

Thomas Aquinas  
(1228-1274)

FROM PREFACE TO  
*CONTRA ERRORES GRAECORUM*  
[13<sup>th</sup> Century]

And so it is hardly to be wondered at if modern teachers of the Faith, after the rise of these manifold errors, are rather cautious and extremely precise in speaking about doctrine in order to avoid all heresy. Hence, if we find anything in the writings of the ancients which is not said with this necessary caution, as would befit a modern, it is not to be condemned as something to be rejected, nor is it to be applied in a wide sense, but it is to be fastidiously interpreted. Secondly, because many things which sit well in Greek, in Latin will possibly not sound right, Latin and Greek-speakers profess the same truths of Faith in different words. Now the Greeks say in full conformity with Catholic doctrine that the Father, Son and Holy spirit are three  $\upsilon\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\acute{\alpha}\sigma\epsilon\varsigma$ . But if we say in Latin three *substantiae* (substances), this is not right, even if, according to the properties of the word, *hypostasis* in Greek is the same as the Latin *substantia*. For *substantia* is more usually taken in Latin in the sense of essence, which both we and the Greeks believe to be single in God. So, when the Greeks say three *hypostases*, we say three persons, as Augustine teaches in *De trinitate* VII. vi.11. And there is no doubt that in many others matters the same thing has happened. Therefore, when translating matters pertaining to the Catholic faith, it is the duty of the translator to preserve the matter, even if he changes the mode of expression according to the conventions of the language into which he is translating. For clearly, if what is said according to the letter in Latin is expounded in a vernacular language, the account given will not be sound if one translates word for word. And it is even clearer that, when what is said in one language is translated word for word into another, there is no cause for surprise if a certain lack of clarity results.

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