farello et collegis eius, in CO7: 322-323; see the citation and analysis in Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 4, p. 32.
manner, for example, the ongoing revision of his *Institutes* (1539/1541). Additionally, the controversial doctrinal issue between Calvin and Servetus, concerning the aseity of Christ, emerged again in 1546. Thus, it is necessary and legitimate to investigate whether Calvin has Caroli and Servetus in mind and is responding to them when he wrote the commentaries on John 1 (1550-1552/1553), Gen. 1 (1550-1553/1554), or the *Institutes* (1559). In order to do so, let us now proceed to the debates between Calvin and Servetus.

### b. The Debates between Calvin and Servetus

Michael Servetus (1511-1553) was the author of “On the Errors of the Trinity” (*De trinitatis erroribus*), published at Hagenau (Haguenau) in 1531 and *Christianismi Restitution* (published in Vienne, France, in January 1553). In these two works he disputed a number of the traditional Christian doctrines, especially the doctrine of the Trinity. Calvin’s responses to Servetus can be found in numerous places—his various commentaries (John 1 and Genesis 1), the *Institutes* of 1559 (I.13.23), and also in his *Defensio Orthodoxae Fidei De Sacra Trinitate Contra Prodigiosos Errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani* (Defence of the orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity against the prodigious errors of the Spaniard Michael Servetus) were published in February 1554 (four months after Servetus’ death).

In commenting on John 1 and Genesis 1, Calvin explicitly rejects Servetus’ views of the Trinity and on Christology. The debates between Servetus and Calvin concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and the aseity of Christ show that the controversy lies in the fundamental difference between Calvin’s and Servetus’ understandings of the Word.  

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153 See Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, pp. 212-222. Warfield observed that Calvin’s christological argument to Caroli (after the 1537 disputations) seems clearly based on exegetical arguments rather than patristic citations: “The enlarged and readjusted treatment of the topic in the second edition of 1539 seems to have been composed under the influence of the controversy with Caroli” (p. 222). For example, Calvin’s editing of post-1536 editions of the *Institutes* includes an exegetical argument based on Heb. 1:3, aimed at securing biblical warrant for using the term “Person” in the trinitarian vocabulary. See also Calvin’s commentary on Heb. 1:3, above.


156 See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*: vol. 4, pp. 75-76.


159 See Calvin’s commentaries on John 1 and Genesis 1, above.

160 See Erik de Boer, “2.5.3: Servetus’ Christology,” vol. XI/3 of *Supplementa Calviniana: Sermons inédits: Sermons sur le Livre des Revelations du prophète Ezechiel. Chapitres 36-48*, ed. Erik A. de Boer -
According to Servetus, no trinitarian term is found in the Bible: “Not one word is found in the whole Bible about the Trinity, nor about its Persons, nor about an Essence, nor about a unity of the Substantia, nor about one Nature of the several beings.” Hence, Servetus levelled a biblical critique against the traditional churchly doctrine of the one divine essence and three divine Persons; consequently he stated his accusation that “those trinitarians are truly tritheists and true atheists.” In Servetus’ words,

Now allow us to demonstrate by means of arguments and evidence that those three incorporate and distinct entities cannot exist in the unity of God. [...] By the principle of convertibility three beings are naturally inferred from three entities. Therefore, there are three essences and three gods. The trinitarians support their Trinity in their argument against the Jews by pointing out that Elohim is the plural for the word God. [...] If there are gods by virtue of the Trinity, then they are three incorporeal and truly distinct gods. If they are truly distinct, applying the argument of convertibility in absolute terms, they are also distinct in essence. Thus they are true tritheists and true atheists, who do not consider God to be one but only threefold and an aggregate. They understand God figuratively, not absolutely. They believe in imaginary gods—mere projections of demons.

These three Gods of theirs (trinitarian believers) form one composite Ousia; [...] that God is constituted out of the three beings. It is clear, therefore, that we are Tritoites (tritheists), and we have a threefold God; we have become Atheists, [...] For as soon as we try to think about God, we are turned aside to three phantoms, so that no kind of unity remains in our conception.

Moreover, in his chief work, the Christianismi restitutio, Servetus had particularly argued against Calvin’s trinitarian doctrine. By offering his own teaching, which he claims is “a biblical and patristic exposition,” together with a series of letters against Calvin, Servetus insisted that his version on the doctrine of God is a “restoration” to Christianity. Jerome Friedman rightly summarises that both the works of Servetus in Errors and the Christianismi Restitutio “stress that the unknown Father was perceived and comprehended only through the means He made available.” This means were “the Word and the Spirit,” or, “the two hands of God.” Friedcan points out that according to Servetus, these means “are
essentially manifestation of the Father’s will, to which there are subordinated.”

Even these means of God are various “forms” of God’s deity, yet they are not God Himself. For Servetus, Christ (the Word, the Son of God, the fullness of deity in Christ) and Holy Spirit are God in the sense of the names, the powers, the glories, the manifold dispositions/dispensations and the appearances (masks or forms) of God, which are shared by God, and with God, but not identical to singular nature/essence of God. These confusions and errors of Servetus’ doctrine of God are shown apparently in his doctrines of Christology and Pneumatology. In short, following Sabellius, Servetus insisted on the radical oneness of God—one in essence and in Person, and he viewed the doctrine of the Trinity as without any biblical foundation. From our investigation of Servetus’ Errors and Restitutio, as shown above, we learned that Servetus was condemned as a heretic not because of his refusal to adopt the trinitarian terminology for his doctrine of God, but because of his wrong understanding and formulation of his teaching on the Word and the Holy Spirit. For Servetus, the inter-relationship among Jesus, the Holy Spirit and God, “was [...] only the distinction of ratio between the Persons, so that there is but a single Person, which because of the various result is now called the Father, now the Son, now the Holy Spirit.” Apparently, such an understanding of his theology seems to be a repetition of ancient heresies.

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167 Friedman, Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy, p. 63.
168 See Serveto, “On the Errors of the Trinity,” pp. 11b-12a; and pp. 22b-24b. According to Servetus’ interpretation of the “one” in 1 John 5:7, the “one” “has reference not to singleness, but to oneness of mind, and harmony, so that the two (the Word and the Holy Spirit) might be credited with one power” (p. 23a).
169 See Serveto, “On the Errors of the Trinity,” pp. 12a: “CHRIST there makes it clear that he is God not in Nature but in appearance, not by nature but by grace [...] For that only the Father is called God by nature is plainly enough shown by Scripture, which says, God and CHRIST, CHRIST and God [...] For although I say that CHRIST is very God, yet in the relation which he holds to the Father this very passage (John 17:3) notes a differences.”
171 See Serveto, “On the Errors of the Trinity,” pp. 27a-29a. Instead of using the term personae for God, to explain the Trinity, Servetus uses the Latin term dispensatio (disposition/principle) to denote that God disposes Himself in three different ways in three different forms of His activities.
172 See Serveto, “On the Errors of the Trinity,” pp. 16a: “Although CHRIST is God, yet he is one with the Father. Thus no plurality is shown as they [trinitarian believers] suppose, for he is God, a kind of deity being shared by him with the Father.”
173 Serveto, “On the Errors of the Trinity,” pp. 119a-119b (emphasis added). See also p. 119a: “Although the oracle was God, yet it was the oracle, and not God himself, that came to be flesh.”
174 Serveto, “On the Errors of the Trinity,” pp. 92b-93a (emphasis added). Cf. also p. 2a. In Servetus’ very first sentence or illustration of his view concerning the Word, he says that “In investigating the holy mysteries of the divine Triad, I have thought that one ought to start from the man; for I see most men approaching their lofty speculation about the Word without having any fundamental understanding of Christ, and they attach little or no importance to the man, and give the true Christ quite over to oblivion;” and in p. 112b: “I say that the whole Nature, of God in him (Christ). In him is the whole Deity of the Father, in so much that even the angels marvel at this. And not only is God present in him, but the whole authority of God has been given him [...] he is God and the Lord of the world.”
175 Serveto, “On the Errors of the Trinity,” p. 28b (emphasis added). See also pp. 30a-30b: “And to receive the Holy Spirit (e.g., Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8) means nothing that that when the heavenly messenger comes upon you, you shall received power from on high. And that this power is not a separate being is proved by the texts in which JESUS perceived in himself that power had gone out of him (Mk 5:30)” (p. 30b).
176 Cf. Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 4, p. 190: Muller points to Rijssen’s Summa theologiae didactico-elenctica,IV.vi and states the traditional trinitarian distinctions in the Godhead between Essentia and Personae in the following way: “They (personae) differ from the divine Essentia not realiter—that is to say, not essentialiter, ut res & res—but modaliter, ut modus à re.: the personal properties by which the personae are distinguished from the Essentia, are modes of a sort, by which they are characterized, not formally and properly as in creatures who are affected in certain ways by their properties, but eminently and analogically, rising beyond all imperfection.”
177 Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 4, p. 75, see also pp. 74-76.
In 1546 Servetus began his debate with Calvin on the issue of Christ as the Son of God, through an exchange of letters. When Calvin received Servetus’ works and letters, he reacted with some polemic responses to dispute the heresies of Servetus. In February 1554 Calvin published the details of their ferocious debate in Defensio. These debates also appeared in his commentaries on John 1 and Genesis 1, as well as in the 1559 Institutes. One of Calvin’s arguments against Servetus was Servetus’ rejection of the pre-Nicene tradition (according to Irenaeus and Tertullian). Servetus strongly argues that the distinction between the Father and the Son in the pre-Nicene tradition cannot be understood as an essential subordination of the Son. Calvin thus points out the errors of Servetus’ doctrine of the Trinity in his Institutes:

For Servetus the name “Trinity” was so utterly hateful and detestable that he commonly labelled all those whom he called trinitarians as atheists. [...] This, indeed, was the sum of his speculations: God is assumed to be tripartite when three Persons are said to reside in his essence; this is an imaginary triad, because it clashes with God’s unity. Meanwhile, he would hold the Persons to be certain external ideas which do not truly subsist in God’s essence, but represent God to us in one manifestation or another [...] For he publicly declares that in the essence of God there are parts and divisions, each portion of which is God: indeed, he particularly states that the spirits of believers are coeternal and consubstantial with God.

Calvin affirmed the aseity of the Son, whereas Servetus ruled out the eternal existence of the Son. Calvin showed the dreadful teaching of Servetus and his followers in the Institutes:

The Father is distinguished from the Son and the Spirit by this mark, that He is the only “essence giver (quia sit solus essentiator)” [...] For whoever says that the Son has been given His essence from the Father denies that He has been from Himself. But the Holy Spirit gives the lie to this, naming Him “Jehovah.” Now if we concede that all essence is in the Father alone, either it will become divisible or be taken away from the Son. And thus deprived of His essence, He will be God in name only. The essence of God, if these babblers are to be believed, belongs to the Father only, inasmuch as He alone is, and is the essence giver of the Son. Thus the divinity of the Son will be something abstracted from God’s essence, or a part derived from the whole [...] They confess Christ to be God, and yet to differ from the Father. Conversely, there must be some mark of differentiation in order that the Father may not be the Son. Those who locate that mark in the essence clearly annihilate Christ’s true deity, which without essence, and indeed the whole essence, cannot exist.

Herein, we see an important understanding of Calvin’s view of divine simplicity. As Calvin states, God the Father is the only “essence giver [quia sit solus essentiator];” and Christ is unambiguously as the one God with the Father, for He possesses the divine name Jehovah, so Christ is also the essence giver. In other words, when Christians think of the deity (essence) of Christ, they should not think of the distinction between the Father and the Son, but rather of the unity and aseity of the one God. In Calvin’s thought this emphasis on the aseity of the Son is crucial to safeguard the divine simplicity. Once the aseity of Christ is secured, the unity of God becomes self-evident. Calvin clearly points out that the “doctrine” of the Trinity is not an invention of human beings; it belongs to the entire revelation of God, which

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178 Calvin, “CLIII. Letter to Frellon, 13th February, 1546” (a mysterious personage is mentioned in this letter, and it is generally understood and recognized that this person is no other than Servetus), in idem, The Letters of John Calvin, vol. II, pp. 16-19.
180 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.22.
181 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.23.
includes the Old Testament. Apparently, the different notions of the Trinity held by Calvin and Servetus stemmed from two opposing understandings of the Word (Christology), which set the tone for their debate from the very beginning. Servetus maintained that the Word who became flesh was the Son of God but not God Himself; he described Christ as one of the dispensations of God. For Calvin, the Word who became flesh was the eternal Son of God and God Himself. Since his conflicts with Caroli and Servetus, Calvin clarifies that the central theological term “aseity” also belong to Christ (and the Spirit).

c. John 1:1-5 (1550-1553/1558)

Now that we know Calvin’s view on the divine simplicity through his responses to Caroli and Servetus, we are ready to move to Calvin’s commentary on John 1:1-5. Calvin began to develop the commentary of John during as he also started the congrégation, presented John 1:1-5 in 1550, continued to work on it and published it as commentary in 1553. During the years of 1550-1553, Calvin interconnected his lectures on John with Genesis (published in 1554). Calvin’s commentaries on the John and Genesis further show his extended treatments of the doctrine of divine simplicity. If we compare to the earlier editions of the Institutes (1536 and 1539/1541), we learn that Calvin profoundly uses John as the main texts in his trinitarian formulation in the Institutes of 1559, and John 1:1-5 is a Bible text that Calvin links to Gen. 1 in discussing the aseity of Christ in relation to the Trinity, through which he insists that the eternal divinity (deity) of Christ is in God’s essence. Let me begin by citing Calvin’s comments in John 1:1, in which he expounds that the divinity of Christ is clearly demonstrated in this verse:

In this prologue he declares Christ’s eternal divinity [aeternam Christi divinitatem praedicat], to teach us that He is the eternal God [aeternum esse Deum], manifest in the flesh, […]

182 See Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.3-4.
183 See Calvin’s detailed explanation on the aseity of the Son in the following sections.
186 See John Calvin, “the Congréagation on John 1,” in Ioannis Calvini Varia. In English in The Deity of Christ and Other Sermons, pp. 13-34.
therefore, the Evangelist asserts that we do not forsake the one, eternal God when we believe in Christ.\textsuperscript{189}

In his comments on John 1:1,\textsuperscript{190} Calvin indicates that “the Word” (Latin: \textit{Sermo}) refers to Christ as the Son of God, or synonymous with “the eternal Wisdom of God,” “the will of God,” and “the express image of God.” With all these divine titles and attributes, the Evangelist confesses that “the Word” is “the eternal God;”\textsuperscript{191} and immediately after affirming the eternal divinity of Christ, the Evangelist confesses that “the Word was with God.” Hence, Calvin comments, “We have already said that the Son of God is thus placed above the world and all creatures and before all ages. But at the same time this expression attributes to Him a \textit{hypostasis} distinct from the Father […] He had a certain subsistence of His own in God (\textit{illi subsistentia in Deo foret}) […] it shows the Son to be distinct from the Father.”\textsuperscript{192} Then Calvin continues to comment on “the Word was God” in the following way: “Lest any doubt should remain as to Christ’s divine essence, he clearly declares that He is God. Now, since God is one, it follows that Christ is of the same essence with the Father and yet in some way different.”\textsuperscript{193} In sum, in my opinion, Calvin’s comments (in italic) on John 1:1 can be expressed as follows:

\begin{align*}
1:1a & \text{ In the beginning was the Word (Christ is self-existence and has no beginning)} \\
1:1b & \text{ the Word was with God (Christ is the second hypostasis with God the Father)} \\
1:1a' & \text{ the Word was God (Christ is God of Himself)}
\end{align*}

We can see from what is mentioned above that for Calvin, John 1:1 (1:1a, 1b, 1a’) expresses the important relationship between the \textit{essence} and \textit{Person} of “the Word.” On the one hand, when the Evangelist confesses that “the Word was \textit{with} God,” he is referring to Christ as the second \textit{Person} “with” God the Father. On the other hand, when he confesses that “In the beginning was the Word, […] and the Word was God,” he is referring to Christ as one and the same \textit{essence} of God, He is God of Himself. Hence, Calvin elucidates, “The Word was from the beginning, and transcends all time.”\textsuperscript{194} In other words, when speaking of the eternity of Christ alone, the Scripture tells us that He is the \textit{self-existence} of God. Therefore, Calvin defends such understanding of the eternal Son of God in John 1:1a and 1:1a’ rebukes Servetus’s errors which denied the true eternity of Christ. Firstly, “Servetus, that most arrogant and worthless Spaniard, imagines that the eternal Word came into being only when He was exercised in the creation of the world;”\textsuperscript{195} and, secondly, Servetus holds that the Word cannot have existed “before God is represented by Moses as speaking. As if, because He was not yet openly manifested, He did not subsist in God! As if He had no inner

\begin{footnotes}
\item[191] Calvin, \textit{Comm. John} 1:1, p. 7; cf. CTS. \textit{John}, vol. I, pp. 25-26 and COR11/1: 11. See also Calvin’s presentation on John 1:1-5 at the \textit{congrégation}, in which he even firmly describes the incomparable Word in God in this way: “Nothing like that exists in God, so whatever is in Him is of His essence and eternity. That is why the Evangelist declares that this Word is really God.”
\item[193] Calvin, \textit{Comm. John} 1:1, p. 9; COR11/1: 15.
\item[194] Calvin, \textit{Comm. John} 1:1, p. 8; COR11/1: 11.
\item[195] Calvin, \textit{Comm. John} 1:1, p. 7; COR11/1: 11. Although in his presentation of John 1:1-5 Calvin does not refer explicitly to the errors of Servetus, the traces of Servetus are inferred in these texts: “Foolish imaginings, vain speculations;” “some perverted the sense of this doctrine;” “God would have to be a creature of our imagination;” “surely men themselves are confused and do not know how to imagine Him without being led astray in their imaginations;” and “pollute His doctrine, classing it among the foolish invention of men.” (I take these remarks from Erik de Boer, \textit{Iannis Calvini Varia: Congrégations et Disputations}, vol. 1, pp. 33-56).
\end{footnotes}
existence before He began to show Himself outwardly!” Calvin also continues to defend that this text also silences a dog’s barking (Arians) who believes the Word has a beginning, was created by God. For Calvin, this text successfully refuted the wicked ideas of Servetus, Arians and Arius, by affirming the eternity of Christ, “since He was always united with God before the world existed.” In fact, Calvin comments, that the Evangelist clearly declares that Christ is God in 1.1a’: “As to Christ’s divine essence, he clearly declares that He is God [divina Christi essentia scrupulus maneat, clare assertit esse Deum], since God is one, it follows that Christ is of the same essence with the Father and yet in some way different.” Thus, John 1:1a and 1:1a’ not only affirms the eternity of Christ, but the aseity of Christ.

After affirming the eternity and essence of Christ through John 1:1a and John 1:1a’, Calvin then comments on John 1:1b. Calvin explains, that when the Evangelist said “the Word was with God” in John 1:1b, he is describing Christ as the second Person of the triune God. “But at the same time, this expression (the Word was with God) attributes to Him a hypostasis distinct from the Father. […] He had a certain subsistence of His own in God.” Calvin is careful to protect the irreducible oneness of God’s essence (substance) by choosing this term subsistence (he distinguishes subsistence from substance) to describe a certain property peculiar to each Person individually; so the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three personal subsistences, yet each Person of the Trinity is the entire essence of God. Calvin explains this text in his congrégation in a much clearer statement: “What is this distinction? It is not a distinction of essence. For he always means that this Word is God. And we must conclude, since we have only one God, and there is only one simple essence in Him, that Jesus Christ, this Eternal Word here spoken of, was not different from God His Father. Yet there is always some distinction […].” Hence, Calvin defends, this verse, refutes the error of Sabellius (which held that there is no true distinction in Person between the Father and the Son.), “since it shows the Son to be distinct from the Father.” Calvin further explains his Christology when commenting on John 1: 14. Calvin explains that “the Word became flesh” is the “genuine hypostasis” of Christ in the essence of God. “Here are two chief articles of belief: First, in Christ two natures were united in one Person in such a way that one and the same Christ is true God and man. Secondly, the unity of His Person does not prevent His natures from remaining distinct, so that the divinity retains whatever is proper to it and the humanity likewise has separately what belongs to it.” Again, John 1:14 is another text that refutes the Christology of Servetus which invented “a Christ who is a confused compound of the twofold nature, as if He were a divine man.” Additionally, Calvin also discusses the trinitarian terms in John 1:1b. Calvin prefers to use the term hypostases as in the sense of Hebrews 1, (which I have already discussed earlier; and I also pointed out that we can see in the Institutes how Calvin adopted the trinitarian

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196 Calvin, Comm. John 1:1, p. 8; COR11/1: 11.
197 Calvin, Comm. John 1:1, p. 8; COR11/1: 11.
198 Calvin, Comm. John 1:1, p. 8; COR11/1: 11.
199 Calvin, Comm. John 1:1, p. 9; COR11/1: 15.
200 Calvin, Comm. John 1:1, p. 9; COR11/1: 15.
201 Calvin, Comm. John 1:1, p. 9; COR11/1: 15 (emphasis added). See also Muller, Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: “subsistence” can be defined as the mode of existence that indicates “a particular being or existent, an individual instance of a given essence” (p. 290).
202 See Calvin, The Deity of Christ and Other Sermons, p. 23: “That is how we shall find these three properties in the essence of God. […] The Three are only One, and yet we must distinguish Them, since there is a definite distinction, as is here shown” (emphasis added).
204 Calvin, Comm. John 1:14, p. 19; COR11/1: 30.
expression of Gregory of Nazianzus to summarize his idea of the Trinity [cf. the Institutes, I.13.17]). Comparing this to his contribution of John 1:1-5 in the congrégation (1550/58), we see that Calvin does not mention his theological opponents as in his commentaries, but their existence were inferred within the text, and the text was expressed in a slightly different manner (e.g., the illumination of the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in his commentary of John along with the doctrine of the Trinity), but Calvin clearly underlines the three hypostases or properties in God of Himself: “For we shall come to the Father as the source of all things. Then we shall not be able to conceive of the Father without His Counsel and Eternal Wisdom. Then there will be a virtue which resides in Him which we shall also sense clearly. That is how we shall find these three properties in the essence of God. […] The Three are only One, and yet we must distinguish Them, since there is a definite distinction, as is here shown.”

Now, let us turn to the Institutes. Calvin uses the significant and important doctrine he expounded according to John 1 in his Institutes. When discussing the terms of “essentia” and “subsistence” in the Institutes I.13.6, Calvin adds that:

For if the Word were simply God, and yet possessed no other characteristic mark, John would wrongly have said that the Word was always with God. When immediately after he adds that the Word was also God Himself, he recalls us to the essence as a unity. But because He could not be with God without residing in the Father, hence emerges the idea of a subsistence, which, even though it has been joined with the essence by a common bond and cannot be separated from it, yet has a special mark whereby it is distinguished from it.

Calvin praises the apostle of making the oneness and threeness of God much clearer in John 1:1-2 (see Institutes I.13.7, the line on John [in italic] was added in the 1559 version):

But John spoke most clearly of all when he declared that that Word, God from the beginning with God, was at the same time the cause of all things, together with God the Father. For John at once attributes to the Word a solid and abiding essence, and ascribes something uniquely His own, and clearly shows how God, by speaking, was Creator of the universe. Therefore, inasmuch as all divinely uttered revelations are correctly designated by the term “word of God,” so this substantial Word is properly placed at the highest level, as the wellspring of all oracles. Unchangeable, the Word abides everlasting one and the same with God, and is God Himself.

Calvin remarkably derives the threeness and oneness of God’s essence from this passage of Scripture, and makes a specific remarks: The Word existed in God Himself (in the sense of essence), while the Word is also distinguished from God (in the sense of Persons). To put it in a nutshell, the relationship among the distinct Persons in God is “distinction but not division.” In Calvin’s words,

For although the essence does not enter into the distinction as a part or a member of the Trinity, nevertheless the Persons are not without it, or outside it; because the Father, unless he were God, could not have been the Father; and the Son could not have been the Son, unless he were God. Therefore we say that deity in an absolute sense exists of itself; whence likewise we confess that the Son since He is God, exists of Himself, but not in respect of His Person;

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207 See Barbara Pitkin, “Calvin as commentator on the Gospel of John,” pp. 164-198. Pitkin observes that although Christ’s divinity is not a central topic constituted in the Fourth Gospel, it is still an important theme for Calvin (p. 190).
208 See Iannis Calvini Varia: Congrégations et Disputations, vol. 1, John 1:1-5, p. 43.
209 See Calvin, The Deity of Christ and Other Sermons, p. 23.
210 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.6.
211 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.7; Calvin inserts this passage from his Institutes (1541), p. 201.
indeed, since He is the Son, we say that He exists from the Father. Thus His essence is without beginning; while the beginning of his Person is God Himself. 212

What is mentioned above shows us once again that Calvin maintains that the Word (the Son) and God Himself (a se ipso esse, or He is autotheos/ self-existence/aseity) are intimately related without division and distinction in essence, but that they also remain distinct in Persons. The notion of autotheos is developed much fuller and clearer by a theologian from the days of the Synod of Dordt, Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644): “Filius est a Patre ratione modi subsistendi in essentia, non ratione essentiæ […] Filius non est ἵωτόθιος sed ἵωτόθεος.” A notably similar emphasis and argument concerning the divinity of Christ is also found in the passages Calvin inserted in the Institutes (1559):

For although John affirms that the Word was God when the universe was as yet not created, he utterly distinguishes Word from idea. If then, also, that Word who was God from farthest eternity both was with the Father and had his own glory with the Father, surely he could not have been an outward or figurative splendor, but of necessity it follows that he was a hypostasis that resided in God Himself. 214

But because he could not be with God without residing in the Father, hence emerges the idea of a subsistence, which, even though it has been joined with the essence by a common bond [individuo nexu cum essentia coniuncta est] and cannot be separated from it, yet has a special mark [specialem tamen habet notam qua ab ipsa differat] whereby it is distinguished from it. Now, of the three subsistences/personae I say that each one, while related to the others, is distinguished by a special quality [proprietate quadam]. This “relation” [Relatio] is here distinctly expressed: because where simple and indefinite mention is made of God, this name pertains no less to the Son and the Spirit than to the Father. But as soon as the Father is compared with the Son, the character of each distinguishes the one from the other. Thirdly, whatever is proper to each individually, I maintain to be incommunicable because whatever is attributed to the Father as a distinguishing mark cannot agree with, or be transferred to, the Son. […] that there is a kind of distribution or economy in God which has no effect on the unity of essence. 215

As stated earlier, a full version of Calvin’s explanation of the aseity of the Son according to his exposition of John 1:1 is encapsulated in his debate with anti-trinitarians. The following passage in the Institutes shows this well. It is a passage in the 1539 edition, but the line on John 1 (in italic) was added in the 1559 edition (after the case of Servetus):

Indeed, I conclude far otherwise: the Word had existed long before God said, “Let there be light” [Gen. 1:3] and the power of the Word emerged and stood forth. Yet if anyone should

212 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.25 (emphasis added).
213 Maccovius, Distinctiones et regulae theologicae ac philosophicae (1659), p. 16; also available in a critical Latin version and English translation in Willem J. van Asselt, Michael D. Bell, Gert van den Brink, and Rein Ferwerda (eds.), Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules [Publications of the Institute for Reformation Research 4] (Apeldoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2009), pp. 126-127. See the citation and analysis in Michael D. Bell, “Maccovius (1588-1644) on the Son of God as ἵωτόθεος,” Church History and Religious Culture 91, no. 1-2 (April 2011): pp. 105-119: “The Father functions eternally as the principium (or principle of origin) of the generation of the Son as to his mode of subsisting as the essential Son of God, but not as to the source or principium of his essential Deity as such. […] in his relation to the Father as the Person of the Son he is not the son by Himself ἵωτοθεος, i.e., does not self-generate Himself as a Son co-substantial with the Father as Son, […] the Son does not derive his essential Deity or oúthos from the Father, but is God of Himself—Deus a se—or God of Himself in His essential nature as God” (pp. 109-110).
214 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.22.
215 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.6.
inquire how long before, he will find no beginning. Nor does He delimit a certain space of time when he says, “Father, glorify thy Son with the glory which I had with thee before the foundations of the universe were laid” [John 17:5 p.]. Nor did John overlook this: because, before he passes on to the creation of the universe [John 1:3], he says that “in the beginning the Word was with God” [John 1:1]. Therefore we again state that the Word, conceived beyond the beginning of time by God, has perpetually resided with Him. By this, His eternity, His true essence, and His divinity are proved. 216

To conclude and to summarize our study above, two significant aspects are to be noted regarding Calvin’s view of divine simplicity. Firstly, Calvin clearly argues that the Persons are distinct and unitary: (i) The Persons are distinct by a special “quality or property” (proprietate quadam) in the Trinity (cf. I.13.2, 6, 18, 22 and Institutes 1536 Latin edition, p. 48), 217 namely “principium/fons (principle or source), sapientia/consilium agendi (wisdom or counsel of acting) and virtus (power).” 218 This special quality (incommunicable quality [proprietate incommunicabili] or special mark [specialem notam]) distinguishes each Person; 219 and is characterized by Calvin as qualities that signify the Persons, not the essential attributes. The reason is that divine attributes cannot offer real distinction when referring to the three Persons. (ii) The Persons are unitary by a common bond. “It has been joined with the essence by a common bond and cannot be separated from it.” 220 Through such an understanding, Calvin maintains the oneness of God. The following statements from Calvin’s Institutes further clarify how both the oneness and the threeness of God are safeguarded by applying the term of proprietate quadam:

Those men who had piety at heart, loudly countered that three properties [tres proprietates] must truly be recognized in the one God [uno Deo]. 221

When we hear “one,” we are to understand the unity of substance [substantiae unitatem]; that when we hear “three” we are to distinguish in this one essentia, nevertheless, three properties [in una hac essentia distinguendae tamen tres proprietates]. 222

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216 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.8.
217 Cf. Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 48; OSI: 75 “Would that they had been buried, provided only among all men this faith were agree on: that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, yet that the Son is not the Father, nor the Holy Spirit the Son; but that they have been differentiated by a peculiar quality [proprietate quadam esse distinctos].”
218 Cf. Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 48; OSI: 75: “Indeed Scripture so distinguishes these as to attribute to the Father the beginning of acting and the fountain and source of all things [ut patri principium agenda, rerumque omnium fontem et originem attribuat]; to assign to the Son the wisdom and plan of acting [ad filio, sapientiam et consilium agendi assignet]; to refer to the Spirit the power and effective working of action [ad spiritum, virtutem efficaciamque actionis referat].” See also John T. Sloetemak, “John Calvin’s Trinitarian Theology in the 1536 Institutes: The Individualization of Persons as a Key to Calvin’s Sources,” in Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages: A Tribute to Stephen F. Brown, eds. Kent Emery Jr., Russell L. Friedman and Andreas Speer (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters) (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 781-810.
219 See Calvin, Institutes (1541), p. 214; the Latin text of the Institutes 1539 in COI: 494: Siquidem et improprie dicetur essentiae paternae character, quodiam Dei essentiam in se continent, non portioneaut defluxa, sed integra perfectione, Neque vero tam precisa sum austeritate, ut ob nudas voculas digladiari sustineam.” See also this same remark in the discussion of Calvin’s commentaries on Heb. 1, 11:3, and Gen. 1: 26. Notably, in this research, due to the reason of consistency, the translation of proprietas is changed from “characteristic” to “property.”
220 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.6.
221 Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 48.
222 Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 48. Cf. Institutes (1541), p. 215: “when we hear Scripture declare that there is only one God, they must not fail to understand unity in the divine essence; when Scripture names three,
Secondly, Calvin is determined to prove that the accusation of Caroli is false; and Calvin reaffirmed the teaching of the divine essence of Christ according to the Church fathers. In other words, Calvin not only argued against Caroli, he also strongly affirmed the fullness and simplicitas of the divine essence in each of the Persons, and maintained that the essence is neither begotten nor proceeded, but that this only applies to the Persons.223

d. Genesis 1:1-3 and 1:26 (1550-1553/1554)224

We continue our investigation, again, not with the Institutes, but with Calvin’s Commentary on Genesis, in order to gain a most detailed exegesis of the irreducible oneness of the Trinity according to Calvin. In Calvin’s doctrinal commentaries on Genesis and the Gospel of John,225 he explicitly elaborates how the doctrine of God’s unity (divine simplicity) is related to the Trinity, and the theological understanding of attributes emerges from these selected passages in these two Bible books; later these passages were included in the Institutes (1559) to stress the irreducible threeness of God’s unity.226

As mentioned in Section 5.2, most likely Calvin began his lectures on the book of Genesis from 1550-1552,227 and published both the Latin and French translation of this commentary in 1554, which he dedicated to the three sons of Johan Friedrich, elector of Saxony, dated 31 July, 1554.228 Calvin also began preaching on Genesis on September 4, 1559.229 Later this commentary was reprinted in 1563 as part of his Harmony on the Last Four Books of Moses (Exodus through Deuteronomy). No differences are found in these editions, concerning the passages this study selected to examine.230 In the period of his commentary on Genesis from 1550 to 1554, Calvin also wrote the Defensio (1554) after the trial and execution of Servetus in Geneva in 1553; and he makes a direct reference to Servetus’ errors on the Trinity when commenting on Genesis 1. Thus, it is necessary for us to find out how the controversy and debate between Calvin and Servetus on the doctrine of the Trinity influenced Calvin’s interpretation of Genesis.231 Hence, our tasks in the following sections are: to investigate how Calvin speaks about the divine simplicity in relation to the Trinity in Gen. 1; and how his comments on Gen. 1 correlated with his Institutes (1559).

they must not fail to consider three diverse characteristics (or properties). When that is admitted simply and without deceit, we do not need to worry about the words.”

225 See the discussion of these two doctrinal commentaries in Section 5.2.2.
226 See Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13. In fact, as Scott M. Manetsch indicates, in Institutes (1559), Calvin quotes from or alludes to the book of Genesis nearly 250 times.
228 See Wulfert de Greef, The Writings of John Calvin, p. 87.
229 See Wulfert de Greef, The Writings of John Calvin, p. 95.
230 See Wulfert de Greef, The Writings of John Calvin, pp. 88-89. Calvin dedicated this volume to Henri de Bourbon, Prince of Navarre (and later King Henry IV of France) on July 31, 1563.
231 See Randall C. Zachman, “Calvin as commentator on Genesis,” p. 2.
Let us begin with the question: What does the divine name—the plural form of *Elohim*—in Gen. 1:1 meant according to Calvin? Traditionally, the plural form of the noun *Elohim* (i.e., the name that describes the Creator in the opening verse of Gen. 1:1 and Gen. 1:26a) is treated by Christian theologians as a clear reference to the three *Persons* of the Godhead. Calvin, however, has little solidity with the use of the plural form of God’s name *Elohim* as reference to the triune God. In Calvin’s words:

Moses used the word *Elohim*, a plural noun. From this the inference is drawn that the three *Persons* of the Godhead are here noted; but since, as a proof of so great a matter, it appears to me to have little solidity, I will not insist upon this but rather caution readers to beware of uncertain interpretations of this kind. […] because Moses afterwards says that *Elohim* had spoken and that the Spirit of the *Elohim* rested upon the waters. If we suppose three *Persons* are here denoted, *there will be no distinction between them*. For it will follow both that the Son is begotten by Himself and that the Spirit is not of the Father, but of Himself.

If *Elohim* is interpreted as a reference to the Trinity, and used against the Arians, Calvin warns, we will likely slip into another heresy, namely the error of Sabellianism. For Calvin, the name *Elohim* in Gen. 1:1 is rather to denote the plural number of *omnipotencia Dei* (God’s eternal powers):

For me it is sufficient that the plural number *expresses those powers that God exercised in creating the world*. Moreover, I acknowledge that the Scripture, although it recites *many powers of the Godhead*, yet always recalls us to the Father, and his Word, and his Spirit, as we will shortly see. But those absurdities to which I have alluded forbid us to distort with subtlety what Moses simply declares concerning God Himself by applying it to the separate *Persons* of the Godhead [inferred Servetus]. This, however, I regard as beyond controversy—that from the peculiar circumstance of the passage itself, a title is here ascribed to God, expressive of that powers that was previously in some way included in his *eternal essence*.

However, it is important to note that Calvin does not deny the doctrine of the Trinity. But he resists interpreting the plural noun of *Elohim* in Gen. 1:1 as a reference to the Trinity. Calvin has also preached on this verse in 1559, and stated in his preaching that the plural number of eternal powers do not refer to any different divinities or gods in God’s nature, but “it teaches the variety of attributes that God possesses in Himself so that we may recognized them.

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232 See W. Gunther Plaut (ed.), *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, revised ed. (New York: Union for Reform Judaism, 2006), p. 363. In light of the Jewish linguistic excursus on the divine name, *Elohim* is a generic name used to refer the biblical God, as well as generically used to refer to the gods of the nations as well.

233 Most of the classical Christian thinkers (e.g., Augustine of Hippo) used this verse as a basic biblical foundation for the Trinity. However, the Jewish Commentator Franz Rosenzweig, states in his commentary on Gen. 1:26 that “during the process of creating, God does not in fact say I but We, an absolute, all-inclusive term that does not refer to an I outside the self but is the plural of all-encompassing majesty.” See W. Gunther Plaut (ed.), *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, p. 43.

234 See Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 1:1; cf. *CTS. Gen.* 1:1; *CO23*: 14-17. See also Scott M. Manetsch, “Problems with the Patriarchs: John Calvin’s Interpretation of Difficult Passages In Genesis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 67, no 1 (Spring 2005): pp. 1-25, esp. pp. 8-9. Manetsch points out: “From time to time, Calvin the commentator does not address the question directly, referring his reader instead to the *Institutes* for a fuller treatment of a theological problem […] He rejects as a "violent gloss" the interpretation (defended by Martin Luther) that the plural form of the divine name *Elohim* points to the three *Persons* of the Trinity.”


236 Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), p. 48. Calvin warns, “But where one has to resist the Arians on the one hand, the Sabellians on the other;” hence, “while indignant that the opportunity to evade the issue is cut off from both of them” (p. 48).

separately, and then it leads us back to a simple and unique essence, namely, that we have one and only one God and that we are not adrift in imagining Him to be of one kind or another.”

Now, in order for us to learn how this passage teaches us about the Trinity, we need to understand how Calvin understood the Son and the Holy Spirit from this passage. Calvin states that he found the doctrine of the Trinity foreshadowed in Gen. 1:1 (God of Himself), Gen. 1:2 (the eternal Spirit as the Holy Spirit), and Gen. 1:3 (the eternal Word as the Son); but such trinitarian dogma is not revealed in the plural form of divine name (Elohim). Calvin explains that “God,” His “Spirit,” and His “Word” are distinguished from one another, and all these three Persons exist eternally in one single essence of God. Calvin further clarifies this: The eternal Spirit (Gen. 1:2) is the essential power of God shown in God’s act of creation and providence. Thus, he agreed with those who understand the Spirit as the eternal Spirit of God; and he points in his Institutes I.13.22 to the distinctive activity of the Spirit in sustaining the creation:

The Spirit is introduced here, not as a shadow, but as the essential power of God (Latin: essentialis Dei virtus), when Moses tells that the as yet formless mass was itself sustained in Him [Gen. 1:2]. Therefore it then has become clear that the eternal Spirit had always been in God, while with tender care he supported the confused matter of heaven and earth, until beauty and order were added (I.13.22).

The similar point is made in the Institutes I.14.20: “From this history (Gen. 1 & 2) we shall learn that God by the power of His Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing; that thereupon He brought forth living beings and inanimate things of every kind, […] and that, although all were subject to corruption, he nevertheless provided for the preservation of each species until the Last Day.” As for the eternal Word shown in God’s act of creation, Calvin explains that the Word of God is the eternity of His essence, thus is in God Himself. Calvin refers to John 1 when commenting on Gen. 1:1-3 (see also Calvin’s commentary on John 1 as mentioned above),

Moses now, for the first time, introduces God in the act of speaking (the Word), […] It is certain that the world had been begun by the same efficacy of the Word by which it was completed. God, however, did not put forth His Word until He proceeded to originate light; in the act of distinguishing between light and darkness, His wisdom begins to be conspicuous. Which thing alone is sufficient to confute the blasphemy of Servetus. This impure caviller asserts, that the first beginning of the Word was when God commanded the light to be; as if the cause, truly, were not prior to its effect. Since however by the Word of God things which were not came suddenly into being, we ought rather to infer the eternity of His essence. Wherefore the Apostles rightly prove the Deity of Christ from hence, that since He is the Word of God, all things have been created by Him. Servetus imagines a new quality in God when He begins to speak. But far otherwise must we think concerning the Word of God, namely, that He is the Wisdom dwelling in God, and without which God could never be; the effect of which, however, became apparent when the light was created.

Let us proceed to Gen. 1:26a, another important verse for us to answer the central question of this research. Calvin comments that the plural name Elohim “Let us make man” (Gen. 1:26a) is the “consultation meeting” of God in His climax of the creation, “when He approaches the most excellent of all His works, He enters into consultation […] that He would, in a manner, enter into consultation concerning His creation.” This consultative

238 Calvin, Sermons on Genesis, Chapters 1-11, pp. 10-11 (emphasis added).
meeting of God is not the consultation of God and angels, or sum of gods, but “He consulted with Himself.” In other words, this consultative meeting of God is a meeting between God of Himself, His eternal Wisdom (the Son) and His Power (the Holy Spirit); hence, it foreshadows the doctrinal teaching of the Trinity. Calvin explains,

But since the Lord needs no other counsellor, there can be no doubt that He consulted with Himself. The Jews make themselves altogether ridiculous, in pretending that God held communication with the earth or with angels. [...] Christians, therefore, properly contend, from this testimony, that there exists a plurality of Persons in the Godhead. God summons no foreign counsellor; hence we infer that He finds within Himself something distinct; as, in truth, His eternal Wisdom and Power aside within Him.

According to Calvin, God is identified in Gen. 1 as the triune God who creates the whole world; the creational context is then explored in Gen. 1:2-3 (the fact that God creates through His Word and His Spirit in the creation); and hence, the concept of the three Persons of the Trinity emerges. It is also a significant point to note that the “consultation meeting of God” in Gen. 1:26 is used to refer the plurality of Persons in the Godhead, rather than to the plural noun Elohim in Gen. 1:1. Therefore, in Gen. 1 the identity of God as the triune creator of all things is established. Such understanding of the triune God, as shown in Calvin’s comments on Gen. 1, informs us about the reasons why the nature of the triune God is interpreted in the way as indicated in the Institutes (1536, 1539/1541, and 1559). Let me now turn to these reasons.

In his exposition of the Creed in the Institutes (1536), Calvin states the distinction of Persons as shown in Gen. 1:26a in a much clearer manner: “That nevertheless there was a common action of the three Persons in creating the world is made plain by that statement of the Father ‘Let us make man in our image and likeness.’ In these words He is not taking counsel with the angels, not speaking with Himself, but addressing His Wisdom [the Son] and Power [the Spirit].” At this point, it should be noted that when Calvin interprets this text as God’s consultation with his divine council (“Wisdom” and “Power”), during his creation of men in his image, Calvin is not equating divine attributes to Christ (and the Holy Spirit). Rather in consistency with his view of “peculiar properties” in the Trinity, Calvin understands “Wisdom” and “Power” as the personifications of God the Son and of God the Holy Spirit. Or to be more precise, Calvin is pointing to the peculiar subsistences of God. In other words, Calvin understands “Wisdom” and “Power” in this text as referring to the subsistences (or hypostases) of the Persons (the title “Wisdom” is peculiar to the Son; and the title “Power” is peculiar to the Holy Spirit). Hence, Calvin recognizes a distinction between the biblical hypostatization of Wisdom (as the Logos or Word), and the attribute of wisdom often predicated of God. Herein, Calvin maintains that the essence of God is an irreducible

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241 Calvin, CTS. Gen. 1:26, pp. 92-93 (emphasis added); cf. Comm. Gen. 1:26, p. 25, CO23: 14-17. See also Calvin, Sermons on Genesis, Chapters 1-11, p. 92. In Calvin’s preaching on Gen. 1: 26-28, he states that “there are three Persons in one God. The Father was the sovereign cause and source of all things, and He here enters into consultation with his Wisdom and Power. We stated earlier that our Lord Jesus Christ is the everlasting Wisdom which resides in God and has always had His essence in Him. He is one of the Trinity! The Holy Spirit is God’s Power.”
242 Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 50.
243 This kind of interpretation (make uses of the personification of Wisdom) already attested in the early fathers (e.g., Patristic Christology), and supported by the closely related Proverbs 8 and John 1. They (e.g., Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tertullian) almost at one accord see the “Wisdom” in Proverbs as a personification of God the Son, and they equate it with the Logos (the Word) in John 1. See the early Church fathers’ commentaries on Gen. 1: 26, Proverbs, and John 1:1. See Maurice Dowling, “Proverbs 8:22-31 in the Christology of the Early Fathers,” Perichoresis 8.1 (2010): pp. 47-65.
oneness in the Trinity, not three essences (but three Properties or subsistences) in the Trinity. Such a trinitarian understanding is essentially rooted in the unity of God’s simplicity. In a remarkable way Calvin expresses his understanding of the Trinity through applying the scriptural descriptions of God as close as possible (instead of using the traditional trinitarian terms as mentioned earlier):

[...] the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to be one God. For the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Spirit is God: and that there can be only one God. On the other hand, three are named, three described, three distinguished (tres nominantur, tres describuntur, tres distinguuntur). One therefore, and three: one God, one essence. Why three? Not three gods, not three essences (Unus itaque, et tres: unus Deus, una essentia. Qui tres?) [...] To signify both; the ancient orthodox fathers said that there was one ousia, three hypostaseis, that is, one substance, three subsistences in one substance.244

In responding to the question of “Why three?” Calvin answers that the tres are one God, not three gods, not three essences (No tres dii, non tres essentiae). With careful chosen words, Calvin uses tres nominantur, tres describuntur, tres distinguuntur to indicate a certain distinct property or quality (proprietate quadam) of the triune God,245 instead of using the trinitarian terms (Greek words: one ousia and three hypostases or Latin words: one essence and three Persons) that indicate a certain relationship (quo relationem quando indicare voluerunt) of the threeness of God. 246 This remarkable shift of Calvin is an important key to understand the true distinction of three Persons in one divine essence. For Calvin, indicating the distinction of God’s threeness by a certain proprietate (property) is a much more appropriate biblical interpretation of the Trinity, especially in order not to fall into the errors of the Sabellians, while rejecting the Arians. In other words, this distinction of the threeness of God must not be confused with the gods of the heretics. The threeness of God has neither become “the likeness (homoiousios) of God” (Arius), nor a turning towards “no distinction in God” (Sabellius).247 Unlike Arius and Sabellius,248 Calvin urges that this doctrine should be received and confessed by us: “Persons who are not contentious or stubborn see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be one God. For the Father is God; the Son is God, and the Spirit is God; and there can be only one God.”249 Calvin further elaborates the deity (or aseitas) of Christ and the deity (aseitas) of Spirit in his exposition of the Creed,

The Deity of Christ: By this we confess that we believe in Jesus Christ who we are convinced is the only Son of God the Father. He is the Son, not as believers are—by adoption and grace only—but by nature, begotten of the Father from eternity. When we call Him “only” Son we are distinguishing Him from all others.250

The Deity of the Holy Spirit: Here we confess that we believe in the Holy Spirit, but that He is with the Father and the Son, the third Person of the most Holy Trinity, consubstantial and co-

244 Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 45 (emphasis added).
245 Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 48; see also the discussion for explaining the distinction of the three personae above.
246 Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 45.
248 Arius had undermined the deity of Christ by confessing that Christ was only the eternal Son of the Father [Christ was made and had a beginning], consubstantial with the Father, but not God Himself. On the other hand, Sabellius, had undermined the distinction of Christ in the Trinity by confessing that the Son only subsisted in the unity of God, no distinction in God. On the contrary, Calvin holds that Christ is the Son of the Father, He is one God with the Father or God Himself: “He who was God likewise became man so that the very same one might be both man and God, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of Person” (p. 52).
249 Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 45 (emphasis added).
250 Calvin, Institutes (1536), p. 50 (emphasis added).
As shown above, Calvin not only confessed Christ as the only Son of God, but *God of Himself*. Calvin continues to comment,

Inasmuch as *He is God, He is one God with the Father, of the same nature and substance or essence*, not otherwise than, distinct as to the *Person* which he has as his very own, distinct from the Father. […] Since therefore *God the Son is one and the same God with the Father, we hold Him to be true God, Creator of heaven and earth. And just as we have established all our trust in the Father, so also must we establish it in the Son, since God is one.*

In short, through Calvin’s theological interpretation of the above passages in connection with his *Institutes*, we are able to see three significant and crucial innovations in Calvin’s view of divine simplicity. First, the above examination of Gen. 1 shows that Calvin has not only properly interpreted the name of God (*Elohim*) without any alleged dependence on the fathers’ exegesis. When he claims that Gen. 1 underlines the teaching of the simplicity of God, he also clarifies that the title of *Elohim* in this passage is ascribed to the eternal *essence* of God alone, and he also demonstrates how God’s simplicity is not impaired by the Trinity. In this way, Calvin firmly safeguarded the doctrine of the Trinity and Simplicity. Secondly, not affirming the plural form of *Elohim* as a reference to the triune God does not rule out Calvin’s understandings of the doctrine of the Trinity, as shown in this passage. Calvin safeguarded the doctrine of the Trinity through understanding the Word and the Spirit in terms of God’s creation of the world (Gen. 1:1-3). This is an original approach of Calvin to formulate the trinitarian doctrine in his own way. Calvin’s explanation of Gen. 1:1-3 not only prevents us from confusing the distinctive *Persons* of the Trinity, it also keeps us from the error of Sabellianism. The exegesis Calvin employs is remarkably careful, in that he avoids the presumption of doctrinal thought without violating the boundaries. Thirdly, although the concept of divine simplicity was not explicitly and invariably discussed as a separate attribute in the theological system of Calvin’s *Institutes*, and was not given the same prominence as his teaching on other doctrines, it was, in fact, mentioned in the context of his discussions on other areas, such as: the deity and aseity of the Son, the deity of the Holy Spirit, the divine attributes and names, the unity of the Trinity—particularly in Gen. 1, as well as in his extensive arguments with Servetus.

e. Matthew 28:19 (1553-1555)

Besides referring to Eph. 4:5-6 as an indication of the oneness and threeness of God, Calvin also points out that Matt. 28:19 is a baptismal passage which also echoes the same confession. In 1553, Calvin begins his exposition on the Synoptic Gospels (*Matthew, Mark,*

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251 Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), pp. 57-58 (emphasis added).


and Luke) at the congrègations; the commentary of the Synoptic Gospels is arranged in the form of a harmony and was published in 1555. Let us begin by Calvin’s discussion of Matt. 28:19 which focuses on the baptismal formula (baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit) with reference to the divine simplicity.

As our preceding studies have shown, Calvin’s doctrinal formulation of the triune God is also apparent in his comments on Matt. 28:19, namely in the baptismal formula in which Christ commanded us to administer baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”:

This passage teaches that the full and clear knowledge of God, which had only been darkly foreshadowed under the Law and the Prophets, had at last emerged under the Kingdom of Christ. The ancients would never have dared call God their Father unless they had taken their confidence from Christ, their Head. The eternal Wisdom of God was not altogether unknown to them, the Fountain of light and life. It was one of their acknowledged principles that God exerts His power by the Holy Spirit. But from the start of the Gospel God was far more clearly revealed under three Persons [Sed exortu evangelii longe clarus sub tribus personis patefactus fuit Deus], then the Father showed Himself in the Son, His living and express Image, and Christ Himself, by the brilliant light of His Spirit, shone out upon the world and held out Himself and the Spirit to the minds of men [...].

Calvin then concludes: “So we see that God is not truly known, unless our faith distinctly conceives three Persons in one Essence [tres in una essentia personas concipiat].” For Calvin, baptizing in the name of the three Persons does not violate the simplicitas of God (oneness), because the inseparability of the distinct Persons (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) as God of Himself (one essence) is without division. Calvin carefully defined such understanding of “God of Himself” in three Persons as follows: “Then the Father showed Himself in the Son, His living and express Image, and Christ Himself, by the brilliant light of His Spirit, shone out upon the world and held out Himself and the Spirit to the minds of men.”

Let us now turn to the Institutes. When Calvin explains the distinction and unity of the three Persons in his Institutes in Matt. 28:19, and used this text as one of the key verses (and similar verses like Eph. 4:5) to state the oneness of the Trinity, he inserts the passages from his earlier commentaries on Matt. 28:19 (in italic) into the Institutes (1559):

For this means precisely to be baptized into the name of the one God who has shown Himself with complete clarity in the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Hence it is quite clear that in God’s essence reside three Persons in whom one God is known […] What, then, did Christ mean when He commanded that Baptism should be in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, except that we ought with one faith to believe in the Father, the Son, and the Spirit? What else is this than to testify clearly that Father, Son, and Spirit are one God?

Calvin explains in the Institutes (1559) that the baptismal formula of Matt. 28:19 commanded us to baptize into the name of the one triune God, not three gods. Although three names are mentioned in the baptismal formula: the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of...
the Holy Spirit, we are not baptized into three different gods; but into one God in the three Persons. Through our exploration of Calvin’s commentary on Matt. 28:19 (from 1553-1555), we are able to see the development of his trinitarian formulation, when compared to the Institutes of 1536, 1539/1541, and 1559—The following important insights from the Commentary were added to the Institutes (1559), which make his trinitarian formula much clearer:

For this means precisely to be baptized into the name (the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) of the one God who has shown Himself with complete clarity in the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Hence it is quite clear that in God’s essence reside three Persons in whom one God is known.258

Notably, while stressing the “equality” of the three Persons in the baptismal formula, in his Institutes of 1541 Calvin also points to a clear “distinction” of the divine names in a simple essence:

Certainly these words “Father,” “Son,” and “Spirit” mark for us a true distinction […] it is a distinction and not a division. Likewise the heavenly Father shows that He has a characteristic (Proprietatem) distinct from His son when in Zechariah He calls His Son His companion or neighbour [Zech. 13:7].259

They (those who respect God’s honour) affirmed that there are three Persons dwelling in one God, or rather that in one divine essence there are a Trinity of Persons (p. 213) […] Let us say that there are a Trinity of Persons in only one divine essence; so we will explain simply what Scripture teaches and close the mouth of this heretic (Arius and Sabellius). […] when we hear Scripture declare that there is only one God, they must not fail to understand unity in the divine essence; when Scripture names three, they must not fail to consider three diverse characteristics.260

In short, when discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, Calvin uses the notion of “a distinction and not a division” (sed distinctio/-ne, non divisio) to safeguard the oneness and threeness of God, by which the Son distinguishes Himself from the Father, and the Spirit is also distinct Himself from the Father and the Son; but these three distinct characteristics or properties (proprietatem) is only one God.261

5.3.5 Discourse of the Divine Simplicity in Calvin’s Expositions (1559-1564):
As mentioned above in Section 5.2.1, the theological methods of Calvin in the Institutes differ from those in his biblical commentaries, and in his commentaries he often does not discuss the theological loci. Since the loci are not added to his Institutes after 1560, Calvin takes up the important doctrine of the divine simplicity when handling the texts in his commentaries such as Dan. 7:13; Exod. 3:14, 34: 6-7; and Ezek. 1: 25-26. Calvin’s expositions of these texts show that we find a more mature theological reflection in these last series of his commentaries.262 Let us now turn to the investigations of these selected texts in their chronological sequence.

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258 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.6; cf. Institutes (1536), pp. 207-208.
261 See Calvin’s commentary on Gen. 1: 26 (ref. Section 5.3.4d, above) for his discussion of “properties” (Proprietatem), in which he explains that the “properties” are peculiar to the Persons of the Trinity.
262 See Barbara Pitkin, “Prophecy and History in Calvin’s Lectures on Daniel (1561),” in Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung in Judentum, Christentum und Islam: Studien zur Kommentierung des
a. Daniel 7:13-14 (1559-1560/1561)\textsuperscript{263} Calvin’s commentary on the prophetic book of Daniel is one of the last series of his expository publications.\textsuperscript{264} Calvin’s commentaries on Dan. 7:13 and Ezek. 1: 25-26 are transcriptions from the Praelectiones (theological lectures) on Daniel and on Ezekiel Calvin that gave at the Genevan Academy (founded in June 5, 1559).\textsuperscript{265} The exposition of Calvin’s on Daniel appeared at least two times: he first preached on Daniel (about 47 surviving sermons) in the summer and fall of 1552; then he engaged in a full exegetical treatment on Daniel (sixty-six lectures) from June 1559 to April 1560.\textsuperscript{266} In what follows, the questions that I seek to answer are: How does Calvin reflect on the divine simplicity in relation to the Trinity and the divine attributes in the vision of Daniel (i.e., the begotten Son of God in Dan. 7:13-14); \textsuperscript{267} and: How does he in his lectures link this text with his theological opponents (i.e., Servetus)?

In his Praelectiones 35 on Dan. 7: 13, Calvin comments at considerable length on this most important Old Testament text for identifying “the Son of man” as the foreshadowing of the Trinity, in particular the second Person of the Son: “The second part of the vision, As it were the Son of man appeared in the clouds. Without doubt this is to be understood of Christ [...]”\textsuperscript{268} Calvin continues to state that “the object of this vision was to enable the faithful certainly to expect the promised Redeemer in his [Daniel’s] own time.” Furthermore, there are also other indications that demonstrate the coming of Christ in this text, Calvin points out that, for example, in these words: “Why Daniel uses the word “like” [Heb. letter is כ] the Son of man,” and the answer is “the mark for likeness […]. For the Prophet says, He appeared to him as the Son of man, as Christ had not yet taken upon him our flesh.”\textsuperscript{269} In this lecture, Calvin uses this text to reject the error of Manicheans (e.g., Servetus)\textsuperscript{270} who thought of the text as “Christ’s body to be only imaginary. For as they wrest the words of Paul, and pervert their sense, that Christ was in likeness as a man (Phil. 2:7), so also they may abuse the Prophet’s testimony, when Christ is not said to be a man but only like one.”\textsuperscript{271}

Calvin continues to explain further that the teaching of this text is about foreshadowing (“prelude” or “preface”) the first advent and the ascension of Christ. Firstly, Calvin comments that on the one hand, Daniel applies the expressions “likeness” or “as” a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[263] Danielbuches in Literatur und Kunst, eds. Katharina Bracht and D. DuToit (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), pp. 323-347; Raymond A. Blacketer, “Calvin as commentator on the Mosaic Harmony and Joshua,” pp. 41-42.
\item[265] Calvin’s commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets published in 1559, Daniel in 1561, Jeremiah and Lamentations in 1563, the Mosaic Harmony in 1563, and the first twenty chapters of Ezekiel (published posthumously) in 1565.
\item[266] The transcriptions of Calvin’s lectures were coordinated by “Jean Budé and Charles Jonvillier with care, fidelity and diligence” (ioannis Budaei et Caroli Jonvilaeo labore et industria exercet); and they were published in 1561 by the Genevan printer Jean de Laon. See Pete Wilcox, “Calvin as commentator on the Prophets,” pp. 107-130; CO40:17-18 and CO40: 520-521.
\item[267] See Barbara Pitkin, “Prophecy and History in Calvin’s Lectures on Daniel (1561),” pp. 323-347.
\item[268] See the indication of the eschatological view - “the progress of the Kingdom of Christ” in Calvin’s expositions of the Prophets by P. J. Wilcox, “Evangelisation in the Thought and Practice of John Calvin,” Anvil 12 (1993): pp. 201-17; and idem, “Calvin as commentator on the Prophets,” pp. 121-124.
\item[270] Calvin, CTS. Dan., vol. II, Lect. 35, p. 41.
\item[271] On the subject of Calvin, the Manicheans, and their relation to Servetus, see Institutes (1559), I.15.5.
\end{footnotes}
human being, in this text to Christ before His incarnation, namely, before “God sent His Son, made of a woman, Christ then began to be a man when he appeared on earth as Mediator, […] before He was joined with us in brotherly union.” This is the reason why Daniel uses the word “likeness,” and why he “does not pronounce Christ to have been man at this period, but only like man.” Calvin also employs the terms of Irenaeus and Tertullian—“prelude,” and “specimen” or “symbol”—to describe the figure of Christ before He had put on human flesh: “This was a symbol, therefore, of Christ’s future flesh, although that flesh did not yet exist.” For Calvin, such understanding of Christology helps us to appreciate John 1:1 in a clearer way: “We now see how suitably this figure agrees with the thing signified, wherein Christ was set forth as the Son of man, although he was then the eternal Word of God.” In short, Calvin applied the prophecy of Daniel about the “likeness as the son of Man” neither to the first advent of Christ on earth nor to the second advent of Christ (apocalyptically) in the time of the end. Rather, he viewed this text as the “preface” of the first advent of Christ.

On the other hand, Calvin explains that the phrase “He was in the clouds” teaches us about the ascension of Christ which expresses the distinction of Christ from a created human being. In Calvin’s lecture on this text, he rather says: “For by this expression he simply wishes to teach how Christ, although like a man, yet differed from the whole human race, and was not of the common order of men; but excelled the whole world in dignity […] as he always carried with Him some marks of deity, even in his Humility.” Hence, the word “He came even unto the Ancient of days” is about the divine majesty in Christ; this which is another remarkable insight that helps us to appreciate John 1:14: “Glory appeared in him as of the only begotten Son of God.” Calvin linked this text to other New Testament texts, especially Rom. 6: 10: “When Christ ascended to heaven, he then put off this mortal body, and put on a new life.” Thus, Calvin indicates that the “full meaning of the Prophet’s words” here refers to the different stages of Christ, namely, the “preface” of Christ, as well as the “ascension” of Christ. Indeed, such understanding of this text makes it even better for us to reflect on “Christ as the Mediator”—“neither the human flesh of Christ, nor the divine nature of Christ properly speaking, but a Mediator is here set before us who is God manifest in flesh.” Calvin then argues, “For if we hold this principle that Christ is described to us, not as either the word of God, or the seed of Abraham, but as Mediator, that is eternal God [fully God] who was willing to become man [fully man], to become subject to God the Father, to be made like, and to be our advocate, then no difficulty will remain.” Indeed, Calvin’s Christology (which emphasizes the Person of the Mediator, the God-man) in Dan. 7: 13-14 successfully serves as a perfect principle to rebuke both the Arianism and Sabellianism, as well as to restore the oneness of God by means of this text. With this principle in mind, Calvin argues, one will be able to understand the Scriptures rightly: (i) When the Son ascends to heaven, the Son is not united with the oneness of God’s essence, but “I am one with the Father [as Person], and that the Deity [essence of God] is one;” (ii) The first advent of Christ is given to us by His Father [as Person] as “the guardian of our salvation;” yet “when we know Christ [Person] to be seated at His Father’s right hand, we then understand Christ to be truly God (essence), because all knee would not bent before Him, unless He had been the eternal God […] the true unity and nature of God necessarily shines forth in the human nature of Christ.” Here we see again how in his comments on this text the standardized phrase for

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273 Cf. the discussion of Christ’s *aseity* in Calvin’s commentary on Ezek. 1: 25-26, below.
the divine simplicity is restored by Calvin. Calvin’s Christology, as based on this text emphasizes both the true humanity and the deity of Christ (the Mediator).

Furthermore, Calvin also presents another perspective of his christological argument in his lecture on Dan. 7: 14. Calvin teaches that Dan. 7: 14 portrays a culminating stage of Christ, which commenced “the reign of Christ,” in which the arrival of Christ at the Ancient of days is God of Himself because the supreme “power was given to Him.” Calvin also links and supports his claim with several texts (e.g., Matt. 28:18, Eph. 1:21 and 2: 7) and explains that the supreme power in heaven and earth was acquired by Christ alone, and hence, Christ is God of Himself. Calvin concludes, “So, therefore, Daniel now proceeds with what he formerly said concerning the approach of Christ to God.” Calvin believes that such understanding of Christology can be used to argue against the heretics, who denied Christ as the true and eternal God. Calvin contends that Christ is not presented in this text as the essence of God, but Christ is understood as “the Person of the Mediator; [...] as God manifest in flesh, and with respect to His human nature.” As we see that immediately after affirming Christ as the Person of the Mediator (the humanity and deity of Christ), Daniel’s vision also addresses Christ as the same and one essence with the Father through His eternal Power and Glory. In Calvin’s words: “The Prophet should say power was given to Christ, to subdue all people, nations, and languages to Himself, [...] Christ was raised to His own empire to govern His church in the name and with the power of His Father.”

In short, Calvin’s theological interpretation of this text indicates his emphasis on the three-fold Christology, which is supported by its close relation with 1 Tim. 3:16. As pointed out by Calvin: (P1) Christ is the eternal Son of God concerning His Person of the Trinity; (P2) Christ is the Mediator between God and humanity concerning His incarnation (the true humanity and deity of Christ); (P3) Christ is God of Himself concerning His true essence of God (the aseity of Christ). Clearly, as a result, Calvin’s Christology is certainly contrary to Servetus’ Christology, because Servetus had confused the Person of Christ (P1) with the two natures of the Christ as Mediator (P2). In summary, from his lectures on Dan. 7:13-14, Calvin derives his doctrinal teachings, and he supports his claim on the divine simplicity by connecting this to Daniel’s vision of the Son of man to Christ as the Person of the Mediator, as well as the God of Himself.

b. Exodus 3:14 and 34: 6-7 (1559-1562/1563)

I have explained in the preceding section that the important divine name of Jehovah can be derived from Exod. 3:14 and 34:6-7, especially through the lens of Calvin’s Institutes

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278 See Calvin, CTS. Dan., vol. II, Lect. 35, p. 44.
279 Calvin, CTS. Dan., vol. II, Lect. 35, p. 44.
280 Calvin, CTS. Dan., vol. II, Lect. 35, p. 44.
However, Calvin’s exposition of these texts in his *Institutes* (1559) preceded his commentary on the *Last Four Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (hereinafter referred to as the *Mosaic Harmony*) of 1563, and some of the detailed conclusions of Calvin in these passages have been revised and expanded in his commentary. Hence, at this point, let me begin by exploring the setting of Calvin’s commentary on the *Mosaic Harmony* in its context. Calvin begins to assemble “the material in his commentary on the *Mosaic Harmony*” after his introductory exposition of Exod. 1: 1-8 on September 1, 1559, in the *congrégations*. The commentary on the *Mosaic Harmony*, as Erik de Boer observes, is explicitly chosen by Calvin as the beginning of a renewed focus, in the order of teaching (*docendi ratio*) in his expository project of the Old Testament books. Following the pattern of “doctrine took precedence over history,” in commenting on the New Testament, Calvin distinguishes doctrine (law) and history, when commenting in the *Mosaic Harmony*. This hermeneutical distinction between history and doctrine in the *Mosaic Harmony* is drawn from the distinction of Calvin’s comments on John (doctrine) and the Synoptic Gospels (history). Since our present concern is to investigate how Calvin argued that Exod. 3:14 and 34:6-7 teach the divine simplicity, we may wonder about the main difference between Calvin’s exposition of these texts in his *Institutes* (1536, 1539/1541, 1559) and in the *Mosaic Harmony* (1559-1562/1563). The following investigation shows how Calvin’s view of divine simplicity is more fully taught in his commentary on these selected texts; and hence, this provides us with important material to answer the central question of this present research.

In the *Institutes* (1559), Calvin gives a brief comment on Exod. 3:14 and defends the equality of the divine name and the *essence* of God in the Son and the Father. Calvin argues that these two *Persons* of God not only share the same divine name, but also the same *essence*:

> It remains that the *essence* is wholly and perfectly common to Father and Son. If this is true, then there is indeed with respect to the essence no distinction of one from the other. If they make rejoinder that the Father in bestowing essence nonetheless remains the sole God, in whom the essence is, Christ then will be a figurative God, a God in appearance and name only, not in reality itself. For there is nothing more proper to God than to be, according to that saying, “He who is has sent me to you” (Exod. 3:14).

Notably, later in his commentary (1563), Calvin expounds at considerable length that Exod. 3:14 emphasizes the unity of God through His eternal attributes:

> The verb in the Hebrew is in the future tense, “I will be what I will be [Ero qui ero];” but it is of the same force as the present, except that it designates the perpetual duration of time. This is very plain, *that God attributes to Himself alone divine glory*.

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284 See 5.2.1, above.
285 See the similar remark made by Muller in *The Unaccomodated Calvin*, pp. 153-154.
287 Erik de Boer, *The Genevan School of the Prophets*, pp. 166-168; cf. Raymond A. Blacketer, “Calvin as commentator on the Mosaic Harmony and Joshua,” pp. 30-32, 51-52. See also Calvin’s distinction between *historie* and *doctrine* in the *Mosaic Harmony* in 5.2.2, above.
[divinitatis gloriam], because He is self-existent [a se ipso] and therefore eternal [aeternus]; and thus gives being and existence to every creature. Nor does He predicate of Himself anything common, or shared by others; but He claims for Himself eternity as peculiar to God alone, in order that He may be honoured according to His dignity. Therefore, immediately afterwards, contrary to grammatical usage, he used the same verb in the first person as a substantive, annexing it to a verb in the third person; that our minds may be filled with admiration as often as His incomprehensible essence is mentioned.\(^{291}\)

What we just mentioned shows that the significance of discussing the close relationship between divine essence and attributes of the triune God. In Exod. 3: 14, God reveals His divine name as “I will be what I will be” (or “I am who I am”). Under this divine name, Calvin discusses three essential attributes—divine glory, self-existence, and eternity. Calvin explains “that God attributes to Himself alone divine glory, because He is self-existent and therefore eternal.” And such a sole glorious and self-existent state yields, logically, eternity. With these essential attributes of God, particularly the divine eternity that implies God’s unique glory, “He claims for Himself eternity as peculiar to God alone, in order that He may be honoured according to His dignity.” These essential attributes were revealed to Moses and all human beings, so that they will adore and glorify God, but not to apprehend “his incomprehensible essence.” In his comments on Deut. 6:4, this point is also emphasized. Calvin states that the confession of “God is one” refers not only to God’s incomprehensible essence, but also to His revealed and known power and glory.\(^{292}\) God bears not only the title of majesty, Jehovah, but He is also “thy God, the God of Israel.” In Calvin’s words, “The orthodox Fathers aptly used this passage against the Arians; because, since Christ is everywhere called God, He is undoubtedly the same Jehovah who declares Himself to be the One God; and this is asserted with the same force respecting the Holy Spirit.”\(^{293}\)

In addition, Calvin also clarifies that the name of God in Exod. 3: 14 is the contemplation of His secret essence and His providence upon the creation:

Wherefore, in order rightly to apprehend the one God [unum Deum], we must first know, that all things in heaven and earth derive at His will their essence, or subsistence from One, who only truly is [subsistentiam ab uno qui solus vere est]. From this Being all power is derived; because, if God sustains all things by His excellency, He governs them also at his will. And how would it have profited Moses to gaze upon the secret essence of God, as if it were shut up in heaven, unless, being assured of His omnipotence, he had obtained from thence the buckler of his confidence?\(^{294}\)

Another remarkable and foundational text which provided Calvin with added thoughts with regard to his view of divine simplicity is Exod. 34: 6-7 (in order for us to proceed in a clear manner, I refer to these two verses below for easy reference):

And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord / Jehovah [YHWH][717], The Lord / Jehovah [YHWH], merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation (Exod. 34:6-7, NRSV).

\(^{294}\) Calvin, *CTS. Comm. Mosaic Harmony*, vol. I, Exod. 3: 14, pp. 73-74; CO24: 44.
As discussed in Section 5.2.1, Calvin argues in his *Institutes* (I.10.2), that the repeated mention of the divine name in Exod. 34: 6-7 demonstrates the true eternal attributes of God (i.e., His eternity and His self-existence). This exposition was inserted from the *Institutes* (1539/1541); and when Calvin further commented on Exod. 34: 6-7 in *Institutes* (1539/1541), he argues that the divine name ascribed to God’s singularity in this passage is to express the distinctive quality of God (the divine name “Jehovah” comprises His eternity and His power). In Calvin’s words,

> We must think that His eternity and His essence residing in Him are heralded by the name ascribed to Him in first place (which is repeated twice in Hebrew), which is as much as to say “He who alone is.” Next His powers are remembered, by which He is shown to us, not as He is in Himself but how He is toward us, so that this knowledge consists more in living experience than in vain speculation.  

Calvin’s exposition shows that the eternity of God (the inferred self-existence of God) yields God’s *essence*. “He who alone is,” indeed is comparable or identical to His divine name “I am who I am” (Exod. 3: 14). Calvin further clarifies:

> Moreover we see that the powers which are listed for us here are ones we have seen shine forth in the heaven and earth: that is, mercy, goodness, compassion, righteousness, judgement, and truth. For His Wisdom is comprised under the Hebrew word which is given to Him as His third title, which is as much as to say “containing the Powers in Himself.”

In his comments on Exod. 34: 6-7, Calvin states that the repeated use of the “true titles” of the Lord / Jehovah יְהוָה (nomina Dei) teaches us about God’s *essence* which is often associated with His eternal attributes, namely *aeterna* (eternal) and his *self-existence*. Calvin then connects the boundless powers of God with the Name of God and explains that,

> [...] the name 'l el, is added, which, originally derived from the Hebrew word for ‘strength’, is often used for God, and is one of His names. By these words, therefore, His eternity and boundless power are expressed.

As shown above, according to Calvin, the name of God—Jehovah in Exod. 34: 6—entailed the *eternity* and *boundless power* of God, and is derived from and rooted in the Hebrew verb hāyah or hāvah (which means “to be”). As Calvin indicated earlier in the *Institutes* (1539/1541 and 1559), this divine name is God of Himself, which reveals the self-existence (without beginning) of God. The same remark is found in his comments on Exod. 6: 2: “It is derived from the word קְנֵץ, hāyah, or קֶנֶץ, hāvah, and therefore it is rightly said by learned commentators to be the essential name of God [nomen essentiale Dei]. [...] Since, then, nothing is more peculiar to God than eternity, He is called Jehovah, because He has existence from Himself [vocatur Iehova quod a se ipso habeat esse], and sustains all things by His secret inspiration.” Thus, for Calvin, the name Jehovah can only be referred to God alone—the self-existent and the eternal God.

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296 Calvin, *Institutes* (1541), p. 45; cf. *Institutes* (1559), I.10.2: “Now we hear the same powers enumerated there that we have noted as shining in heaven and earth: kindness, goodness, mercy, justice, judgment, and truth. For power and might are contained under the title Elohim.”
For Calvin, all these attributes and activities derived from the true titles of God. “God Himself proclaimed in a loud voice His power, and righteousness, and goodness, […] when He passed by, to cry out and to dignify Himself with His true titles.” Instead of using *attributes*, herein Calvin uses the term “titles” to describe “Power, and Righteousness, and Goodness” as the true “titles” of God. Remarkably, Calvin elsewhere (both in his *Institutes* and commentaries) attributes these true “titles” to God of Himself in his discussion of the Trinity, such as: “Goodness and Righteousness” to the Father; “Wisdom” to the Son; and “Power” to the Holy Spirit.

Thus, Calvin makes several remarks in the above passages, especially Exod. 3:14 and 34: 6-7, which remain the foundational texts throughout his discussions of the divine simplicity.

Let me come to a conclusion with regard to our preceding investigations. First, notably, as shown above, when commenting on the name of God—Jehovah—, Calvin makes a distinction between seeking the knowledge of God’s *essence* through His divine names (*nomina Dei*), and seeking the knowledge of God through the activities or creation works of God (*attributa Dei*). For Calvin, the *essence* of God is in Himself incomprehensible; and it is only through the divine names (*nomina Dei*) that He revealed to us His power and eternity. Such “distinction” between divine *essence* and attributes is an important key for discussing the doctrine of divine simplicity.

Second, concerning the *nomina Dei* which repeatedly proclaimed in Exod. 34:6 (“Jehovah [YHWH], Jehovah [YHWH] […]”), Calvin states that this is the invisible *essence* of God—the *aeternitas* (eternity) and self-existence of God. In other words, for Calvin, the divine *essence* is identical with the self-existence and eternity of God. Later in his commentary, Calvin also links all other essential attributes, such as the goodness, righteousness, and power to God’s true titles. In short, it is foundational for Calvin to maintain the identity of all the divine *attributes/divine names* with the divine *essence* without parts.

Third, Calvin clearly makes a “distinction but not a division” between the divine names and attributes. Calvin’s exegesis of Exod. 34:6 also shows the twofold governing characteristic which determines his theological interpretation of the divine names (YHWH), namely His *eternity and boundless power*. Calvin argues and affirms that these two particular and distinctive attributes of YHWH distinguishes Him clearly from other gods. In addition, Calvin also identifies other divine attributes, such as goodness, righteousness, and power with God’s true titles, and hence, logically, Calvin identifies these true titles (everlasting ‘Goodness,’ ‘Wisdom/Righteousness,’ and ‘Power’) with the three *Persons* of God. In other words, all three *Persons* of the Trinity are equally eternal and all-powerful. Consequently, the divine simplicity is maintained.

Fourth, when comparing Calvin’s comments on Exod. 3: 14 and 34: 6-7 in his *Institutes* (1539/1541, 1559) with his commentary in his *Mosaic Harmony* (1563), we see the development of Calvin’s doctrine of *attributes* and *essence*, which is built on a consistent foundation. For example, in his *Institutes* Calvin uses these texts to emphasize the distinction of divine attributes to God alone from the attributes shown in His creation; and he also stresses that these attributes or names are equal to the *Persons* of the Trinity. He then develops this approach in a more mature way in his commentary, by indicating the identity of certain names (or titles) with the divine *essence*. Calvin thereby demonstrates that, when the

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300 See the discussion of the divine names and attributes in relation to His *essentia* in 5.2.3, above.
301 See the discussion of “properties” that are peculiar to the *Persons* of the Trinity in light of Calvin’s commentary on Gen. 1:26, above.
true titles are attributed to the three *Persons* of God, distinction is shown in their special titles in relation to the *Persons*, but there is no distinction in their *essence*.

c. Ezekiel 1:25-26 (1563-1564/1565) \(^{302} \)

As already indicated, during the period of 1561-1563, Calvin was embroiled in polemics with the anti-trinitarians, and presents his mature and theological thoughts on the divine simplicity in Ezek. 1: 25-26. Calvin began his lecture on Ezekiel (*Ezechiels prophetae praelectiones*) on January 20, 1563, and ended with Ezek. 20:44 on February 2, 1564. The incomplete version of Calvin’s commentary on the first twenty chapters of Ezekiel was published in 1565 after his death. \(^{303} \) Although examining the exegesis of Ezek. 1:25-26 cannot unfold the entire scope of his doctrine, the historical context of Calvin’s exegesis of Ezek. 1:25-26 provides further details of his polemic with the anti-trinitarians (e.g., Servetus and Giorgio Blandrata of Piedmont), \(^{304} \) which is useful for our evaluation of the development of Calvin’s trinitarian and christological views after the *Institutes* 1559. \(^{305} \)

Calvin commented on Ezek. 1: 25-26 at least two times: the surviving sermons on the passage from 1552 to 1554 (*Manuscrits Francaises*, volumes 21-23), \(^{306} \) and his lectures in *In Ezechiels prophetae praelectiones* (1563-64). \(^{307} \) In the *Praelectiones*, Calvin notes that Ezek. 1:25-26 mainly speaks about two aspects of God’s glory, namely “the likeness of a throne” and “the appearance of a human being.” The prophet regards these two essential aspects of God’s majesty not as an actual “throne” or a “human being,” but the “likeness” of a throne and “appearance” of a human being. For Calvin, “This was especially necessary concerning the human figure,” \(^{308} \) because this figure refers to Christ alone. Calvin explains: “Whenever God appeared in human form, an obscure glimpse was given of that mystery which was at last made manifest in the *Person* of Christ.” \(^{309} \) This comment leads Calvin to offer his last,

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\(^{303} \) Giorgio Blandrata, an Italian physician, began to disturb the Italian congregation with his anti-trinitarian ideas in May 1558. In addition to his comments on Ezek. 1:25-26, Calvin also wrote his polemics to Blandrata in *Responsum ad quaestiones Georgii Blandratae* (first published in 1567, see CO9: 321-332). See also Joseph N. Tylenda, “The Warning That Went Unheeded: John Calvin on Giorgio Blandrata,” pp. 24-62, especially the English translation of a letter from Blandrata to Calvin (CO17:169-171) and Calvin’s *Responsum* (CO9:325-332) in pp 52-62.

\(^{304} \) Calvin only refers to Ezek. 1:28, 2:1, 48:35 in the *Institutes* (1559) as an illustration of the unique glory of God, referring to the prophet’s claim of the equality of Christ’s glory in the Trinity. He then further explains Ezek. 1:28 in his *Praelectiones*. He points out “this vision was the likeness or appearance of the glory of God” by indicating the asety of the *personae*: “Since it is certain that the prophet saw Christ, then Christ is Yahweh, that is, the eternal God [*Deus aeternus*]. Although Christ is distinct from the *Person* of the Father, nevertheless he is entirely God [*totus tamen Deus est*]—God who in Himself is the Father [*qui in ipso est pater*]. Even though there is a distinction between *Persons*, the essence cannot be torn apart or divided [*neque essentia nisi impie discerptur*] except in wickedness” (p. 57).


\(^{306} \) CO40: 52-57.


very lengthy, version of the polemics with two anti-trinitarians, Servetus and Giorgio Blandrata: “In the meantime, the ravings of Servetus should be rejected. [...] Servetus contends that this likeness was human in essence, and that Christ was a son in a figurative sense, because he was God in visible form, composed of three uncreated elements,”310 and “this must also be noted because fanatics are now spreading a new error, as if Christ were a God distinct from the Father, and the Holy Spirit was still another God.”311 And this “new error” of tritheism was followed by Giorgio Blandrata.

With these two anti-trinitarians in mind, Calvin carefully reformulates his trinitarian doctrine into a fuller and clearer declaration of the aseity of the three Persons in light of Ezek. 1: 25-26, as well as John 3:16, 14:10, and 1 Tim. 3:16, to defend the right doctrine:

They [anti-trinitarians] think their wicked notion is confirmed whenever the Father is called simply “God.” But the solution is easy, for in such a case a comparison is made of the Father with the Son: “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.” (John 3: 16) The Father is certainly called God, but the Son is added. Therefore it is not surprising if the foundation of deity is given the highest rank. At other times, when there is no comparison of Persons, the entire deity [tota Deitas], which is common to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and which is one and simple [et una est ac simplex], is denoted. In sum, when the Persons are not under consideration, there is no relating one to another; but when the Persons are an issue, then indications of relationship arise. The Father is placed separately, and then the Son in his rank, and then the Holy Spirit. [...] When Paul says that God was manifested in the flesh, he is certainly not speaking of a secondary or foreign essence (1 Tim. 3: 16). The essence of God is one [Una est enim essentia Dei]. Therefore, the entire deity [tota deitas] was manifested in the flesh. [...] just as Christ said “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me” (John 14: 10). Elsewhere when he teaches that the entire fullness of deity dwelt in Christ [totam plenitudinem deitatis residere in Christo], we ought not to conclude from this that the essence of God was torn, [...]. Thus, if Christ is truly God, it follows that His essence does not differ from the Father’s.312

In this citation Calvin introduced the issue of the simplicitas and unitas of God’s essence in the context of his polemics with the anti-trinitarians. For Calvin, the doctrine of the Trinity is neither the blasphemy of Servetus, who argues that the essence of God composed of “three uncreated elements,” nor the error of Blandrata who “torn” (or divided) the essence of God into three distinct gods. Calvin asserts that the essence of God is one without distinction, and each Person of God is one and same essence with other Persons of God. Calvin argues, “when there is no comparison of Persons, the entire deity [tota Deitas], which is common to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and which is one and simple [et una est ac simplex], is denoted.”313 In other words, whenever Christ is referred to Himself as God, Christ’s essence is the one and same essence with the Father (and the Holy Spirit)—“If Christ is truly God, it follows that His essence does not differ from the Father’s.” Thus, the three Persons of God shared the same and one essence with one another; and the one essence is not composed of, or divided by, three Persons. There is neither distinction nor division in essence between the Persons, but there is the one and the same essence.

5.4 Conclusion
I trust I have presented an investigation which sufficiently indicates the immense significance of Calvin’s exegetical work on the important doctrine of the divine simplicity, in relation to

our central question. As shown in the preceding examinations of this chapter, Calvin had carefully chosen the biblical texts from both the Old and New Testaments in his formulation of the Christian doctrine of divine *simplicitas*. Through his careful doctrinal and terminological explanation in light of his exegesis (of the selected Bible texts this chapter examined), we gain a clear and vital understanding of this doctrine, and most importantly, it helped us to embrace what the Bible teaches about the unity and the Trinity of God. The following are some of the significant findings of this chapter, by which I also show the areas or results that will be carried forward to Chapter 6.

First, in Section 5.2.1, we learn the importance of exploring Calvin’s works in his historical context and his approaches to the whole scope of his works. In considering the view of divine simplicity in relation to our central question, namely how Calvin relates God’s *simplicitas* to a multiplicity of His attributes and the plurality of *Persons*, I have shown that we should read Calvin’s biblical commentaries in light of and in connection with the various editions of his *Institutes* (1536, 1539/1541, and 1559). Apparently, Calvin’s discussion of the divine simplicity in the *Institutes* and the commentaries were intended to complement each other and to express a mutual interrelationship which deserves more of our attention. Also, I have shown and drawn our attention to the complex literary and historical circumstances for the whole project of Calvin’s commentaries, especially his contributions to the *congrégations*, his *Praelectiones* at the Genevan Academy, and the polemic engagements with his theological opponents in his times.

Second, in Section 5.2.2, I have pointed out the need to identify and examine the important terminology Calvin used for defending the divine simplicity (in relation to our concern) in his commentaries and the *Institutes*, and I have shown that the selected terms of the essence, the *attributes*, and three *Persons* of God are essential for Calvin in discussing the divine simplicity. After examining this terminology, by showing the continuity and discontinuity of Calvin’s use of these terms (by comparing him with preceding theologians), I have specifically pointed out that, for example, the *aseity* of Christ is the key term Calvin used to formulate the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology in his *Institutes* and commentaries. Nevertheless, these theological terms that Calvin used are in accordance with the Christian traditional creeds (i.e., Apostle’s Creed, Chalcedonian Creed, and Athanasian Creed). We learn from the development of Christian doctrine that each term had a varied and complicated usage, but they were carefully used by Christian theologians to maintain a proper understanding of the oneness and threeness of God. This is quite clear in Calvin’s usage of these doctrinal terms. The doctrine of the Trinity in Calvin’s *Institutes* and commentaries does not only explain the relationship between the three *Persons* in God, but it also preserves the simplicity of God. Hence, we learn from the preceding examinations that, when describing the absolute simple *essence* of God and the *Persons* of the Trinity, every definition and every term was used by Calvin to maintain the doctrinal teaching that there is “three distinct *Persons* but not a division” in a simple *essence*. Thus, I have specifically identified the “standardized phrase” Calvin often used when discussing the doctrine of divine simplicity: “For in each *hypostasis* the whole divine nature is understood, with this qualification—that to each belongs his own peculiar quality” (I.13.19; *OS*: 132). Also, we may conclude from our examinations that, although Calvin uses the term “proprietas” for the characteristic (or title) of each one of the three divine *Persons* (everlasting Goodness, Wisdom, and Power), at the same time he also affirms that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each wholly, and without derivation, God Himself.

Third, in Section 5.3, I continued to examine whether the theological terms I studied in Section 5.2.2 are properly defined throughout Calvin’s discussions of the divine simplicity in relation to the Trinity and God’s attributes through studying selected biblical passages
from Calvin’s commentaries in connection with his *Institutes*. Three observations can be concluded from my investigation:

(i) I intentionally examined the selected biblical texts in their chronological sequence in order to provide an opportunity to explore the genuine development of Calvin’s idea of the divine simplicity, in his biblical commentaries (1539-1564) and the *Institutes* (1536, 1539/1541, and 1559). My investigation indicated that for example, the idea of Christ’s aseity is not explicitly shown in his earlier works (Rom. 8: 9-11 and the 1536 *Institutes*), but it was being developed to a clearer doctrine in the latest editions of his *Institutes* of (1539/1541, 1559) and his commentaries (John 1 and Gen. 1) after his debates with Caroli and Servetus. Moreover, Calvin even provided a more mature theological reflection on this doctrine in his final series of the *Praelectiones* (Exod. 3: 14, 34: 6-7; Ezek. 1: 25-26). At this juncture, we should recognize from the doctrinal arguments of Calvin in the various editions of his biblical commentaries and the *Institutes*, that there was a consistent foundation in the development and formulation of his view of divine simplicity.

(ii) I have shown that the formulation of Calvin’s view of divine simplicity in his biblical commentaries provided him with a strong foundation to defend the doctrine of divine simplicity, rather than to defend the doctrines of the church fathers. In light of the selected biblical texts, we learn that the careful choices of the texts and theological terms Calvin used to discuss the divine simplicity are remarkable and also a genuine necessity for developing the right doctrine. For example, Calvin uses Heb. 1:3 to define his theological term (*hypostasis*), and shows that the theological formulation of his doctrine of divine simplicity is derived directly from the Scripture, rather than from other sources or analogy.

(iii) In Section 5.3.4.a-b, I have briefly discussed the debates that Calvin was drawn into by Caroli and Servetus, respectively. We gain some insights from the theological context of the debates that, for example, the key issue surrounded the debates is: the aseity of Christ. Thus, in the study of the selected biblical texts of John 1 and Gen. 1 I have shown how Calvin has successfully defended his claim of the aseity of Christ, and refuted the errors of his opponents: Calvin does not invent any analogy in order to make sense of the divine simplicity in relation to the Trinity; rather he constantly used biblical texts, while considering the Scriptures as a whole (e.g., he cited one part of Scripture while at the same time referring to other part of the Scriptures) to provide a coherent and convincing view of the divine simplicity. In the *Institutes* Calvin admitted the difficulty of explaining some elements in the trinitarian terminology and its doctrinal formulation; yet Calvin avoided using or inventing any analogy in explaining and making sense of the divine simplicity. As such, in his days, Calvin’s teaching in the commentaries (in connection with his *Institutes*) remained to be a prominent feature in the theological discussion of the doctrine of divine simplicity, due to its strong scriptural foundation.

Fourth, it is legitimate to conclude that Calvin has provided a comprehensive defense of the concept of divine simplicity, particularly through his usage of the *aseity* of Christ, which not only refuted the opponents during his time, but also offers an answer to our central question. Thus, I believe that the formulation of Calvin’s view of divine simplicity provides an important Christian doctrine for the comparative purpose of this present research—it is an important source for us to dialogue with Thomas, as well as with the Islamic thinkers (al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd) that this research chose to study.

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6

The One and Only God

“In that day there shall be one Lord, and His name shall be one.” (Zech. 14:9)

O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians): Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allāh, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allāh. Then, if they turn away, say: “Bear witness that we are Muslims [lit. Submission to the will of God].” (the Qur’ān, Surāh 3:64)

6.1 Preliminary Remarks: A Comparative Study of Four Thinkers with regard to the Paradoxes in the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

In this final chapter, I will survey our findings of how al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin approach the concept of divine simplicity (ref. Chapters 2-5), and I will compare and evaluate the essential convictions (see Convictions [1]-[5] below) that arise from these findings. The aim of this chapter is to present a case for the view that this set of essential convictions makes a philosophical and theological appropriation of God’s simplicity possible. In order to accomplish this, the chapter proceeds through the central themes broadly exemplified by al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin, in conjunction with the doctrine of divine simplicity, as discussed in this work. As it is certainly not possible to discuss and compare all the philosophical and theological aspects that shaped their doctrines of divine simplicity within the scope of this present chapter, I limit myself to the following central elements that I have identified in the previous chapters, namely: uniqueness (“al-khāṣṣiyah”) and completeness or perfection (“kāmil”) by al-Ghazālī; existence (“ anniyya”) by Ibn Rushd; the “highest good” by Thomas; and the “aseitas” by Calvin.

For al-Ghazālī, God’s uniqueness implies that God is the incomparable God, without any eternal partners, and that He transcends the composite nature of the creatures. Therefore, He is without parts in the uniqueness with which He is the one and only God. God’s perfection implies that He is Himself in the completeness of His divinity and that in this divinity the attributes are “not identical, but not different.” Therefore, He is free from all composition of attributes. In the same vein Thomas explains, that God’s highest good implies that He is Himself the supreme good (highest degree of existence). His plurality of attributes signifies the ultimate goodness in His own essence. The plurality of attributes is neither equivocal nor univocal with respect to His ultimate perfection. In God’s highest good each of His attributes and His essence are one and the same. In contrast with al-Ghazālī and Thomas, Ibn Rushd argues that the essential attributes of Allāh only appear as accidental to

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1 In Chapter 1, I have described the paradoxes of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Christianity and Islam, which this research seeks to answer. How do the four selected thinkers from the two faiths of Islam and Christianity (i.e., al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin) conceptually link the oneness of God (divine simplicity/Tawḥīd) with the plurality of His attributes (ṣifāt). Consequently, this research seeks to investigate how the Christian thinkers (Thomas and Calvin in particular) relate the oneness of God’s essence to the plurality of three divine Persons in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In the preceding chapters, I have examined the works of these four thinkers in order to provide some primary sources and evidences to answer the paradoxes of divine simplicity. For fuller discussions of divine simplicity in each selected thinker, please see al-Ghazālī (Chapter 2), Ibn Rushd (Chapter 3), Thomas (Chapter 4), and Calvin (Chapter 5).

2 This research aims mainly to state and compare the positions of the selected four thinkers on divine simplicity. I do not attempt to trace how much they each owe to their predecessors, nor address whether these four thinkers were influenced by one another or by their objectors through their works. Although at times I refer to the contradiction between the theories of the four thinkers’ and their opponents in their polemic works (see below Section 6.2.1), this is not meant to trace the historical connections between them.
human beings. As such, the attributes seem to be added to the essence of Allāh. Therefore, the attributes of Allāh should be interpreted as “imagined attributes.” Finally, both Ibn Rushd and Calvin emphasize the connection between God’s simplicity and His self-existence. For them, God’s aseitas (αὐτοθεος, a se ipso, or autotheos, self-existent God, “God of Himself”) implies that He is God of Himself in the fullness of His deity, and thus self-contained within Himself. In addition, Calvin further emphasizes God’s aseity in his discussion of the Trinity. Calvin points out that in His aseity, God and each of the divine Persons are really identical with the one and the same as His essence. Yet, the divine Persons do not imply three different “gods of himself” (tritheism), but the one and only God.

As pointed out in Chapters 2-5, I contend that the central themes, as summarized above, imply God’s simplicity and represent a more consistent formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity. In short, their formulations of divine simplicity are a consequence of God’s uniqueness, perfection, goodness, and aseity. As identified above, these thinkers have different understandings of each of these attributes, but the similarities in their interpretations are striking.

By bringing these four thinkers from two traditions into conversation, I suggest to apply this framework to the interfaith dialogue context of my country, Malaysia. I propose that Muslims and Christians should consider using these central themes in their thinking and speaking of God’s simplicity. I hope that this approach will be a viable trail towards a genuine interfaith dialogue in Malaysia. Especially the discussion of the paradoxes—the divine simplicity over against the multiplicity of divine attributes (and the divine Persons) is important. Muslims and Christians are justified to call their God Allāh, if both parties take seriously what the representative authors have brought forward about God’s simplicity. As shown in the motto of this chapter, the Qur'ān, Surāh 3:64 confessed that Allāh is one God without partners and lords; He alone is God of the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).

In what follows, I will compare and evaluate what al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin have brought forward with regard to the concept of divine simplicity (6.2). In this section, I will summarize the most pressing objections to the concept of divine simplicity they had to face (6.2.1). I will then make a final evaluation by showing how the central elements are interpreted by them. I therefore use five essential convictions ([1]-[5]). The

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3 As indicated in Chapter 1, Malaysian Christians are prohibited by the Malaysian government and the High Court to use “Allāh,” as in this predominant Muslim society this title is reserved for its own God. Based on the research of this study, it is concluded that, if the word “Allāh” is referring to the one and only God, then both Muslims and Christians can call their God Allāh despite of their different faiths. However, it is neither my intention to answer the question of whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God, or the contextual question whether Malaysian Christians and Muslims refer to the same Allāh when they both believe in an irreducible oneness of God. Nor do I attempt to answer the question whether Muslims and Christians worship two different gods. As pointed out by Miroslav Volf: “Inversely, the mere fact that Muslims and Christians use the same word for God does not mean that their God is the same.” Rather, I intend to show the central themes deriving from al-Ghazālī’s, Ibn Rushd’s, Thomas’, and Calvin’s interpretations of divine simplicity enable us to move toward a fruitful way of speaking of God’s simplicity, which is in agreement with the monotheistic traditions of Christianity and Islam respectively. Also, this is what the whole thesis is in fact driving at, that if we take their attitudes towards the worship of God seriously, there is no difference between the Christians and Muslims. They both want to worship the One and True Allāh. See also Miroslav Volf, “Allāh and the Trinity: A Christian Response to Muslim,” The Christian Century, 128 no. 5 (March 08, 2011): pp. 20-24.

4 Cf. Calvin, Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets: Zechariah and Malachi, trans. Rev. John Owen, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2009), pp. 427-429. Calvin comments on Zech. 14: 9, “The Prophet then teaches us, that God cannot be truly worshipped, except He shines alone as the supreme, so that our religion may be pure and sound. [...] God distinguishes Himself from all idols and his worship from all superstitions; [...] The more then it behoves us to notice this truth, so that the one name of God may prevail among us, and that no one may allow himself the liberty of imagining anything he please; but that we may know what God ought to be worshipped by us.”
interpretation of these five convictions shows sometimes similarities and sometimes differences. In a following step I will discuss the implications for interfaith dialogue on the doctrine of divine simplicity in the context of Malaysia (6.3). Finally, this chapter ends with an overall conclusion of this research project (6.4).

6.2 Common Paradoxes and Solutions regarding Divine Simplicity in Christian and Islamic Theologies

The intent of this section is to build a preparatory stage that can be carried forward to, and applied in, the next section. In what follows, I compare and evaluate the preceding chapters as a whole, in order to bring these four thinkers into conversation. The following sections aim to answer the following questions: 6.2.1 What are arguably the most important objections to divine simplicity in al-Ghazālī’s, Ibn Rushd’s, Thomas’, and Calvin’s time? 6.2.2 What are the similarities and differences between their theories with regard to conceptualizing the paradoxes of the doctrine of divine simplicity in relation to a plurality of attributes respectively (and, how Christian thinkers [Thomas and Calvin] conceptualized the three divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)?

6.2.1 Objections to Divine Simplicity: Problems with the Plurality of Divine Attributes and Three Divine Persons

As pointed out in the previous chapters, the polemical works that were investigated in this research play an important role in building, as far as possible, a genuine dialogue among the opponents and the selected thinkers: the selected thinkers discuss the multiplicity of divine attributes (and divine Persons) without destroying the simplicity of the divine essence. I have briefly shown in the preceding chapters how their historical contexts and various theological approaches shaped the debate of the paradox. For example, I have demonstrated the mutual questioning of these paradoxes of divine simplicity by the selected thinkers and their objectors. All four thinkers held firmly to the doctrine of divine simplicity and rejected or rebuked the philosophical and theological opponents during their time. In other words, they all shared the same intention of being a faithful defender of the doctrine of divine simplicity. The table below summarizes and puts together the objections and disagreements all four thinkers faced:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Opponents’ objections to al-Ghazālī’s theory</th>
<th>It denigrates the plurality of divine attributes: Since God’s simplicity is the pure actuality of thought, God’s essence and attributes are identical. Thus, there are no eternal attributes coexisting in God.⁵</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Opponents’ objections to Ibn Rushd’s theory</td>
<td>It denigrates the plurality of divine attributes: The existence of attributes is added to God’s essence; since God is the one and necessary being, God has no real attributes.⁶</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁵ See Chapter 2. For al-Ghazālī, the Philosophers’ theory with regard to the doctrine of divine simplicity is incompatible with the Islamic version of divine simplicity.

⁶ See Chapter 3.
| The Opponents’ objections to Thomas’ theory | (i) It denigrates the plurality of divine attributes: The pluralities of divine attributes are in opposition to divine simplicity.  
(ii) It does not cohere with three divine Persons: It is argued that “the difficulty [arises]by saying that God is both three and one, […] because when a substance is numbered the aggregate will be one through the one added intention.”7 “We are insane for professing three Persons in God, even though we do not mean by this three gods.”8 |

| The Opponents’ objections to Calvin’s theory | It does not cohere with three divine Persons: It is argued that “since there is no God but one, why do you here mention three, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?”9 “Those three incorporate and distinct entities cannot exist in the unity of God. […] By the principle of convertibility three beings are naturally inferred from three entities. Therefore, *there are three essences and three gods.*”10 |

As shown in the table, we see a clear picture that, in various ways, the objectors expressed a recurrent problem which became the central question in the doctrine of divine simplicity. Consequently, this has led all four thinkers to deal with these most pressing objections to the divine simplicity.

The polemical debates on the simplicity and plurality of attributes in God appear to be even more complex when we look at al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), in which we see al-Ghazālī level a charge against the Philosopher (i.e., Ibn Sīnā), who constructed a simple God with no real attributes, as opposed to the God of Islam. A brief glance at the debate can be also found in Ibn Rushd’s references to al-Ghazālī’s text in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*). These polemical works reveal that both Islamic thinkers faced the same presuppositions (in their opponents) in defending the oneness of God.

On the Christian side, I have also explored the debates over the paradox of the simplicity and the plurality of divine attributes, as well as simplicity and the Trinity. Thomas’ *Summa Contra Gentiles* shows that he was keenly aware of the problems in relation to simplicity and a multiplicity of attributes (*SCG*.I), as well as the Trinity (*SCG*.IV). Thomas carefully formulated the truth of divine simplicity that the Christian faith professes, and refuted the errors of his objectors (i.e., Arians, Sebellians, Amaury of Bene, St. Bernard, and David of Dinant). As for Calvin, in light of the various versions of his *Institutes* (1536 Latin Edition, 1541 French Edition, and 1559 Latin Edition), and in connection with his biblical commentaries, I pointed to his persistence in affirming the oneness of the triune God while facing tremendous challenges from his opponents. For example, Calvin fought against the

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9 See *John Calvin’s Catechism* (Geneva, 1545).

challenges of Pierre Caroli, Michael Servetus, and Giorgio Blandrata of Piedmont, whose views threatened the doctrine of the Trinity. Their challenge not only forced Calvin to explain the doctrine of the Trinity in a much clearer manner, but also to preserve the doctrine of divine simplicity.\textsuperscript{11}

In short, we can conclude from what we said above, that all four thinkers, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin, were explicitly and implicitly preoccupied with the paradox of divine simplicity. Furthermore, inspired by these essential convictions, they found the solution to the problem of the compatibility between divine simplicity and multiplicity of attributes (and three divine \textit{Persons}), when they professed the one and only God. I will continue to further elaborate this point in the next section.

6.2.2 Divine Simplicity: The One and Only God

At this juncture, it is clear that the four positions that we have considered in depth—those of al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin—derive their answer to the question of the paradox of divine simplicity from their Christian and Islamic faiths. Although the concept of divine simplicity is constructed by them in different ways, as they developed the doctrine by using the characteristics of their own religion, instances of similarities and differences are found in their formulations of the doctrine, due to their understanding of divine simplicity. It has been my contention throughout this study, that one can, only if God is self-contained in Himself (e.g., Ibn Rushd’s idea of \textit{anniyya} and Calvin’s idea of aseity), and absolutely unique and perfect (e.g., al-Ghazālī’s idea of uniqueness and Thomas’ idea of highest good), designate Him as the one and only Allāh. These are the most crucial characteristics for making Christianity and Islam monotheistic.

My inquiry into the polemical works of the selected four thinkers in the preceding chapters reveals that there was no actual debate among them (except between Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazālī). And we have also seen their different ways of speaking about God’s simplicity. However, a comparison between the theories of these thinkers is possible by bringing them into dialogue (as this chapter intends to do). Despite their different faiths and Holy Scriptures, their theologies/\textit{kalām} on the doctrine of divine simplicity remain firmly situated in classical monotheism. Moreover, such a comparison is important in itself, because of the lack of detailed comparative studies with regards to their formulations of divine simplicity. The issue at stake is to ask at this point whether they would or would not have agreed that there can be a multiplicity of attributes within the single essence of God. To express this in another way: Would they have agreed that the opponents (as shown above) had vindicated the very essence of God who is one and the only being?\textsuperscript{12} In order to answer this question, let me take the results of my study of the four thinkers, and lay out their similar theological convictions (1)-(4), followed by their divergent convictions (5). In articulating divine simplicity, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin have presupposed the irreducible oneness of God by employing the following theological convictions:

\textbf{Conviction (1): God is the one and only being with all attributes of perfection}

For the plurality of God’s attributes, I have learned from these four thinkers that all comply to their revealed Scriptures (the Bible and the Qur’ān), which both revealed God of Himself to be One, as well as the God who has a plurality of attributes. Thus, all four thinkers

\textsuperscript{11} See Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{12} The reason why some theologians and philosophers cannot agree that the multiplicity of attributes is essentially predicated to God, is that it would introduce a multiplicity within the single essence of God.
agreed that there is a multiplicity of attributes, and that these can be predicated to the divine essence. The God of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd has all attributes of perfection (e.g., seven essential names or so called inadequate “attributes” [ṣīfāt dhātīyya] of Allāh, namely, His power [qudra], knowledge [‘ilm], life [ḥayāt], will [irāda], hearing [ṣam‘], sight [baṣr], and speech [kalām]). For them, these essential attributes of God are not added to His single essence, but are stated to subsist eternally in Allāh. For al-Ghazālī, divine attributes have different degrees of unity, depending on whether they are unique and complete. That is why the multiplicity of attributes, as al-Ghazālī explains, implies the utmost degree of unity, that is, of simplicity.

In light of al-Ghazālī’s theory the consideration of God as “al-khāṣṣiyah” (uniqueness) is crucial for any confession of God’s simplicity (Tawḥīd). In the treatment of the problem of divine ṣīfāt (attributes) in Sunni Islam, al-Ghazālī solved the paradox of characterizing a theologically simple Allāh by maintaining a number of eternal divine ṣīfāt without destroying the simplicity of Allāh: whatever the seven essential ṣīfāt/attributes are, they are not parts of Allāh. In al-Ghazālī’s major works, Allāh is characterized as wholly unique (al-khāṣṣiyah); though He has ṣīfāt, His ṣīfāt “are not identical, but not different” with His Dhāt. For example, in describing the unity of God (Al-Tawḥīd), al-Ghazālī employs the traditional view of Islam, saying that the one (Al-Wahd) and unique (al-Ahad) God is an absolute unity, who can neither be divided nor duplicated. The oneness entails that no part of it is itself a substance, as a point has no parts. Based on the studies of Ibn Rushd’s theory, the empirical ‘existent’ (wājid al-wujūd) is an important term in the discussion of Allāh’s essence (its absolute oneness, al-ahaddiyya) and its relation to His essential attributes (ṣīfāt). Ibn Rushd explains his understanding of ‘existence’ in two senses:

The First Sense: The attributes of Allāh should be interpreted as the actual existence of “imagined attributes” subsisting in Allāh eternally. This actual existence (first sense) is not an accidental predicate to the essence of Allāh but Allāh of Himself. In short, this first sense of existence is basically equivalent to the metaphysical unity of essential being. The Second Sense: Ibn Rushd argues that the essential attributes of Allāh only appear as an accidental (or contingent) existence (second sense) to human beings. Thus, the attributes seem to be added to the essence of Allāh. Ibn Rushd echoes Aristotle’s principle that the term ‘existent’ can mean different things. In this second sense, existence is an accident only because it can be said of substance and consequently of the nine remaining categories. In short, this second sense is equivalent to the numeric unity of attributes. Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd’s theory of existence in this second sense also indicates that it is attributed primarily to God’s essence and only secondarily to the remaining existing things or predicates. According to Ibn Rushd, God’s perfect attributes, preceding all relation in God, are the only one.

Did Thomas and Calvin agree with al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd with regard to this conviction? Indeed, their approaches to the paradox of divine simplicity in relation to the plurality of attributes are not exactly the same, but the intersections between their theories are compatible in this theological conviction. The God of Thomas and Calvin not only has essential attributes (i.e., omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, omnibenevolence, etc.), but all perfections of attributes (including the relational attributes, i.e., mercy, justice,

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13 See Chapter 2.
14 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsīfa, trans. Sabih Ahmad Kamali as The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Pakistan: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963), pp. 96-108. Al-Ghazālī repeated this idea throughout his arguments. Cf. Frank Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology. See also Chapter 2.
16 See Chapter 3.
17 See Chapter 3.
holiness, etc.) which are identical to His single essence. According to Thomas’ theory, if we comprehend the plurality of divine attributes in terms of creaturely attributes, we may introduce some complexity in God’s essence (in other words, God’s simplicity is removed). Thus, Thomas rejects any univocal and equivocal linking (in Thomas, the univocal use of attributes entails that it is predicated of God and humans in precisely the same way, while on equivocal use of attributes is opposed to literality between the divine and the human) of creaturely attributes to God’s essential attributes. For example, the principles Thomas used to discuss the simplicity and the attributes of God can be found in his SCG.I.c.31. In his theory Thomas proposes an initial division of his understanding on the nature of God into the categories of cause (essentia) and created effectus (created effects of God): Thomas discusses divine simplicity and perfection under cause, and he discusses the plurality of God’s attributes and names under created effects of God. With these categories in mind, Thomas formulates his answer that states “that the divine perfection and the plurality of divine names are not opposed to the divine simplicity.” Thomas argues that, if one is to predicate any positive attributes of God (who subsists in the nature mentioned above), he/she should acknowledge that predicating the highest good to God is recognizing that God’s attributes are neither univocal nor equivocal with respect to these attributes they predicate. Notably, this theological theme is similar to al-Ghazālī’s notion that the attributes of Allāh are neither identical with, nor different from, the attributes we predicate of Him. According to Thomas, we conceive of God’s attributes in a certain likeness of God as created effects by means of conceptions proportional to the divine perfections that pre-exist in God. In other words, the multiplicity of created effects of God brings with it a multiplicity of names, by which different perfections are designated. In God all attributes are absolutely one single perfection. Similarly, all divine attributes signify God. Although these attributes do “imitate” God’s ultimate perfection, they are neither equivocal nor univocal to God’s ultimate perfection.

As for Calvin, although in his Institutes he does not discuss the topic of divine simplicity and plurality of attributes explicitly or at length, he elaborates to a considerable extent on these issues in his biblical commentaries. In The Harmony of the Last Four Books of Moses (i.e., Exodus 3:14 and 34:6-7), Calvin explains,

[... ] whatever was right for men to know about Him. “Jehovah,” he says, “Jehovah, a merciful and gracious God, patient and of much compassion, and true, who keepest mercy for thousands, who takest away iniquity and transgression [...] in whose presence the innocent will not be innocent, who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children” [Exodus 34:6-7]. Here let us observe that His eternity (aeternitatem) and His self-existence (καὶ αὐτουσιαν) are announced by that wonderful name twice repeated. Thereupon His powers are mentioned, by which He is shown to us not as He is in Himself, but as He is toward us: [...] Now we hear the same powers enumerated there that we have noted as shining in heaven and earth: kindness, goodness, mercy, justice, judgment, and truth. For power and might are contained under the title Elohim (1.10.2).

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18 See Chapter 4.
19 SCG.I.c.31. pp. 141-143.
20 Cf. S.T.Ia, q. 13.
21 OS3: 86, 2.15. Calvin used the Greek words καὶ αὐτουσιαν here in a passage from the year 1539 to express the self-existence of God, this divine attribute—καὶ αὐτουσιαν—from which aseity, authotheos, self-existence, God of Himself is derived to stress the equality and coeternity of the personae. Cf. I.14.3 in OS3: 155, 3.14-15: “For, since nothing is more characteristic of God than eternity and self-existence—that is, existence of Himself [Nam quum nihil magis Dei proprium sit quam aeternitas, et αὐτουσια, id est, a seipso existentia].”
22 See the analysis of Calvin’s commentary on Exodus 34:6-7 in Chapter 5.
We have shown Calvin’s interest in *attributa divina* as a term preferable to *nomina Dei*. Calvin considers that “this *Dei nomen* (the name of God) is especially ascribed to the Father because if the beginning comes not from Him, the simple unity of God (*simplex Dei unitas*) cannot be conceived” (1.13.29; *OS* 3: 151). What does Calvin mean when he refers to the divine names in relation to God’s oneness? Calvin could mean: “The name of God is especially ascribed / peculiar to the Father,” as applicable only to one God in the sense of God’s *essentia* (essence) without the beginning, because God has existence in Himself and He is uncreated. In his comments on Rom. 1:21, Calvin explicitly mentions together certain *attributes* that are characteristic marks of the one God,\(^23\) namely, *eternity, power, wisdom, goodness, truth, righteousness, and mercy*. Furthermore, Calvin explains that while we cannot comprehend God’s spiritual essence, nonetheless God reveals *something* of it to us, which he refers to as *attributa divina* (divine attributes), especially the distinct divine *attributa* that represent God of Himself, such as His eternity (*aeternitas*) and His self-existence (*kai aórovía*). In short, Calvin holds that the attributes of God also demonstrate divine essence (of God Himself), and the many attributes are distinct from one another but together they describe the one single essence of God.

**Conviction (2): God is the one and only being without parts**

The ultimate contention, therefore, for these selected thinkers is: God is the one and only being, His essence is without parts (any temporal portions can be understood as partial). A careful reading of their works in relation to the paradox of divine simplicity reveals these clear concerns: (a) al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin argued that God’s essence is one, indivisible, and without parts; (b) al-Ghazālī and Thomas argued that the multiplicity of essential attributes is *neither identical to nor different from* (or in Thomas’ terminology: neither univocal nor equivocal) God’s essence.

According to al-Ghazālī, these ‘essential attributes’ (*ṣifāt dhātiyya*) are “not identical, but not different” with regard to God’s essence (*Dhāt Allāh*). This distinction is important. If the essential attributes were identical with the divine essence, then the oneness of Allāh would be compromised. On the other hand, if the essential names or attributes were not coeternal with the divine essence, then the many essential attributes of Allāh would be sabotaged. In other words, the co-eternity of these essential attributes with the divine essence does not entail that the relation between the essential attributes is causal. Consideration was also given to God’s completeness (*kāmil*). Al-Ghazālī’s regards this divine perfection as crucial to the classical understanding of divine simplicity. One of his remarkable passages cogently illustrates how the concept of divine simplicity is a necessary condition for affirming God’s completeness (*kāmil*): “When we say ‘Allāh,’ we point to the essence (*Dhāt*) together with the attributes, not to the essence alone because the term ‘Allāh’ cannot be predicated of an essence that is judged to be free from the divine attributes such as it could not be said that jurisprudence is something other than the jurist.”\(^24\) In short, al-Ghazālī’s God is a wholly unique being. One of the distinctive achievements of al-Ghazālī’s idea of divine simplicity is this theological theme. From this description it is evident that the only one God is not composed of a multiplicity of attributes, but that the multiplicity of essential attributes is subsisting within God’s unity (*Tawḥīd*).

Although Ibn Rushd does not argue that God has divine attributes eminently, he holds that God’s simplicity is His essence. Ibn Rushd argues that God, as the necessary being,

\(^{23}\) See Chapter 5. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* (1559), I.13.7, 8, 9. Calvin indicates that the everlasting Wisdom, eternity, highest power, righteousness are the characteristic marks of the one God [*quod unius Dei proprium est*].

\(^{24}\) *Al-Ghazālī on Divine Predicates*, p. 74.
is identical to His essence. Thus, God has His perfect attributes eminently in the sense that His attributes are identical to His essence. In sum, through the aspects mentioned above, the Islamic thinkers hold that the doctrine of divine simplicity underlines an inevitable oneness of God. Yet, it is important to note that the view that multiplicities of attributes are predicated of God is not restricted to the works of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd. Similarly, this is vindicated by Christian thinkers, Thomas and Calvin, as well.

On the Christian side, does the multiplicity of attributes within God’s essence challenge the simplicity of God? Thomas’ answer was an emphatic “No.” In his SCG Thomas points out that “parts are imperfect in comparison with the whole;” but God is the first and highest good. In other words, the absolute and infinite perfections that pre-exit in God are the highest degree of those particular attributes. Indeed, all divine perfections are identical with the wholeness of the divine essence. Given that each attribute predicated of God must be the highest degree of that particular attribute, all attributes pertaining to God are one/unified in God. Hence, God is without parts. According to Calvin, “the essence of God is one, simple and undivided, and He contains all in Himself, without portion or derivation, but in integral perfection” (Calvin’s Institutes I.13.2). Thus, God is without parts, undivided as He is (“all in Himself” or a se ipso—which corresponds to aseitas: “God of Himself”). In other words, the plurality of attributes in God does not form many gods, but one and incomparable God (e.g., Isa. 48:11). For example, it is like saying God is eternal, God is powerful, God is wise, God is good, God is truthful, God is just, God is loving, and yet these aspects are not seven attributes of parts of the essence of God, but of the one God. In addition, Calvin’s discussion of the nomina Dei and attributa Dei in the Institutes 1.10.2 indicates that each of God’s properties (attributa), such as kindness, goodness, mercy, and so forth, are the union of all properties with His eternity and self-existence (καὶ αὐτοῦσιαν). In short, for Calvin, the attributa of God are not a multiplicity of His essence, but both the indivisible unity and identity in God’s essence.

**Conviction (3): God is one in single essence (Dhāt)**

Now, another question that requires answering is: What does the term “one” (in God’s essence with a multiplicity of attributes essentially) mean? The answer to this question is given numerous times in the texts of the selected thinkers. As already mentioned, according to these thinkers, a multiplicity of attributes can only be predicated of the one simple being, if this multiplicity is seen to be an irreducible oneness within God’s essence. In other words, at all costs these thinkers would keep multiplicity far away from God’s essence, and their utmost concern is to safeguard divine simplicity. For them, God’s attributes are not “added” to His single essence, but essential to God’s single essence. God’s essence cannot be a “divisible” being, since He is one and simple. Such emphasis on the divine simplicity is in accord with their works that we have studied in the previous chapters. We have already seen that their God is absolutely one and indivisible in essence; and those divine attributes, which are predicated of His essence cannot but be many in number, and cannot even be composed by God’s essence and existence. For example, Thomas in his SCG I.c.77 argues that the multitude of other things is posterior to the one. Or to be more precise, they are comprehended in and directed to God’s final goodness, in which “His final goodness is one.” Therefore, the only way for these thinkers to safeguard the divine simplicity is to assert that the essence is one in number.
Conviction (4): God is the one and only transcendent being

Specific consideration was also given to the classical view of God’s transcendence, as many regard the divine perfection as a unique feature to formulate the classical understanding of simplicity in both the Christian and Islamic dogmas. In surveying what “transcendent” means in the theories of al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin, my aim is to demonstrate that, apart from the solutions provided by these thinkers, it is difficult for any of them to “fully” comprehend the one and only God. In other words, this study also investigates how these four thinkers attempt to formulate a doctrine of God’s unity by translating the classical philosophy/falsāfa of neo-Platonic and Aristotelian traditions of thought on unity, in order to demonstrate the divine transcendental unity.

Al-Ghazālī explains the term “one,” or God is one, in relation to the unknowability of God. Al-Ghazālī repeatedly uses the term of God’s unknowability as a definition for the oneness of God. For al-Ghazālī, God’s unity is not merely numerical, but concerns His uniqueness that separates Him from everything else; His completeness is without parts. This is God’s mystery that is beyond our comprehension. Although Ibn Rushd does not explicitly use the term in his formulation of divine simplicity, he implies the transcendental concept of Allāh. For example, it is shown in Ibn Rushd’s exegesis of Aristotle’s Metaphysics that he follows Aristotle’s notion of substance (Latin: substantia; Greek: ousia) to describe God’s transcendent nature as the First, the First Intellect and the Prime Immovable Mover. Notably, in Metaphysics, Allāh is posited as the First Principle (the Unmoved Mover) of a first moved substance, that is, beyond the outermost heavenly bodies and the sphere of the fixed stars. Such a notion of transcendent substance or essence is distinct from Aristotle’s Categories, including qualities, quantities, relations, etc.

In his SCG, Thomas repeatedly reminds us of our incapability to know “what God is”, and of our ability to comprehend only “what God is not.” Furthermore, Thomas stresses that even when applying all the remotionis of creaturely characteristics and modes to “what God is not” in describing God, this still does not “tell us what God is in Himself” (SCG.I.c.14). For Calvin, “God’s essentia is incomprehensible; hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception” (Institutes I.5.1). Moreover, we also see in the beginning of Calvin’s discussion on the essence of God in the final edition of the Institutes (I.13.1), that he carefully makes a distinctive qualification of God’s essence in light of the Scripture. In Calvin’s words, “The Scriptural teaching concerning God’s infinite and spiritual essentia ought to be enough, […]” (Institutes I.13.1). Apparently, for Calvin, the essence of God is not only immeasurable and spiritual (a denial of any speculation about God); but He is also clearly a numerical one. The simple and undivided essence of God exists in three Persons (an affirmation of the acceptance

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25 I am aware that the concept of “transcendental” (transcendens/transcendentia) was more familiar to the thinkers of the sixteenth century (see Chapter 1), and it was not frequently used by the medieval thinkers (e.g., al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, and Thomas), as well as the Reformed thinkers (e.g., Calvin). See also Jan A. Aertsen, “Chapter One: The Concept of Transcendens in Medieval Thought: What is beyond and What is common,” in Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor [ca. 1225] to Francisco Suárez (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 13-34; and Alexander Treiger, “Avicenna’s Notion of Transcendental Modulation of Existence and Its Greek and Arabic Sources,” in Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (eds.), Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas (Leiden: Brill, 2012): pp. 327-363.

26 These categories contain things that cannot exist on their own; their existence depends on their being “in” substances.

27 Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, Tres Dii (Jaeger 3-I: 54-55); see the citation and translation in Jaroslav Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600), p. 221. According to Gregory of Nyssa, ousia is a term legitimately used to refer to a truly simple God (the transcendent unity of God); he notes that “the divine, simple, and unchangeable nature transcends any sort of diversity according to ousia, in order to be [truly] one.”
of a triune God). This seems to be a paradoxical claim, but indeed, the mysteriousness and richness of God’s essence are manifested.

To summarize, the convictions of (1)-(4), mentioned above, are to show and conclude that when all four thinkers approached the paradox of divine simplicity and the plurality of attributes in their formulations of divine simplicity, all these formulations, in fact, contain the confession of God as the one and only transcendent being. These four common convictions that help to identify the basic presupposition of these thinkers suggest that perhaps the problem of the doctrine of divine simplicity is not as insolvable as it at first seems. Perhaps the coherence of God’s simplicity and multiplicity of attributes (and Persons) becomes apparent if it is understood in light of this insight we derive from these thinkers.

Conviction (5): God is one in essence and three in divine Persons

The Christian Bible not only reveals to us the plurality of divine attributes and divine simplicity, it also manifests the relations between the three Persons of the Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). In this Conviction (5), I point to the most divergent aspects that arise from the formulation of divine simplicity by these Christian thinkers (especially Thomas and Calvin), namely: God is one in essence and three in divine Persons. I show that Thomas’ and Calvin’s formulations of the “oneness and threeness of God” are able to provide a trinitarian doctrine that would also be acceptable to Muslims thinkers (al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd). Throughout this study, I consider this conviction as the most difficult issue in dealing with God’s simplicity.

The central divergence in the formulation of the Christian and Muslim thinkers of divine simplicity stems not only from of their different faiths (e.g., the different content of the revealed Scriptures), but also from their divided understandings of the doctrine of the Trinity. As indicated earlier in 2.1, Ibn Rushd clearly objected to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, because it is logically an unacceptable configuration and it compromises divine simplicity. He says (the italicized sentences form the premises of Ibn Rushd’s objections):

The intellect which is by itself and possesses a perfect life. […] Therefore life and knowledge are the most distinctive attributes of God, and this God is living and knowing. It is in this respect that the Christians were mistaken when they adopted the doctrine of the Trinity in the substance; it does not save them from it to say that it (i.e., the substance) is three and God one because if the substance is multiple, the compound is one in the sense of unity superimposed on the compound. […] This doctrine implies that it is composite and every compound is originated, unless they claim that composite in themselves, they would be things passing from potentiality into actuality by themselves and moved by themselves, without mover. […] The tripartition which is perceived in the deity, for instance, is a conceptual distinction, not an ontological one; it is something which the mind devises by comparison with things composite in a certain sense and uniform in another; they are not, as the Christian claim, distinct concepts referring to one being.

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28 See Paul Helm, *Calvin: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2008): For Paul Helm, Calvin draws a fundamental distinction between the essence of God in se (as He is in Himself) and the nature of God quoad nos (as he is revealed to us) (pp. 36-52).

29 Ibn Rushd, *Ibn Rushd’s Metaphysics*, XII.1620-21:1072ba18, trans. Genequand, p. 160: “The attribute and the thing to which it belongs refer in their case to the same thing, ontological one, but double according to its designation, I mean attribute and subject. For when this essence is apprehended as substratum and qualified by any attribute, the attribute and the subject of the attribute are one in the act of predication (fī‘l-ḥamal), and two if one envisages the distinction between predicate and substratum […]”

In the passage above, Ibn Rushd argues against the concept of the Trinity on the basis of the following premises:

P1: The plurality of divine Persons implies the composition of substances.
P2: The plurality of divine Persons is an ontological distinct “concept” in God’s essence. Consequently, a one and only single essence is not possible.
P3: Christians often attribute certain attributes (e.g., life and knowledge) to the divine Persons.

Conclusion: Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is opposed to divine simplicity.

Certainly, it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss their diverse and debatable understandings of the Trinity, yet Ibn Rushd’s refutation of the Trinity deserves our attention. Based on the premises P1-3, the crucial and divergent point between Islamic thinkers (al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd) and Christian thinkers (Thomas & Calvin) is how they relate the oneness of God’s essence to the plurality of divine Persons. I contend that Thomas’ and Calvin’s concept of the oneness and threeness of God can be understood in a way that would make it the Christian doctrine of the Trinity much more plausible for Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazālī (that it is not opposed to divine simplicity).

The Christian thinkers, Thomas and Calvin, attempted to solve the paradox of simplicity and the Trinity through the following presuppositions:

P4: The Christian Bible revealed that there is an irreducible oneness in God’s essence;
P5: The Christian Bible revealed that there are three distinct divine Persons in God (i.e., the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit);
P6: These three divine Persons are distinctive in their “opposed relation” to each other in God;
P7: Each divine persona is God of Himself (aseitas), but they are not composed of three essences of God (tritheism); but the one, simple and undivided essence of God exists in three Persons.

Conclusion: Therefore, there is irreducible oneness in God’s essence, and threeness in God’s Persons.

Clearly, several theological aspects are put forward in the premises above. In P4-7, by employing the terms “opposed relation” and the “aseity” of divine Persons in their discussions of the oneness and threeness of God, Thomas and Calvin attempted to hold on to

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31 See Alexander Treiger, “Al-Ghazālī’s ‘Mirror Christology’ and Its Possible East-Syriac Sources,” Muslim World, 101.4 (2011): pp. 698-713. Treiger points out that because of the need of Muslim-Christian dialogue, both the Arab, Christian theologians and Muslim theologians (e.g., John of Dolyatha [eight century], al-Nāshī’al-Akbar [d. 906]) “redefine” the hypostases as divine attributes. For example, the “mirror Christology (along with its variant, the seal-and-wax Christology outlined by al-Warrāq (9th century Muslim theologian) is obviously a Christian attempt—and to judge from al-Ghazālī, a rather successful one at that—to propose a Christology that would be palatable to Muslims.” See also David Thomas, Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity: Abū ʻĪsā al-Warrāq’s “Against the Incarnation” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Ismail Abdullah, “Tawḥīd and Trinity: A Study of Ibn Taymiyyah’s al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,” Intellectual Discourse, vol. 14, no.1 (2006): pp. 89-106.

32 Cf. See also the following remarkable passage that indicated al-Ghazālī’s version of the Trinity, in which the hypostases of the Trinity are equated with divine attributes (ṣifāt): “Christians who say “Third of a Trinity” (thālith thalāthah, the Qur’ān, Surāh 5:73) do not mean that God is three, but they say that He is one in essence and three in respect to attributes (be-e’tebār-e ṣefāt). They say, literally, “One in substance and three in hypostasis-ness” (wāḥid bi-l-jawhar wa-thalāth bi-l-ṣanāmīyāt), and by hypostasis (ṣanām) they mean attributes (ṣefāt) (Makātib, 15:12-15; German tr. Krawulsky, Briefe und Reden, p. 84). See the citation and translation in Treiger, “Al-Ghazālī’s ‘Mirror Christology’,” at p. 712, n. 53.
the doctrine of the Trinity without destroying the simplicity of God. Indeed, what is at stake in this paradox of divine simplicity and the Trinity is how we talk about the theological concepts of “persona,” “the relations,” and the number “three.” As shown above, these key foundational concepts allowed Thomas and Calvin to safeguard the irreducible oneness of the triune God.

“Persona”

What is the meaning of persona? For Thomas and Calvin, the Latin term persona is used in Christian theology for describing the distinct relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (three hypostaseis in Greek). 33 Yet these three Persons are one and the same divine essence. In this regard, the term persona is used by Christian thinkers not as the modern sense of “individual persons,” who are distinct from one another in self-existence and rationality. On the contrary, when the term persona is used to refer to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it points to the fact that there are real “distinctions” of three personae (or three subsistences or three prosopa), but is not a distinction of ousia (or essentia). 34 In other words, Christian theologians affirm the irreducible unity in term of ousia in God of Himself and the real distinctions among the three Persons in God of Himself. Thus, we cannot interpret this persona 35 as equal to the contemporary concept of individual person. 36 In short, the three Persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not three gods which are distinct from one another in essence. But the three Persons are one and the only God. Thus, the three divine Persons imply neither the composition of substances (P1), nor ontological distinctions in God’s essence (P2). 37

“The relation”

Another theological concept is the meaning of “the relation” between three divine Persons. For Thomas, the divine Persons have distinct proprietates in “opposed relation” to the three hypostases. In other words, the three divine Persons are distinguished from one another through their “opposed relations” and distinct “proprietates.” Thomas asserts that, while the principle of “opposed relations” between the personae and the distinct “proprietates” leads to the plurality of the divine Persons, the common essence between the personae does not lead to a plurality of Persons. 38 Likewise, Calvin agrees with Thomas at this point. But Calvin

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33 See John Calvin, The Deity of Christ and Other Sermons, trans. Leroy Nixon (New Jersey: Old Paths Publications, 1997): Calvin insists, “the word ‘Substance’ or [as the Greeks say] ‘Hypostasis’ is still more suitable since it is from Holy Scripture” (p. 22).

34 See the discussion of the Institutes (1559), I.13.2 and Calvin’s commentary on Hebrews 1:3 in Chapter 5.

35 The translation of persona into ‘person’ became common in Modern English version of the Institutes. However, the English word ‘person’ seems to represent the meaning of persona poorly. Thus, it is better to capitalise the word ‘Person’ in order to distinguish between the divine Person and the human person, as no other term can probably be closer to Thomas’ and Calvin’s usage of the Latin term persona.

36 See Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics of vol. 2: God and Creation, pp. 299-300; see also Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 4, p. 175. In a contemporary understanding of an individual person, a distinction between the nature of a human person and the person himself/herself is made. For example, when we say that Socrates was a philosopher in Athens, Plato was a philosopher in Athens, and Aristotle was a philosopher in Athens, does it mean that they are not three Athenian philosophers, but only one? We know the answer is “no,” as although Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all possess the same human nature, as individual persons they are three distinct and separate from that nature and from each other; to put it another way, “human beings, one in one essence, are numerically many.”


38 See SCG.IV.c.26. Cf. S.T.1a, q.28, art. 3. See also Chapter 4.
further develops his understanding of the relationship between three Persons in this way: Christ (and the Father and the Holy Spirit) is “God of Himself” (self-existent/aseity) in relation to His essence; but Christ is the Son of God the Father in relation to His hypostasis. In addition, Calvin also suggests distinguishing the three divine Personae from one another by means of their distinctam proprietatem (distinct properties). It seems that, according to Calvin, these unique properties are only mentioned when reference is made to “Christ as the Son of the Father,” not to “Christ as God of Himself.” In other words, the hypostasis of the Father has His distinct property in relation to the hypostasis of the Son, yet what properly applies to God (divine essence) is “transferred” to the Son. But, Calvin argued, “as soon as the Father is compared with the Son, the character [proprietas] of each distinguishes the one from the other. […] whatever is attributed to the Father as a distinguishing mark cannot agree with, or be transferred to, the Son.”

When referring to Christ as the Son, He is the Son, not the Father. Interestingly, by means of the distinctive proprieties of the divine Persons, we find that Calvin does describe each persona as having his own peculiar quality (unicuique proprietas): It is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit that are described respectively as "goodness" or the fountain of all perfection (principium, fons), “wisdom” (sapientia), and “power” (virtus et efficacia). However, Calvin does not redefine divine Persons as proprietates (properties) in the sense of attributes. Rather he defines divine Persons in relation between the Father (the Father is not begotten), the Son (the Son is begotten of the Father), the Holy Spirit (the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son) through their relations with one another. Accordingly, what each divine persona as God of Himself is "pertains no less to the Son and the Spirit than to the Father," and each is the one and only God. Thus, in sum, when Thomas and Calvin speak of three divine Persons, they do not mean three gods but one and only God.

Now, the following question remains: Does such an interpretation of the distinct Persons in relation to God’s simplicity parallel the Ninety-Nine Most Beautiful Names of Allāh in Islamic theology? When we take a closer look at al-Ghazālī’s view on the relation between the simplicity of God and the plurality of names/attributes, we find that these Ninety-Nine Most Beautiful Names of God are derived from the seven essential attributes of God (which subsist eternally in God’s essence). We especially have found some logical reason to explain how al-Ghazālī, who had started his refutation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity on the ground of its incompatibility with the simplicity of God, encounters the very same difficulty in his formulation of the plurality of attributes and the simplicity of Allāh. In Christian theology, divine Persons are interpreted in a rather paradoxical way: the attribution of Persons of God expressed both the divine essence and the relation in act with respect to the interior activity of the three Persons. Both point to God as a cause of His acts, and God is per se subsistent relations. For al-Ghazālī, God’s speech (the Word of God/the Qur‘ān) is one of the essential divine attributes. God’s speech is the eternal uncreated Word, but it is not identical to God’s essence. Clearly, this uncreated Word is not same as the Christ (Logos) in which the Christian believes. For Thomas and Calvin, the Word/Wisdom (Christ) is not only eternal and uncreated, but also is God of Himself. Therefore, in sum, on the one hand, we see that there is an intersection between the Christian’s and Muslim’s understanding of “the relation.” On the other hand, however, their understandings are not parallel.

39 Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.6; OS3: 116. See also Chapter 5.
40 See Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.18; OS3: 132 and Calvin’s commentary on Heb. 11:3. See also Chapter 5.
41 See Calvin, Institutes (1559), I.13.6. See also Chapter 5.
42 See Chapters 4 and 5; see also Aquinas, S.T. Ia, q28, 4.
“Three”

For Thomas and Calvin, when they confess the three divine Persons, it is not that they worship three distinct deities. The “three” are one single and indivisible divine essence; not three different divine essences, but one and the same essence of God. Thomas strongly defends that the three Persons of God do not relate to each other as three different beings, but as three distinct “subsisting relations” of the essence of God. Still, Thomas did not go as far as certain Muslim theologians, who asserted that by the simplicity of God all essential attributes (the so-called seven essential attributes), that are uncreated, subsist in God’s essence. I have also identified Thomas’ claim that each divine Person is really identical with the whole of the divine essence, and each Person possesses the quality of aseity (a se) independently of each other. In light of Calvin’s theory of divine simplicity, I also demonstrated that the aseity44 of Christ is the key term Calvin used to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology in his Institutes and biblical commentaries. For Calvin, the assertion of God’s simplicity is the basic presupposition that underlies the doctrine of the Trinity. Calvin carefully formulated his trinitarian doctrine by pointing out that, if the three divine Persons are understood as equally self-existent, without “opposed relation” to each other, they must be both the three distinct Persons and the one and same essence of God. For example, when Christ is understood without “opposed relation” with the Father and the Spirit, He is God of Himself. But when Christ is understood as “opposed relation” with the Father, He is Son of the Father.

6.3 Implications for the interfaith dialogue on the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

At this junction, we are ready to consider the question: What are the implications of this study that outlines al-Ghazālī’s, Ibn Rushd’s, Thomas’, and Calvin’s concept of God’s simplicity? The case for the doctrine of divine simplicity is made by examining and comparing God’s uniqueness, perfection, goodness, and aseity in light of these thinkers and subsequently tracing the ways in which their descriptions of God’s simplicity imply that He is the one and only Allāh. In this section, I will attempt to explore and demonstrate how their concepts of divine simplicity could bring about a fruitful interfaith dialogue; especially as these four thinkers speak with abundant richness of God’s simplicity as the one who is absolutely unique, and is so perfectly good that His existence cannot be compared to any other. Thus, I begin with a brief introduction from the vantage point of the debate over the use of “Allāh” by Christians in the context of Malaysia.

In Conviction (5), we have clearly identified the problem of the simplicity and the Trinity that divided the Muslim’s and Christian’s theories about the concept of divine simplicity. Based on their formulation of divine simplicity, both al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd reject the doctrine of the Trinity. For them, it is impossible for the one and only God to co-exist with the plurality of divine Persons in Him. Thomas and Calvin, on the other hand, have sought to maintain the doctrine of the Trinity when speaking of the doctrine of divine simplicity. In other words, the preceding section has shown that the Trinity was an issue in this comparative study between them.

44 For further discussion on the aseity of the Trinity, see Chapter 5, and Brannon Ellis, Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Deity of the Son. Unlike Ellis, who considers the theological consequences of following Calvin’s autothean language and denying the essential communication of divine essence in the eternal generation of the Son, I contend that each persona of the Trinity is autothean (essential self-existence or God of Himself), NOT one of three autothean, and such an understanding is a crucial aspect for reflecting on the unity and Trinity of God in the context of interfaith dialogue.
This problem identified is certainly also a much debated issue in Malaysia, particularly as it concerns the Christian usage of the Arabic term “Allāh” in referring to their triune God. The debates started when the publication of Alkitab [Bahasa Malaysia translation of the Bible] was prohibited by the Ministry of Home Affairs on 13 May 1982. On 23 June 2013 the highest court prohibited Malaysian Christians to use the word “Allāh” when referring to their God. Indeed, “Allāh” is the standard Arabic word for “God”, and has been used by Arab Christians since pre-Islamic times. Dr. Kam-Weng Ng in his article titled Refutation of Muslim Scholars’ Arguments in the Allāh Controversy offers some crucial background for understanding what the Malaysian Christians are facing in these debates. Kam-Weng mainly focuses on the linguistic study of the word Allāh, and insists that Allāh is neither a proper noun nor a personal name for God in the Qur’ān, but a common name to describe the one and only God. He refutes Malaysian Muslim theologians (such as Mohad Sani and Mohd Aizam) who allege that “Christians (with their doctrine of the Trinity) are inconsistent in the usage of the word Allāh and this result in confusion for both Christians and Muslims.” Kam-Weng shows persuasively that is not only right that the word Allāh is used by Muslims to describe the one and only God; it is also legitimate for Malaysian Christians to describe their God as the one and only triune God. Kam-Weng refers to al-Ghazālī’s theory of God’s simplicity (in relation to God’s transcendence), and points out that no one can appropriate the name of God: “Al Ghazālī, Muslim philosopher par excellence, in his magnum opus Ihya’ ‘Ulam Ud-Din warns against taking the language literally since the analogy does not have to agree in every way with that which it resembles. Indeed, classical Islamic scholars insist that God transcends all linguistic reference.” Thus, Kam-Weng concludes that both Malaysian Muslims and Christians can describe their God as Allāh.

This debate raises pressing theological questions for both Muslims and Christians in Malaysia. Do the Muslims and Christians worship the same God when they share the same divine name (Allāh)? Is it possible for the Christian faith to redefine their trinitarian theology (i.e., to define the divine Persons as essential attributes of God) in order to describe Allāh as their one and only God? Is it possible for the Muslim faith to accept Thomas’ and Calvin’s doctrine of the Trinity as a coherent and consistent concept of Islamic Tawhīd’s divine simplicity? In view of the religious tensions in Malaysia and the unanswered questions that arise from the concept of divine simplicity, in what follows, I make four suggestions that are derived from the observations and insights outlined in Convictions (1)-(5). I hope these suggestions will prompt Muslim and Christian thinkers to engage in a genuine dialogue by

45 See Chapter 1.
47 Dr. Ng Kam-Weng is a renowned Malaysian theologian, and is presently Research Director of the Kairos Research Centre in Malaysia. He has a Ph.D. from Cambridge and is a fellow at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies as well as The Centre of Theological Inquiry, Princeton. His writings focus on developing more constructive interfaith dialogue among Christians and Muslims in the context of Islam in Malaysia, especially in answering Muslim questions on the issue of Allāh.
48 Ng Kam-Weng, “God and Humanity in Islam and Christianity” in Diverse and Creative Voice: Theological Essays from the Majority World, ed. Dieumeme Noelliste and Sung Wook Chung (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), pp. 24-47. See also, Kam Weng, “Refutation of Muslim Scholars’ Arguments in the Allāh Controversy.” This article is dated (June 28, June 30, and July 1, 2010), http://www.krisispraxis.com/archives/2013/01/collated-resources-christians-from-pre-islam-arab-christians-to-bumiputera-christians-have-the-right-to-use-allah/ (accessed April-June 2015). In this article, Kam Weng observed, “The fundamental and contested presupposition in the present dispute on the use of Allāh is whether there are words so exclusively defined by a single linguistic system that their usage is reserved for that linguistic system alone.”
considering the following question: How should Malaysian Muslims and Christians respond to the paradox of divine simplicity?

First, concerning the common theological theme of divine simplicity that is found in Islam and Christianity, both Malaysian Christians and Muslims should be open to dialogue by considering the common and diverse prospects as described in (1)-(5). The comparative study of this research shows that there are similarities and differences between al-Ghazâlî, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin with respect to the doctrine of divine simplicity. One must not only appreciate the common ground between their understandings of divine simplicity, but also acknowledge the major differences between their views of divine simplicity. In my opinion, although, on the one hand, their theories of divine simplicity show areas of overlapping, they are referring to different religious traditions. On the other hand, Muslims and Christians should recognize that these four heroes of different traditions do, in fact, have very similar ideas about God. Such similarities and differences highlight the need of achieving a “mutual understanding” between the two faiths, especially regarding the Islamic and Christian doctrines of divine simplicity. This is a crucial element for both Muslims and Christians who aim at deepening the goal of interfaith dialogue.

Second, when speaking about God’s simplicity from the perspective of a Reformed Evangelical thinker, I am deeply influenced by many theological aspects of al-Ghazâlî and Ibn Rushd’s theories, as well as Thomas’ and Calvin’s theories. Their theories are praiseworthy and deserve further study. Although Muslims and Christians do not hold the same positions on God’s simplicity, a consideration of God’s simplicity in light of their theories leads to a richer and clearer understanding of divine simplicity. Thus, Muslims and Christians should try to understand each other’s theology more fully, as well as engage in more genuine dialogue by discussing these theological aspects (e.g., divine uniqueness, perfection/completeness, highest good, and aseity), in order to resolve the paradox of divine simplicity.

Third, both Muslims and Christians in Malaysia should engage in dialogue about the problem arising from the concept of divine simplicity, namely the doctrine of the Trinity. Such an imperative dialogue should not only answer the Muslims’ misconceptions and objections against the Trinity, but also clarify the Christians’ misunderstanding of the Trinity. As it is already been pointed out in Conviction (5), Muslims and Christians should reconsider the definitions of “Persons”, “relation”, and the number “three” as presuppositions in interfaith dialogue and in a discussion of the Trinity. These terms shed light on how Muslims and Christians might explore and relate the paradox of divine simplicity to the one and only God.

Fourth, on the basis of the results of this research project, I have formulated two questionnaires: Part 1 “Dialogue on the belief in One God; and Part 2 “Dialogue on the Trinity” (see Appendix 1). I have also met with a few Islamic religious leaders (Ustaz) in Malaysia and was able to have a fruitful interfaith dialogue with them by using these questionnaires. In other words, the results of this research project enabled me to formulate these questionnaires that provide a good platform and point of connection to carry out an interfaith dialogue in my country. Through these questionnaires both Christians and Muslims can better understand and even appreciate each other’s monotheistic religions. This is absolutely crucial in the context of my country, where tensions between different religions are increasing (as briefly explained in Chapter One). In addition, although analyzing the results of these questionnaires is certainly not the task of this present research, it prepares and

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50 Albert Sundararaj Walters, *We Believe In One God? Reflections on the Trinity in the Malaysian Context* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2012). Based on a survey of Malaysian Christians’ reflections on the Trinity, Walters indicates that many Malaysian Christians are unable to understand the oneness and threeness of God.
provides some foundational content of a future project that can be further developed from this present research.

6.4 Final Conclusion

This section began with comparing a set of theological convictions in the formulation of God’s simplicity. In light of this, this research has shown that the theological themes used by al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin to vindicate the doctrine of divine simplicity could enrich the theology of Christianity and Islam. Through affirming the above central themes, it is very possible to achieve a theological appropriation in thinking and speaking of God’s simplicity, particularly in the context of an increasingly pluralistic society (e.g., Malaysia). Malaysia, in particular, now has more opportunity than ever to engage in a sound and constructive dialogue between their faiths. A variety of doctrinal themes and theological approaches could be used to initiate a fruitful and genuine dialogue between the two faiths. In light of the central themes discussed above, the doctrine of divine simplicity is a parameter to consider. From our research for this comparative study on the doctrine of divine simplicity it would therefore seem that we must come to the same conclusion that al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin reached: namely, that their uses of the four characteristics are rightly interpreted as a vindication of the doctrine of divine simplicity, and therefore it is appropriate for Christians and Muslims to refer their God as the one and only Allāh. A truly Christian and Muslim concept of divine simplicity must take the uniqueness, perfection (or highest good), and the aseity of God into account.
Summary

The doctrine of divine simplicity arises out of Christian and Islamic thinkers’ reflection on the biblical and Qur’anic declaration that God/Allāh is one, but is known as having many essential attributes. The question that naturally arises from such reflection is: is it possible to hold the oneness of God/Allah with the plurality of attributes without compromising the doctrine of God’s unity (Tawḥīd)? This question is especially acute for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In view of the various creedal formulations in both traditions, these doctrinal declarations have been discussed and contested among different groups of scholars, especially in the thought of the following selected thinkers: the Sunni Islamic theologian al-Ghazālī (448-505/1056-1111); the Andalusian philosophers Ibn Rushd (520-295/1126-1198); the Roman Catholic theologian/philosopher Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274); and the Reformed theologian John Calvin (1509-1564). These thinkers offered solutions that help in fostering present-day interreligious dialogue between the two faiths.

This research hence seeks to answer the central question of How do al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin conceptually link the oneness of God/Allāh (divine simplicity/Tawḥīd) with the plurality of His attributes (ṣifāt)? Additionally, how do Christian thinkers relate the oneness of God’s essence with the plurality of three divine Persons? In order to answer this question, I examined the selected texts of these four thinkers: the discussion of the divine unity (Tawḥīd) in al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāsīfa and al-Iqtīsād; the corresponding discussion of God’s unity found in al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut and in Ibn Rushd’s Tahāfut al-Tahāfut, as well as Ibn Rushd’s commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics; the discussions of the simplicity and the attributes of God (and the Trinity of God) in Thomas’ Summa Contra Gentiles and Calvin’s biblical commentaries in connection to his Institutes (1536 Latin edition, 1541 French edition, and 1559).

In considering the historical order of these thinkers, I first concentrated on al-Ghazālī’s and Ibn Rushd’s views—the most comprehensive versions of the medieval theories of divine simplicity in the Muslim world. Then I turned to the theory of divine simplicity according to Thomas and Calvin – the most developed versions of the medieval and reformed theories of divine simplicity in the Christian world. Each of these chapters begins with the selected thinker’s background. A presentation of their historical and theological context is included, and attention is especially given to their contemporary interlocutors for two main reasons. First, I pointed out that each thinker’s conception of divine simplicity is in response to their interrogators (this is commonly less appreciated in contemporary discussion of their thoughts). Second, I also pointed out that this polemical or apologetical debate provides essential background for us to understand al-Ghazālī’s, Ibn Rushd’s, Thomas’, and Calvin’s ideas of divine simplicity. Finally, in the last chapter, with the results of my preceding investigations, I presented a comparative study of the Muslim-Christian theologies, and explored a more mature account of the doctrine of divine simplicity through the philosophical-theological principles of these thinkers.

In the chapter on al-Ghazālī (Chapter 2), considering that al-Ghazālī’s view represents the Ash’arite school over the Mu’tazilite version of divine unity, I identified al-Ghazālī’s usage of the Ash’arite formula. According to the Ash’arite formula, God’s essential attributes (ṣifāt dhātiyya) are neither God nor other than God. To simply put, God’s essential attributes are “not identical, but not different” from God’s essence (adḥ-Dhāt). This is a crucial distinction because on the one hand, if the essential attributes were different from God’s essence (not identical to it), the oneness of Allāh would be compromised. On the other
hand, if the essential names/attributes were co-eternal with the divine essence to maintain the divine simplicity, the many essential attributes of Allāh would be sabotaged. In my view, al-Ghazālī’s formulation of divine simplicity not only affirms the unity and attributes of God, but also counters the Mu’tazilīs’ conception of divine simplicity (including the Islamic philosophers). According to the Mu’tazilīs’ conception of divine simplicity, all positive attributes of Allāh as subsumed in the divine essence. Hence, they hold that the attributes are identical to God’s essence. Consequently, they usually emphasize God’s unity.

Furthermore, I pointed out that the terminologies of Tawḥīd constituted the backbone of Al-Ghazālī’s theory of Tawḥīd–Wahda (singularity), al-ḥaddīyya (individuality), al-Qayyūm (self-existence), kāmil (perfect), and al-ḥāssiyah (uniqueness). It seems that this usage of Al-Ghazālī’s aims at stressing the oneness of God (Tawḥīd) when he considers the existence and distinctiveness of divine attributes. I argued that although al-Ghazālī borrowed these terms from his predecessors (e.g., Ibn Sīnā), he does not adopt their theories of Tawḥīd. Al-Ghazālī used these terms distinctively to demonstrate the transcendent unity of Allāh. For example, al-Ghazālī approaches the doctrine of divine unity by employing the threefold idea, namely the uniqueness, completeness, and unknowability of Allāh. In my discussion of the threefold idea, I pointed out that the following premises are required. Premise 1: Allāh is not quantification but completeness; Premise 2: Allāh is completely one as the unique being. Hence, the conclusion is: Allāh is an absolutely unique-whole-indivisible Being. This threefold idea of al-Ghazālī lies at the heart of his doctrine of divine simplicity. I concluded that by taking into account these three theological terms, al-Ghazālī is able to hold that the plurality of essential divine attributes does not make the singularity of divine essence plural.

Chapter 3 focuses on Ibn Rushd’s Tahaṭḥuf At-Tahāṣf and Metaphysics. I showed that the theological discourses provided by al-Ghazālī are used by Ibn Rushd to form his Tahaṭḥuf At-Tahāṣf. He argued in Tahaṭḥuf At-Tahāṣf that God does not actually possess essential attributes that are multiple and super-added to His essence. Rather God’s divine attributes exist in intellelction (ta’aqquul or in the mind) only. Consequently, God’s divine attributes are identical to (to express singularity) His real essence (self-existence or anniyya). Nevertheless, God’s divine attributes are also different from His real essence in the sense that His perfections are manifested only in relation to His essence as distinct realities, but not to His real essence. Ibn Rushd then makes an explicit inference to further conclude that such essential attributes are to be considered as multiple distinct attributes in God. Thus, it is appropriate only in human perception to presuppose simple essence. Through such argument, Ibn Rushd attempts to secure God’s utter simplicity. For Ibn Rushd, the principle of “God is necessarily existent” (anniyya) is particularly crucial to his doctrine of Allāh’s simplicity and attributes. For example, Ibn Rushd distinguishes the attributes of perfection (i.e., the seven essential attributes of God that are explicitly given in the Qu’rān: knowledge, life, power, will, hearing, vision, and speech) from the non-essential attributes. In such a way, he states that the non-essential attributes of perfection are a unique plurality of attributes “without implying a plurality in essence.”

With regards to Aristotle’s Metaphysics (Book XII), I argued that Ibn Rushd had proved to be an independent-minded commentator of Aristotle, at least with comparison to Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna). I pointed out that by embracing a slightly modified version of Ibn Sīnā’s works, Ibn Rushd vividly demonstrates his solution to the tension that occurs in this doctrine. I argued that in the Metaphysics, Ibn Rushd differentiated the concepts of actuality and potentiality; and constantly treated them as a unity among the attributes of being. I concluded that in his Tahaṭḥuf At-Tahāṣf and his commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Ibn Rushd’s
detailed defense of the doctrine of divine simplicity is best understood when closely linked to
the premise that God is the necessary first uncaused cause of the existent (self-existence). The
oneness of the essence and the multiplicity of attributes in Allāh are clearly shown in this
premise. Since the doctrine of divine simplicity derives from this premise, I also concluded
that the self-existence of God suffices for the theory of Tawḥīd.

For the Christian doctrine of divine simplicity, I turned to the works of Thomas
(Chapter 4) and Calvin (Chapter 5). I began by examining the only completed summa among
Thomas’ works, namely, the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Attention is given to surveying the
theoretical and practical objections raised against the doctrine of divine simplicity in his
contemporary debates. In light of these debates, defending “The Simplicity and the Attributes
of God” (ref. section 4.2) and “The Simplicity and the Trinity of God” (ref. section 4.3) in the
*Summa Contra Gentiles* were important aspects of the whole work. I studied Thomas’ view
on the relationship between the simplicity and the multiplicity of divine attributes; and further
pointed out that the following important aspects served as the key foundations for his solution
to the paradoxes in the doctrine of divine simplicity: (i) the mode of signifying; (ii) the
highest degree of unity; and (iii) the highest degree of perfection. By applying these
important aspects, Thomas proposes an initial division of his understanding on the nature of
God into the categories of cause (*essentia*), and created *effecti* (created effects of God).
Thomas discusses divine simplicity and perfection from the viewpoint of the cause; and
discusses the plurality of God’s attributes and names from the perspective of the created
effects of God. In this way, Thomas claims “that the divine perfection and the plurality of
divine names are not opposed to the divine simplicity.” According to Thomas, we conceive of
God’s attributes as the cause of created effects; whereby the perfections of created effects
pre-exist in God in a higher mode. It is the multiplicity of created effects of God which brings
with it a multiplicity of names; however, the different perfections designated by them are *just
one single* perfection in God. Thomas states that, for example, God possesses all His
attributes as properties in the analogical sense. The perfections that humans know from God’s
works or effects exist in an eminent way in His simple *essentia* (the first efficient cause). To
be sure, all attributes are real and they are not synonymous; they are plural and different to us
according to our understanding, but they are one and the same in God Himself.

In my discussion on Thomas’ theory of divine simplicity in relation to his doctrine of
the Trinity, I pointed out that for Thomas’ theory to be valid, the existence of “oppositional
relation of the divine *Persons*” and “the aseity of divine *Persons*” is required. I also showed
that Thomas’ idea of the doctrine of divine simplicity was partly shaped by his reply to the
Cantor of Antioch: *Reasons for the Faith against Muslim Objections*. This reply is a response
to Muslim polemic against the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The Condemnation of 1277
in Paris (particularly the *Propositions* 185 [1] and 186 [2]), and the treatise on the *Errores
philosophorum* by Giles of Rome also showed that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity was at
stake. These texts revealed that at the end of the thirteenth century, the Christian doctrines of
the Trinity and the eternal generation of the Word were the subject of the debate raised by the
anti-trinitarians (i.e., Ibn Rushd and Maimonides). For these Arabian Aristotelians, the
document of the Trinity destroys the simplicity of God. At first glance, Thomas’ discussion of
the Trinity in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (*SCG* IV [1264]) seems to be engaging in an
explicit polemic against Christian heresies (i.e., Arianism, Sabellianism), rather than fighting
against the non-Christian religious or philosophical objections (Arabian Aristotelians).
Nevertheless, Thomas’ *SCG* in fact shows that there are similarities between the objections of
Ibn Rushd and the objections refuted by Thomas. Thomas points out that according to the
true Catholic faith, there is a real subsisting relation, namely one without a division, between
the divine Persons in God (i.e., the Father is entirely unbegotten, but the Son is begotten). Hence, Thomas affirms that there is one single essence in God (the essence of Father and the essence of Son are the same nature).

Moreover, I presented a survey of Thomas’ doctrine of divine simplicity and the Trinity through his discussion on these two crucial points: (a) the fullness of the deity in the three divine Persons; (b) and the aseity of God in each Person. For Thomas, the numerical oneness of God is an important aspect for maintaining the confession of the Trinity. This is explicitly shown in Thomas’ confession that each divine Person is fully God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But at the same time, Thomas affirms that the three divine Persons do not constitute three gods; they are one and the same God. The reason is that there is only one subsistence / essentia in the Godhead, not three essentiae. Through such an analysis, Thomas asserts that, while the principle of “opposed relations” and the distinct “proprietates” between the Persons leads to the plurality of the divine Persons, the common essence shared by the Persons does not lead to a plurality of gods.

In the chapter on Calvin, I investigated Calvin’s biblical account of the doctrine of divine simplicity in relation to God’s attributes and Persons. I also studied the selected biblical pericopes Calvin uses to support the doctrine of divine simplicity. My investigation shows that these selected pericopes are connected to Calvin’s Institutes (1536, 1541 French Edition, and 1559), and they also play a crucial role especially in Calvin’s affirmation of God’s simplicity and Trinity. I pointed out that the way Calvin used particular biblical texts leads us towards a clearer understanding of his idea of divine simplicity in relation to divine attributes and Persons. In the debates with his opponents (especially Pierre Caroli and Michael Servetus), Calvin explicitly indicated his disagreement with them through explaining these particular biblical texts. I have specifically identified the “standardized phrase” Calvin often used when discussing the doctrine of divine simplicity. For example, “For in each hypostasis the whole divine nature is understood, with this qualification—that to each belongs his own peculiar quality” (I.13.19; OS3: 132). I then restricted my analysis to the following biblical texts according to the historical order of Calvin’s commentaries. These texts appear to be the most representative and significant texts in Calvin’s development of his trinitarian doctrine: Rom. 8:9-11; Eph. 4:5-6; Heb. 1 and 11:3; John 1; Gen. 1; Matt. 28:19; Exod. 3:14; Dan. 7:13, and Ezek. 1:25-26. For example, Calvin uses Heb. 1:3 to define his theological term (hypostasis). He then also shows that the theological formulation of his doctrine of divine simplicity derives directly from Scripture, rather than from other sources or analogy. Additionally, the examination of Calvin’s works enables us to encounter the theological opponents of Calvin (particularly concerning the doctrine of God) who appeared in different periods of his life. These opponents include Caroli, Servetus, Giovanni Valentino Gentilis, and Giorgio Blandrata of Piedmont. I argued that the texts mentioned above do speak about the simplicity and the Trinity of God, as Calvin defines the concept (i.e., in terms of the aseity of God). I also argued that although Calvin’s formulation indicates God’s oneness, this does not prove that God’s oneness is in accordance to the understanding of Servetus (i.e., that God obtains absolute oneness).

Furthermore, I pointed out that when Calvin describes the absolute simple essence of God and the Persons of the Trinity, every definition and term were used by Calvin to maintain the following doctrinal teaching: there are “three distinct Persons but not a division” in the simple essence. Calvin further develops the trinitarian terminology of aseitas, and applies it in explaining the irreducible oneness and threeness of God. This provides a strong argument for Calvin that the doctrine of divine simplicity must be defined in such a way as to
prevent obliterating the threeness of the divine Persons. Similarly, the doctrine of the Trinity cannot abolish God’s oneness. I showed how this perspective becomes the groundwork of Calvin’s biblical interpretation of the doctrine of divine simplicity, the Trinity, and his polemical arguments against the anti-trinitarians. My investigation indicated that the idea of Christ’s aseity does not only explicitly appear in his earlier works (Rom. 8: 9-11 and the 1536 Institutes), but it was being developed into a clearer doctrine in the later editions of his Institutes of (1539/1541, 1559), and his commentaries (John 1 and Gen. 1) after his debates with Caroli and Servetus. Moreover, Calvin provided an even more mature theological reflection on this doctrine in the final series of his Praelectiones (Exod. 3: 14, 34: 6-7; Ezek. 1: 25-26).

In the final chapter (Chapter 6), I applied my preceding findings of how al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin approached the concept of divine simplicity to present a comparative study. I also highlighted the few central elements or solutions that play an important role in their formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity. One of these solutions focuses on the concept of God’s self-existence (the aseity of God): apart from “many attributes” and “three Persons” of the necessary being of God, God’s self-existence is also irreducible. In other words, God’s self-existence is identical to and the same as His many attributes and three Persons. The concept that God’s self-existence is indivisible enables Christianity and Islam to hold without compromise to the multiplicity of God’s attributes.

We have seen that both Ibn Rushd and Calvin emphasize the connection between God’s simplicity and His self-existence. For them, God’s aseitas (self-existence of God) implies that He is God of Himself in the fullness of His deity, and thus self-contained within Himself. Calvin further emphasizes God’s aseity in his discussion of the Trinity. Calvin points out that in His aseity, God and each of the divine Persons are truly identical with each other and the same as His essence. Yet, the divine Persons do not imply three different “gods of himself” (tritheism), but the one and only God. For al-Ghazālī, he uses the concept of God’s uniqueness to support his understanding of God’s oneness: God is an incomparable God, without any eternal partners, and transcends the composite nature of the creatures. Therefore, God is without parts in the uniqueness with which He is the one and only God. In addition, al-Ghazālī also points to God’s perfection as an important solution of this theory. He states that God Himself is in the completeness of His divinity, and in this divinity the attributes are “not identical, but not different.” Therefore, God is free from all composition of attributes. In the same vein Thomas explains that God’s highest good implies that He Himself is the supreme good (highest degree of existence). God’s plurality of attributes signifies the ultimate goodness in His own essence. The plurality of attributes is neither equivocal nor univocal with respect to His ultimate perfection. In God’s highest good each of His attributes and His essence are one and the same.

Taking into account the results and observations mentioned above, I further proposed the following framework for a possible theological appropriation of the doctrine of divine simplicity: (1) God is the one and only being with all attributes of perfection; (2) God is the one and only being without parts; (3) God is one in single essence (Dhāt); (4) God is the one and only transcendent being; (5) God is one in essence and three in divine Persons. As the results of my investigations shows, for al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin, the simplicity of God is associated with God’s uniqueness, perfection, highest good and aseity. In line with this, it is legitimate to conclude that in their theological discourses on God’s simplicity and the plurality of attributes, God’s uniqueness, perfection, highest good and aseity are connected. We also see in contemporary theology of the two faiths that these
themes certainly are significant when discussing the doctrine of divine simplicity. Hence, I argued that if we are to understand God’s simplicity and its relation to divine attributes (and Persons), we must turn to the texts of these thinkers as the starting point of our quest and answer. Admittedly, turning to these four thinkers for discussing the topic of divine simplicity is largely ignored in most contemporary interfaith discussion.

We also recognized from our study of al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Thomas, and Calvin that the tension of the divine simplicity and attributes of God cannot be rationally solved by including their theological-philosophical approaches. However, analyzing and comparing their thoughts on this topic within their context would contribute immensely to our understanding of their significance for Christian-Muslim relations today. Although the ways they understand the relation between God’s oneness and His attributes are different, all four thinkers are aiming at one similar concern, namely to affirm and to worship the one and only God. Hence, it seems to me that both Muslims and Christians are justified to call their God Allāh, if both parties take serious account of what the representative authors have brought forward about God’s simplicity. It should be noted that the scope of this research did leave room for further interfaith study. It is my hope that this research will serve to expand the theological discussion of divine simplicity between the two monotheistic communities (Christians and Muslims).
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APPENDIX 1

| Name of Participant: |
| Phone or Email: |
| Date: |
| Form No.: |

Please do not write your name on this paper unless you would like to participate in the interviews.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Friends,

First of all, thank you very much for your willingness to participate in answering this questionnaire. By answering these questions you will contribute to the interfaith project in the context of Malaysia.

In this questionnaire, there are a number of questions asking for your ideas that we would like you to answer quite honestly. Your answers will be held in the strictest confidence and the data provided will be used only for research purposes. Please kindly answer ALL the questions by either filling in the blank spaces and/or numbers in the boxes wherever appropriate. In case of insufficient space, please use the extra sheets for details and any other relevant comments you wish to make. If you wish to participate in the personal informal interviews to discuss further on other relevant aspects, please kindly write your name and telephone number on the top right hand corner of this questionnaire and I will contact you in the near future. Thank you for your kind cooperation.

This questionnaire was prepared by: Tan Poh Seng

SOAL SELIDIK (Malay Version)

Terlebih dahulu saya ingin mengucapkan terima kasih atas kesudian anda menjawab soal selidik ini. Dengan menjawab soal selidik ini, anda telah menyumbang kepada projek interfaith dalam konteks Malaysia.

Terdapat beberapa soalan yang bertanya tentang idea anda dalam soal selidik ini. Kami berharap agar anda akan menjawab dengan sejujurnya. Jawapan anda adalah sulit dan data yang diberi hanya untuk tujuan kajian. Sila jawab semua soalan sama ada mengisi tempat kosong dan/ atau mengisi nombor di dalam kotak seperti yang diminta dalam soalan. Sekiranya tempat yang disediakan tidak mencukupi, anda dibenarkan menggunakan kertas tambahan untuk maklumat selanjutnya dan apa apa saja pendapat yang ingin anda sampaikan. Seandainya anda ingin turut serta dalam temu bual individu secara tidak formal untuk berbincang tentang aspek lain yang relevan dengan lebih lanjut, sila tulis nama dan nombor telefon di atas sebelah kanan soal selidik tersebut. Saya akan menghubungi anda dalam masa terdekat. Terima kasih atas budi baik dan kerjasama anda.

Soal selidik ini disediakan oleh: Tan Poh Seng
QUESTIONNAIRE (PART 1)
Theme / Tema:
Dialogue: Belief in One God / Dialog tentang Keesaan Allāh

1) How do you perceive your belief in one God (the Unity of God/Tawhid)?
Bagaimanakah anda mengidentifikasikan bahawa Allāh itu Maha Esa?

2) If I have to describe God as one (Tawhid) according to my religious experience, I would say that God is [...] because [...] Sebagai seorang Muslim, kepercayaan kepada Tuhan yang tunggal atau Maha Esa (Tawhid) dalam pengamalan ibadah bermakna Dia [...] kerana [...] Answer/Jawapan untuk Q.2.: A. God is the Greatest, because God made the world-heaven and earth through His Mightiness. Allāh sebagai Allāhu akbar kerana Allāh menciptakan dunia - langit dan bumi dengan kekuasaanNya B. God is Creator and Provider, because His Glory and Wisdom Allāh sebagai Pencipta dan Pemelihara alam semesta, kerana KemuliaanNya dan KebijaksanaanNya. C. God is Lord and Saviour, because He is always forgiving and provide comfort Allāh sebagai Tuhan Maha berkuasa dan maha Penyelamat, kerana Tuhah adalah pelindung dan pengampun. D. God is Loving and Merciful, because He loves us Allāh sebagai Tuhan yang Maha Penyayang (al-Rahim) dan Maha Pengasih (al-Rahman, kerana Tuhah sangat menyayangi manusia. E. None of the above fully represents what I believe. What I perceive God as Tawhid to be is (please state)

3) How would you respond to a friend when s/he says that you believe in one God and 99 beautiful Names of Allāh? Bagaimana anda akan menjawab persoalan tentang kepercayaan kepada Tuhan yang esa dan sifat-sifat Allāh lainnya dalam Ama’ul Husna (99 Nama-Nama Allāh yang Indah)?
4) How do you conceptually link the oneness of God (divine transcendental unity “Tanzih”/Tawḥīd) with the plurality of His beautiful names or seven essential attributes (ṣifāt, namely, His Power, Knowledge, Life, Will, Hearing, Sight, and Speech)? Are these essential attributes could be identified as Many attributes co-eternal with His essence or One and the same with His essence?

Apakah hubung kait antara keesaan Tuhan dengan 99 nama Allāh yang indah? Adakah Allāh maha Hayāt, Qudrah, ‘ilm, Iرادāt, Sam’, Basr, dan Kalām, merupakan "banyak" (Many) sifat keesaan dan kekekalan bagi Allāh atau ketujuh-tujuhan merupakan satu penyatuan?

QUESTIONNAIRE (PART 2)

Theme/Tema: Dialogue on the Trinity / Dialog tentang Tritunggal

5) When I think of Christian God in Three Persons (Latin: Personae), I think of:

Apakah pandangan anda tentang Tuhan Kristian yang Tritunggal (atau Trinitas) itu?

6) What does the Qur’an say about the Trinity?

Apakah ajaran al-Qur’an tentang doktrin Tritunggal?

7) When you think of Christian God as Triune God (the Trinity), are these three or one? Do Christians worship three Gods?

Berbicara bahawa ajaran tentang Tuhan Kristian yang Tritunggal, adakah Tritunggal ertinya Tuhan ada tiga atau satu? Adakah penganut Kristian menyembah tiga Tuhan?
8) How would you respond to a Christian friend when s/he says that Christians believe in only one God and not three Gods? Is Christianity a monotheistic religion?

Apakah reaksi anda apabila kawan anda yang beragama kristian mengatakan bahawa mereka percaya kepada tuhan yang esa tetapi bukan tiga? Benarkah agama Kristian itu agama yang mempercayai adanya Tuhan dan Tuhan adalah satu?

9) Why do Christians believe God is Triune? Have you talked to Christians about this doctrine? If yes, do you find it similar to your own understanding?

Mengapa penganut Kristian mempercayai adanya Tuhan yang Tritunggal? Pernahkah anda membincangkan doktrin ini dengan penganut Kristian? Jika ada, adakah pengertian mereka seakan akan sama dengan pendapat kamu?