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## NOTES ON GIORDANO BRUNO'S CHRISTIANITY IN LIGHT OF HIS TRIAL\*

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### Summary

In its defence of the infinity of the universe, Giordano Bruno's philosophy relies basically upon the investigation into God's almightiness. The paper draws attention to the teaching of Christian theology throughout the Middle Ages and to the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas in particular. It aims to highlight the interrelation between Bruno's notion of the infinite and his view on Christ, the latter in particular close relation to his trials.

**Key-Words.** Augustine – Giordano Bruno – God's almightiness – incarnation – infinity – Inquisition – Jesus Christ – Scholasticism – Thomas Aquinas – Trinity

Before venturing into a closer examination of Giordano Bruno's Christianity, I will first explain why I chose the documentation of Bruno's trial as the main source of my analysis<sup>1</sup>. Within Bruno's philosophical and biographical project, the trial proves

\*This text is the English version of my 'Anmerkungen zum Christentum von Giordano Bruno auf der Grundlage seines Prozesses', *Aither: Journal for the Study of the Greek and Latin Philosophical Tradition*, 23, 7 (2020) (= *Studies in Honour of Paul Richard Blum on the Occasion of His 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. T. Nejeschleba, 2 vols, I), pp. 144-156.

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<sup>1</sup>The principal study of Bruno's trial, with a critical edition of its extant documentation, is L. Firpo, *Il processo di Giordano Bruno*, ed. D. Quaglioni, Rome, Salerno Editrice, 1993. A French translation, with no indication of the name of the editor, was later published as Giordano Bruno, *Œuvres complètes. Documents I: Le procès*, text, notes, and intr. L. Firpo, trans. and additional notes A.-P. Segonds, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2000. In the literature on Bruno's trial, see also: D. Quaglioni, 'Ex his quae deponet iudicetur. L'autodifesa di Bruno', *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 6, 2 (2000), pp. 299-319; Id., 'L'autodéfense de Giordano Bruno', in *Mondes, formes et société selon Giordano Bruno*, ed. T. Dagron and H. Védrine, Paris, Vrin, 2003, pp. 29-46; D. Quaglioni, 'Il processo e l'autodifesa', in *Cosmografia, fede e libertà nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno*. Atti del convegno di studi (Noli, 7-9 luglio 2000), Savona, Euromedia, 2002, pp. 27-48, repr. in *Autobiografia e filosofia. L'esperienza di*

decisive for two reasons. The first reason is that Bruno's trial represents the very last phase of his life and hence, in a sense, a sort of 'unwritten' recapitulation of his philosophical views. Considering the limits imposed by his incarceration and the impossibility of him publishing any further work, Bruno made use of his depositions to carry on with his philosophy. To him his arrest seemed to happen at the very moment in which, with the Frankfurt treatises, his ethical and natural investigation was coming close to synthesizing what he had been theorizing up to that moment in the episodic and occasional forms permitted by the fickle vicissitudes of his exile. The second reason is strictly dependent on the first. In the alternation between total or partial admissions of his religious doubts and reticence or dissimulating attitudes aimed at defending himself and his doctrines, Bruno must have regarded his trial as the final stage for testing not just his philosophical but also his theological views. The dramatic epilogue of the trial was the 'unexpected' conclusion of a confrontation that had pitted the accused against his judges for more than seven years<sup>2</sup>. It is indeed in the trial that one may find, if not the whole of Bruno's ideas, at least their last expression. And it is again in the trial that one may find the reason for Bruno's success in today's scholarship and his significance for early-modern philosophy. To fully grasp this significance, one perhaps should not agree with Bruno, but at least accept that his choice not to recant his doctrines, even at the cost of his life, corresponded to what he perceived as an ethical-philosophical mission, that is, to defend everybody's right to think and believe according to their own conscience and not to have to obey any external imposition.

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*Giordano Bruno*. Atti del Convegno (Trento, 18-20 maggio 2000), ed. N. Pirillo, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003, pp. 127-145; D. Quaglioni, 'Il processo di Giordano Bruno', in *Processi politici*, ed. G. Fabre, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2019, pp. 73-92; L. Spruit, 'Due documenti noti e due documenti sconosciuti sul processo di Giordano Bruno nell'Archivio del Sant'Uffizio', *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 4, 2 (1998), pp. 469-73; Id., 'Una rilettura del processo di Giordano Bruno: procedure e aspetti giuridico-formali', in *Giordano Bruno. Oltre il Mito e le opposte passioni*, ed. P. Giustiniani et alii, Naples, Facoltà teologica dell'Italia meridionale, Sezione S. Tommaso d'Aquino, 2002, pp. 217-225; S. Ricci, *Giordano Bruno nell'Europa del Cinquecento*, Rome, Salerno Editrice, 2000, pp. 458-557, 609-17; Id., 'Le procès de Giordano Bruno par l'Inquisition', *Lexicon philosophicum* 2 (2014), pp. 97-125; F. Beretta, 'Giordano Bruno e l'inquisizione romana. Considerazioni sul processo', *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 7, 1 (2001), pp. 15-49; A.A. Martinez, 'Giordano Bruno and the Heresy of Many Worlds', *Annals of Science* 73, 4 (2016), pp. 345-74 (esp. pp. 359-74). I had occasion to work on Bruno's trial for my 'Il processo a Giordano Bruno: le opinioni "erronee" sul Cristo, l'infinito universo quale "Verbo"', in *The Theology of potentia Dei and the History of European Normativity/Alle origini dell'idea di normativismo: Il problema della potentia Dei tra teologia e diritto pubblico europeo*, eds. A. Schütz and M. Traversino Di Cristo, [2 vols, special issues] *Divus Thomas* [115, 2 (May/Aug. 2012) and] 116, 3 (Sept./Dec. 2013), pp. 231-47, and *Diritto e teologia alle soglie dell'età moderna. Il problema della potentia Dei assoluta in Giordano Bruno*, pref. D. Quaglioni, Naples, Editoriale Scientifica, 2015, pp. 145-62. I am currently working on Bruno's trial with special attention to his relationship with Luther and as an expression of the fear, especially on the part of Clement VIII, that Bruno could have joined the Reformation before his return to Italy.

<sup>2</sup> In saying 'unexpected conclusion', I have in mind particularly D. Quaglioni, 'Ex his quae deponet iudicetur', p. 305 ('una sentenza non scontata'), and S. Ricci, *Giordano Bruno nell'Europa del Cinquecento*, p. 529 ('un epilogo non scontato').

## I

In the trial documentation, Bruno's views on the Trinity and on Christ's incarnation and divinity are already central to the first accusations made by Giovanni Mocenigo. They are treated in three of the eight propositions, 2 to 4, in the list Luigi Firpo provided<sup>3</sup>. Such problems had already been debated at length in the first phases of the first part of Bruno's trial held in Venice, that is, in the third and fourth depositions, held on 2 June 1592, and in the fifth, held the following day. Already in this phase, Bruno's attitude is characterized by his having recourse to scriptural and patristic sources, namely a general appeal to the Bible and a quotation from Augustine intended to support his doubt 'that these three [the Trinity] can be defined as persons, since it seemed to me that the term "person" could not rightly be associated with divinity'<sup>4</sup>. By admitting such a doubt, Bruno confesses that he had 'been uncertain about the ineffable way' in which the incarnation takes place, not about the incarnation per se<sup>5</sup>. Elsewhere, Bruno explicitly accepts the incarnation and reinforces his acceptance by expressing his *confiteor*, but terms the way the incarnation happens as 'incomprehensibilis' (*unintelligible*)<sup>6</sup>. It is difficult to say whether these statements on the Trinity and on Christ's incarnation were part of a dissimulating attitude on his part. On the one hand, Mocenigo's denunciations seem to confirm such an impression; on the other hand, even brother Celestinus, notwithstanding his bad relationship with Bruno, said he never understood 'that he [Bruno] denied the distinction between the persons'<sup>7</sup>. The way Bruno justifies himself confirms that his examination and that of the witnesses on this point constitutes, in light of their diverging depositions, a very delicate phase of the trial. Bruno admits he doubted this 'for the reason that divinity is an infinite nature and humanity a finite one, with the first being an eternal nature and the second a temporal one'<sup>8</sup>. In other words, Bruno justifies his doubt by his inability to understand how, 'proportionally and in sum', the union of the human and divine natures can take place in the same entity<sup>9</sup>.

In a later passage from this same deposition, we come across a statement through which Bruno openly acknowledges his intellectual debt to Catholic theology and especially to Thomas Aquinas, 'in whose doctrine' Bruno says he had been 'nourished'<sup>10</sup>. Yet, according to Mocenigo's denunciation, Bruno had maintained that he was more learned than Aquinas and superior to the 'first theologians of the world',

<sup>3</sup>L. FIRPO, *Il processo di Giordano Bruno*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, doc. 14, pp. 172-73: 'che queste tre possino sortir nome di persone; poiché non mi pareva che questo nome di persona convenisse alla divinità'; on Bruno's use of learned references, see D. Quagliani, 'Ex his quae deponet iudicetur', pp. 311 ff.

<sup>5</sup>L. FIRPO, p. 173, also for the quotation: 'haver vacillato nel modo inefabile'.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, doc. 51, II, 40, pp. 253-59 (p. 259); on this point, see also D. Quagliani, 'Ex his quae deponet iudicetur', pp. 311 ff.

<sup>7</sup>L. FIRPO, p. 253, for both Mocenigo's and brother Celestinus's affirmations and for the quotation: 'che lui negasse la distinzione delle persone'.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 258: 'per essere la divinità natura infinita e la humanità finita, quella eterna e questa temporale'.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*: 'proportionalmente et in somma'.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 259, for both quotations: 'nella dottrina del quale io sono nutrito'.

who ‘knew nothing compared to him’<sup>11</sup>. How are these two divergent statements to be understood? Is Bruno’s affirmation simply meant to gain the judges’ favour and dissimulate polemical intentions or, at least, the conviction of a doctrinal superiority, as Mocenigo’s words would imply? In his fourth deposition, Bruno defends himself by saying he had never spoken of Catholic theologians in bad terms and had rather ‘said something about someone in particular and blamed, as it were, some Lutheran theologians or other heretics’<sup>12</sup>. Such a reference to Lutheran and Calvinist theologians can give the impression, at first glance, that what we have here in Bruno is nothing more than a series of affirmations of principle intended to counterbalance Mocenigo’s accusations. Nevertheless, Bruno’s general attitude in his trial suggests that he is trying, through his constant recourse to authoritative sources that were common to his opponents, to remove conflict from his discussion with them. In Firpo’s opinion, Bruno’s attitude suggests that, in the last moments of this debate, he was convinced that he was facing ‘opponents who were perfectly equal to him in authority and dignity’ and that he hoped that Clement VIII could, as an ‘unbiased judge’, finally turn it in his favour<sup>13</sup>. Yet in Bruno’s ‘authoritative references and [...] doctrinal arguments adduced in his own defence’, as well as in his repeated deference to Aquinas and Catholic theology, I would be tempted to see more than merely a strategy<sup>14</sup>. Bruno called his opponents’ attention to sources that he regarded as his own and on the basis of which he wished to debate openly with them. Nor did the consultors’ overall opinion turn out to be against Bruno at the conclusion of the proceedings, that is, before Clement VIII’s decision to take the lead in the trial even despite this opinion. Indeed, the consultors delivered a ‘largely not-guilty’ vote on the grounds that it was difficult to consider Bruno heretical, given the depositions of witnesses who were clearly to be considered untrustworthy<sup>15</sup>. The consultors advised that torture might be used to prove the charges that were still pending. With respect to the other charges, which the consultors deemed as proved, a verdict *ad resipiscendum* was to be considered sufficient to make amends<sup>16</sup>. In addition, Bruno ‘had to be judged’, as the Reverend Father Ippolito Beccaria put it, ‘from his own depositions’<sup>17</sup>. Also the Protonotary Apostolic Anselmo Dandini was of the opinion that the accused had to be given an opportunity to recant the charges already declared as proved. Also, according to Dandini, only if, after being tortured, Bruno confessed that he had been wrong in speaking against the Trinity, would he be entrusted to the Secular Curia and punished accordingly—that is, given the gravity of the question, with death. In this way it emerges that the final guilty verdict that sentenced Bruno to death was primarily the consequence of Clement VIII’s decision, which—quite the opposite of what Bruno had wished—ordered that the case be

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, doc. 2, p. 144: ‘primi theologi del mondo’; ‘non hanno saputo niente a par di lui’.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, doc. 14, p. 177: ‘detto qualcosa di alcuno particolare, et biasmato, come sarebbe a dir, qualche theologo lutherano od altri heretici’.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 111, for both quotations: ‘contendenti, eguali affatto per autorità e dignità’; ‘giudice imparziale’.

<sup>14</sup>For the quotation, see D. Quaglioni, ‘Ex his quae deponet iudicetur’, p. 317: ‘appigli autoritativi e [...] argomenti di dottrina addotti a propria difesa’.

<sup>15</sup>For the quotation, see *ibid.*, p. 306: ‘in larga misura di non colpevolezza’.

<sup>16</sup>L. Firpo, *Il processo*, doc. 61, p. 328.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 329, for both quotations: ‘ex his quae deponet iudicetur’.

decided on what Bruno and the witnesses had declared up until that moment<sup>18</sup>.

In Dandini's advice to further examine Bruno's heterodoxy on the Trinity, we can find further justification for analysing the impact the issue had in the economy of Bruno's trial. What is at stake here requires a closer inspection, on the one hand, of the sources that were directly mentioned by Bruno in his defence and, on the other hand, of the further elements that came out in the course of the trial. In this respect, especially significant is Bruno's presence in Protestant territories, which could constitute more than a sufficient reason for the Inquisition to investigate Bruno's orthodoxy. We will now take into consideration the first direction of enquiry and evaluate some of the references Bruno made, more or less explicitly, to Scripture, Patristics, and Scholasticism on the role of Christ as the mediator between God and man.

## II

With respect to the role of Christ as mediator, let us first consider for example 1 Tm 2. 3-6 and 2 Cor 9. 13-15. In the first source, Paul explains the role of Christ as the mediator between God and man on the grounds of his identification with the truth of faith and his sacrifice on the cross for the redemption of mankind. In the second source, Paul writes to the Christian community of Corinth about the good works of charity that he invites them to accomplish by following the example of Christ, supported in this mission by the grace that God has given them as his 'ineffable gift'. Now, Paul's enthusiasm in describing the 'ineffable' gift of grace can be better appreciated if we consider his appealing to peace as the greatest good of life. According to Scripture, Christ gives himself as the symbol of such a peace (John 14. 27) and, through his sacrifice, makes grace possible and man ready, once redeemed, to fully receive it (Is 48. 22).

The reference to ineffability leads us immediately back to Bruno's appeal to Augustine as a justification for his doubt. Such an appeal is actually incorrect. Bruno quotes a passage of the *De fide ad Petrum* after Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, III<sup>a</sup>, q. 4, a. 2, *Sed contra*: 'God assumed the nature, not the person, of man'. Following Aquinas, Bruno refers this passage to Augustine, but its real author is Fulgentius of Ruspe<sup>19</sup>. As an expounder and defender of Augustine's doctrine, in this passage Fulgentius is recalling Augustine's Trinitarian and Christological ideas. If, on the one hand, Bruno openly admits his doubt on the level of faith, on the other hand, through this quotation he tries to demonstrate that the use of the term 'person' with reference to Christ constitutes a difficult and unresolved issue in Christian doctrine. Nor does Bruno find Aquinas's explanation of Fulgentius's passage sufficient for a full comprehension of Christ's incarnation.

After his quotation from pseudo-Augustine, Aquinas denies that there could be

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, for both Dandini's and Clement VIII's positions.

<sup>19</sup>On this point, see D. Quaglioni, '*Ex his quae deponet iudicetur*', p. 311; for Aquinas's reference to Fulgentius's passage, quoted also by Quaglioni, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, XLVIII (*The Incarnate Word*, III<sup>a</sup>. 1-6), ed. R.J. Hennessey, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006 (1967), p. 121.

any ‘assumption’ of the human person into Christ. If it is true, as Aquinas claims, that ‘something is said to be assumed as being taken into something’, then ‘what is assumed [...] is presupposed to its being assumed, even as the subject of a movement to a place is presupposed to the movement’<sup>20</sup>. Contrary to what happens with human nature, according to Aquinas, one cannot speak of any assumption of the human person into Christ: ‘a person [...] is not presupposed to human nature’s being assumed, but instead is the term’<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, once we admit that the human person pre-exists the act of assumption, the first should either perish and no longer exist after being assumed, being ‘thus assumed to no purpose’, or else stay alive, which ‘would imply that two persons are given, the assuming and the assumed’<sup>22</sup>. This reasoning leads to the conclusion that ‘in no way does the Son of God assume a human person’, but only the nature<sup>23</sup>. Yet, recalling Fulgentius’s quotation in Aquinas, it is not difficult to imagine that Bruno could have remembered other scholastic explanations of Christ’s incarnation, namely a passage in Gennadius Massilensis’s *De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus*—another work wrongly attributed to Augustine—quoted in Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*. In dealing with the question of Christ’s incarnation, the passage says that we must take for granted that human nature is assumed into the divine without mutation, ‘so that neither is God changed into human substance by assuming its form, nor is man, glorified in God, changed into divine substance’<sup>24</sup>. Such a mutation would lead ‘to a diminution of nature and to the abolition of the substance’<sup>25</sup>. In Lombard’s view, one cannot infer that God changes his nature from the fact of incarnation. He underscores this point by explaining that the mystery of Christ’s incarnation makes it possible to speak of man starting from God, but not vice versa. Consequently, it is right to say that God has become man and wrong in saying that man has become God<sup>26</sup>.

Turning back to Bruno’s above-mentioned appeal to Augustine, with this reference Bruno clearly intends to debate with his opponents on a basis of common authoritative sources. Most importantly, with the references he makes, Bruno demonstrates that his doubt is anything but new within the Christian tradition. Again, he confesses not only his own uncertain memory of the passage he is quoting, but also his difficulty in adhering to the dogma of the Trinity because of the aforesaid ‘ineffability’ of the incarnation. But what was the real opinion of Augustine on this point, on which both Fulgentius and Aquinas based their arguments? Let us consider *Ser.* 186, 1, where Augustine explains Christ’s incarnation in connection with Mary’s virginity. With respect to the notion of person, Augustine states that ‘the fact that the Word became flesh [with the incarnation of Christ] does not imply that the Word

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, XLVIII, p. 121.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.* (with my changes).

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in quatuor libris distinctae*, ed. Ignatius Brady, 2 vols in 3 parts, Grottaferrata, Quaracchi, 1971-81, vol. 2 (1981) (Books 3 and 4), p. 66, dist. 7, c. 3: ‘ut nec Deus mutaretur in humanam substantiam assumendo hominem, nec homo in divinam glorificatus in Deum’.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*: ‘naturae diminutionem et abolitionem substantiae’.

<sup>26</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 65, dist. 7, cc. 2-3: ‘Et quia secundum habitum accipienda est Incarnationis ratio, ideo Deum humanatum, non hominem deificatum dici tradunt. [...] Et licet dicatur “homo Deus”, non tamen congrue dicitur “homo dominicus”’.

withdrew and was destroyed on being clothed with flesh, but rather that flesh, to avoid destruction, drew near to the Word'<sup>27</sup>. Augustine clarifies the way the union between human and divine natures takes place in Christ through a comparison with man: 'as man is soul and body, Christ might be God and Man. The same One who is Man is God, and the same One who is God is Man, not by a confusion of nature but by a unity of person'<sup>28</sup>. The relationship between Fulgentius's, Lombard's, and Aquinas's views with Augustine's becomes clear in light of the negation, in this sermon, of the assumption of the 'person' of man into Christ. If accepted, this assumption would lead even to the reversal of the dogma of the Trinity: 'Thus, humanity was added to the divinity of the Son without producing a 'quaternity' of Persons; the Trinity remains'<sup>29</sup>.

Leaving aside the problem of quaternity, on a terminological level, with the comparison 'as man is soul and body, Christ might be God and Man', Augustine's *Ser.* 186, 1 resembles Bruno's admission of his incapacity to understand how 'the humanity [...] was joint with the divinity in the constitution of a subject as the human soul is joint with the body'<sup>30</sup>. Insofar as it is 'ineffable', Christ's incarnation is not functional with regard to the final explanation of nature that Bruno aims at. Hence Bruno's decision to abandon Christology in his search for a causal explanation: 'leaving aside, then, [...] that speculation, since it surpasses all sense and intellect' in such a way that one can consider 'the principle or cause insofar as, as vestige, either it is nature itself, or it shines in the element and bosom of nature'<sup>31</sup>.

In my opinion, two elements of this decision by Bruno must be highlighted. On the one hand, due to its 'ineffability', Bruno leaves Christology out of his natural investigation and concentrates on causal explanation, arriving in this way at a necessitarianism that leads him to theorize that worlds and the universe are as infinite as God's infinite power, that is, that there is a correspondence between the effect and its principle or cause. On the other hand, it is also true that Bruno largely resorts to Christology through his sources, although he reinterprets them profoundly in light of his natural philosophy. This appears quite evident, especially if one considers one of Bruno's main sources, Cusanus, and the distinction he makes within the concept of unity between the two notions of *complicatio* and *explicatio*<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Augustine, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons, The Fathers of the Church*, XXXVIII, trans. M.S. Muldowney, Washington, DC, The Catholic University of America Press, 2008 (1959), pp. 9-12 (p. 10).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* (with my changes).

<sup>30</sup> L. Firpo, *Il processo*, p. 253: 'la humanità [...] fosse giunta alla divinità alla costituzione d'un soggetto come è giunta l'anima humana col corpo'.

<sup>31</sup> G. Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity and Essays on Magic*, trans. and eds. R. de Lucca (*Cause, Principle and Unity*) and R.J. Blackwell (*Essays on Magic*), intr. A. Ingegno, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 36 (*Cause, Principle and Unity*, Dialogue 2).

<sup>32</sup> We cannot follow up Bruno's relationship with Cusanus in this paper. On this subject, see M. Traversino, 'Dogma trinitario ed infinito universo in Giordano Bruno: spunti dal *De docta ignorantia* di Cusano', in *Verità e dissimulazione. L'infinito di Giordano Bruno tra caccia filosofica e riforma religiosa*, ed. M. Traversino, Naples, EDI, 2015, pp. 155-69, and *Diritto e teologia alle soglie dell'età moderna*, pp. 43-58.

## III

As has been said, in his trial, Bruno does not deny that he had been inconstant in his faith, but he largely appeals to authoritative sources of Christianity to justify his doubts. In addition, in some cases, he rejects the idea that he expressed his inconstancy in his writings or publicly and, in other cases, he says that the only contradictions with faith he had expressed were limited to the ambit of philosophy<sup>33</sup>. This point has been rightly made by Luigi Firpo. On the one hand, in respect to the disciplinary and theological accusations, with statements like this Bruno aims to 'deny what can be denied, mitigate what is uncertain [and to] beg pardon for the charges that have been proved'<sup>34</sup>. On the other hand, 'with regard to philosophy, he neither denies nor diminishes the opinion that is expressed in the printed editions of his writings and he even refuses to acknowledge their mistake, that is, their irreconcilability with dogma and Scripture'<sup>35</sup>. This is clearly evident in Bruno's third deposition in Venice. In this deposition, Bruno is 'asked whether, publicly or privately, in the lectures that he has given in different places, [...] he has ever taught, held, or disputed any article that is against or in conflict with the Catholic faith and according to the viewpoint of the Holy Roman Church'<sup>36</sup>. In his answer, Bruno denies that he had ever 'directly'—that is, on the theological level—'taught anything against the Catholic Christian religion'<sup>37</sup>. Even when he acknowledges he had done that 'indirectly', with his *Centum et viginti articuli de natura et mundo adversus peripateticos* 'printed with the permission of the Superiors', he mitigates the gravity of his admission by saying that he taught so 'with no prejudice to the truth according to the light of faith'<sup>38</sup>.

Here Bruno is appealing to his theory of infinite worlds as an 'effect of God's infinite power', explaining that he had proposed such a theory 'because [he] considered it unworthy of the divine goodness and power that, even if God could give rise to another world and to other infinite worlds in addition to this world, he gave rise to a finite world [only]'<sup>39</sup>. The 'indirect' contradiction on the basis of which 'one may consider the truth of faith as rejected' would then consist, according to Bruno's self-defence, in him having promoted, on the philosophical level, 'a double kind of infiniteness of dimension of the universe and of multitude of the worlds' as

<sup>33</sup>See, for example, L. Firpo, *Il processo di Giordano Bruno*, doc. 13, pp. 165-71 (esp. pp. 168-169).

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 105: 'negare il negabile, attenuare l'incerto, invocare il perdono per le colpe provate'.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*: 'nel campo filosofico invece egli non nega né sminuisce l'opinione che le stampe documentano, e si rifiuta altresì di riconoscerne l'errore, cioè l'inconciliabilità nei riguardi del dogma e della Scrittura'.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 167: 'interrogatus se pubblicamente o privatamente nelle lettioni ch'egli ha fatto in diversi luochi [...] ha mai insegnato, tenuto o disputato articulo contrario o repugnante alla fede catholica et secondo la termination della santa romana Chiesa'.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, for both quotations: 'Direttamente non ho insegnato cosa contra la religione catholica christiana'.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, respectively: 'stampati con permissione de superiori'; 'non preiudicando alla verità secondo il lume della fede'.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, respectively: 'effetto della infinita divina potentia'; 'perché io stimavo cosa indegna della divina bontà et potentia che, possendo produr, oltre questo mondo un altro et altri infiniti, producesse un mondo finito'.

effect and consequence of God's infinite creative power<sup>40</sup>.

In light of statements like these, I think one cannot speak of Bruno as an 'anti-Christian'. Bruno sees in the infinite universe the final proof of God's existence, 'universal providence, thanks to which everything lives, grows, moves, and remains in its perfection'<sup>41</sup>. The above two levels of analysis, philosophical and theological, lead Bruno to declare that he understands also providence in a twofold way. On the one hand, philosophically speaking, Bruno understands providence 'in the way the human soul is present in the body, all in the whole and all in every part of it, and this is what I call nature, shadow, and vestige of the divinity'<sup>42</sup>. On the other hand, theologically speaking, he declares that he cannot understand providence except 'in the ineffable way through which God is in everything and above everything in essence, presence, and power, not as part, not as soul, but in inexplicable way'<sup>43</sup>. Also based on this conviction is a metaphorical reference Bruno makes elsewhere to ancient Egypt's worship of 'crocodiles, roosters, onions, and turnips', that is, 'the gods and Divinity in crocodiles, in roosters, and in other things—Divinity that was found, is found, and will be found, in certain times and periods, places and regions, successively and at the very same time, in different creatures despite their mortality'<sup>44</sup>.

In my view, in such statements, the 'anti-Christianity' that the majority of critics see as the most peculiar feature of Bruno's message finally turns out to be more apparent than real<sup>45</sup>. Bruno's investigation into the natural world shows a tension, strongly Christian, towards the scriptural God and is philosophical and theological at the same time. Reconsidered in this way, Bruno's final choice not to recant his doctrines is not only a proof of coherence with his own ideas but also reveals the profundity of his Christianity—a Christianity to which he was ready, at the

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<sup>40</sup>For the quotations, see *ibid.*, p. 168, respectively: 'indirettamente s'intende essere repugnata la verità secondo la fede'; 'doppia sorte de infinitudine de grandezza dell'universo et de moltitudine de mondi'.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*: 'providenza universal, in virtù della quale ogni cosa vive, vegeta et si move et sta nella sua perfezione'.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*: 'nel modo con cui presente è l'anima nel corpo, tutta in tutto et tutta in qual si voglia parte, et questo chiamo natura, ombra et vestigio della divinità'.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*: 'nel modo ineffabile col quale Iddio per essentia, presentia et potentia è in tutto e sopra tutto, non come parte, non come anima, ma in modo inesplicabile'.

<sup>44</sup>G. Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, trans. and ed. A.D. Imerty, with an Introduction and Notes, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1964, Dialogue 3, Part 2, p. 238 (with my changes).

<sup>45</sup>The analysis of the abundant literature on Bruno's 'anti-Christianity' is out of the scope of this essay. For an account of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideological context surrounding the problem of Bruno's Christianity and the interpretation of his behaviour in the trial, still fundamental are the conclusions of L. Firpo, *Il processo di Giordano Bruno*, pp. 105-115. For a criticism of this scholarly position, see esp. D. Quagliani, 'Il Bruno di Luigi Firpo', in *Il pensiero politico*, 27 (1994), pp. 3-17 (p. 6), later republished in *Giordano Bruno. Note filologiche e storiografiche*, Florence, Olschki, 1996 (Fondazione Luigi Firpo, Centro di studi sul pensiero politico. Quaderni 1), pp. 37-55 (p. 40). See also, more recently, Id 'Il processo di Giordano Bruno', p. 74, and Id., 'Prefazione. Diritto e teologia in Bruno (vecchi e nuovi problemi)', in M. Traversino, *Diritto e teologia alle soglie dell'età moderna*, pp. XIII-XXVII (p. XX), 'Il processo di Giordano Bruno', p. 74.

conclusion of his trial, to sacrifice himself. All these elements become evident when one takes Bruno's research as *teleologically* addressed 'to the Divinity according to how close and familiar it is with us, not according to what it is in itself, that is, most exalted, absolute, and without association with things produced'<sup>46</sup>. From Bruno's viewpoint, man can find God, 'the object and term of all philosophies and all meditation on natural things', only by accepting the infinite universe, *potentia infinita creata* and the *Verbum* of divine power<sup>47</sup>. Bruno peremptorily says that one can reach the knowledge of God, which 'is impossible and vain for the unbeliever', 'guided by supernatural and not natural light'<sup>48</sup>. Equally peremptorily, he also says that such a knowledge is possible only for those 'who do not look for the divinity outside of the infinite world and the infinity of things, but inside that world and those things'<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup>G. Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, p. 238.

<sup>47</sup>For the quotations, see G. Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity*, Dialogue 4, p. 81.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 82.