

KEY THEMES IN ST. THOMAS' THEOLOGY OF THE TRINITY

Gilles Emery, O.P.

The doctrine of the Trinity by saint Thomas Aquinas has given rise to various interpretations. The diversity of such interpretations depends, for a large part, on what is considered to be Aquinas' purpose in Trinitarian theology, and on which themes are recognized to be at the center of his doctrine on the Trinity. Without discussing here the purpose or intention of Aquinas' theology of the Trinity,¹ I would like to emphasize a few aspects which seem to me to be at the core of his account of the Trinitarian mystery.

1. The Triune God and the order of '*consideratio de Deo*'

Since the divine Trinity is the very subject of theology, the study of the Trinity is not just one chapter among others in theology. When speaking of the Trinity, we are sometimes tempted to think only of the material Aquinas treated in questions 27 to 43 of the *Prima Pars* of his *Summa Theologiae*. But in fact, the theological treatment of the Trinity goes much deeper and much further than that. Two major points should be noted in this respect.

¹ On this, see Gilles Emery, La théologie trinitaire spéculative comme 'exercice spirituel' suivant saint Thomas d'Aquin, in Emmanuel Durand and Vincent Holzer (eds.), *Les sources du renouveau de la théologie trinitaire au XX^e siècle*, Paris 2008, 141-177.

First, St. Thomas distinguishes what is *proper* to each divine person, and what is *common* to all three persons. When treating what is common to the three persons, as in *Summa theologiae, Prima Pars*, questions 2 to 26, St. Thomas is not writing a treatise on the One God that should be separated from his consideration of the Trinity. Rather, he is studying what is common to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The reason for studying what is ‘common’ *before* what is ‘proper’ to each person, is at least twofold. On the one hand, our understanding of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, requires that we grasp these persons *as divine*, that is to say, as possessing the divines attributes studied in questions 2 to 26. Now, as Aquinas states, the understanding of what is *common* is included in the understanding of the divine person: “Common terms (*communia*) taken absolutely, in the order of our understanding, come before proper terms (*propria*), because they are included in the understanding of proper terms; but not conversely. For in the understanding of the person of the Father, God is understood, but not conversely.”² In order to grasp the person of the Father, it is not enough to grasp his relation to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and his innascibility, but it is necessary first to grasp his person as *divine*, that is, as possessing all attributes belonging to God *as God*. On the other hand, the distinction between ‘common’ and ‘proper’ allows Aquinas to integrate the epistemological scheme of what, by itself, can be reached by the natural light of human reason (namely, divine attributes that necessarily belong to God insofar as God is the transcendent principle of

² *STh* I, q. 33 a. 3 ad 1: “Communia absolute dicta, secundum ordinem intellectus nostri, sunt priora quam propria, quia includuntur in intellectu propriorum, sed non e converso; in intellectu enim personae Patris intelligitur Deus, sed non convertitur.” See also *I Sent.*, dist. 7, q. 1 a. 3 ad 4: “Commune in divinis est ante proprium, quando commune per se accipitur secundum rationem intelligendi.”

creatures),³ and what is known only through revelation and received by faith (namely, the proper features of each divine person).⁴

Second, the consideration of the Trinity is not just about the Trinity 'in itself', but also about the Trinity *in its actions*, so that the study of the economy, starting with creation, is fully part of the study of the Trinity. In the prologue of the second question of the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas writes: "Our consideration of God will be threefold. For we shall consider, first, what concerns the divine essence; second, what concerns the distinction of persons; and third, what concerns the procession of creatures from God."⁵ Let us add that, in the prologue of the *Secunda Secundae*, the study of human acts is explicitly referred to the image of God in man, which finds its full meaning in the light of Trinitarian faith. And the study of Christ who as man is our way to God, in the *Tertia Pars*, is the study of the visible mission of the Son, as is made very clear in question 43 of the *Prima Pars* on the missions. That is fully consistent with what Aquinas says about the *subiectum* of *sacra doctrina*. This *subiectum* is God: either God in himself, or creatures insofar as they refer to God as their principle and end.⁶ So, when Aquinas states that "The Christian faith consists principally in the confession of the Holy Trinity, and it specially glories in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ",⁷ he is telling us precisely what Christian theology is about.

³ *STh* I, q. 12 a. 12: "Ea quae necesse est ei convenire secundum quod est prima omnium causa, excedens omnia sua causata."

⁴ *STh* I, q. 32 a. 1.

⁵ *STh* I, q. 2, prologue: "Consideratio autem de Deo tripartita erit. Primo namque considerabimus ea quae ad essentiam divinam pertinent; secundo, ea quae pertinent ad distinctionem personarum; tertio, ea quae pertinent ad processum creaturarum ab ipso."

⁶ *STh* I, q. 1 a. 7.

⁷ *De rationibus fidei*, cap. I: "Fides autem christiana principaliter consistit in sanctae Trinitatis confessione et specialiter gloriatur in

2. *Theologia and dispensatio*

St. Thomas doesn't speak of 'theology' and 'economy' exactly as we do today. He employs the word *theologia* as referring to the divinity, or deity, of the three persons, but this meaning of the word *theologia* appears only in patristic quotes.⁸ St. Thomas also employs the word *oeconomia*, or *yconomia*, but this word appears mostly in his commentaries on Aristotle, and it means the government of household.⁹ This being said, St. Thomas has a fine understanding of the reality we describe, with reference to the Cappadocian Fathers, as *theology* and *economy*. He also knows the interpretation that sees in the 'economy' the incarnation of the Son in particular.¹⁰ For *theologia*, Aquinas uses several expressions, for instance *Deus*

cruce Domini nostri Iesu Christi.” See also *Compendium theologiae* I, cap. 2: “Illam autem beatificantem cognitionem circa duo cognita Dominus consistere docuit, scilicet circa divinitatem Trinitatis, et humanitatem Christi.”

⁸ *STh* III, q. 2 a. 6 ad 1: St. John Damascene; *Catena in Lucae evangelium*, cap. 9, n. 6 (*Catena aurea in quatuor evangelia*, Marietti edition, Turin and Rome, 1953, vol. 2, p. 131); St. John Damascene; *Catena in Iohannis evangelium*, Prologue (*Catena aurea in quatuor evangelia*, vol. 2, p. 323); Eusebius of Caesarea; *Expositio libri Dionysii De diuinis nominibus*, cap. 2, lect. 2 (Marietti edition, 1950, #155); Dionysius. For these references, and for what follows, see Martin Sabathé, *La Trinité rédemptrice: Processions et missions trinitaires dans le Commentaire de l'évangile selon saint Jean par saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Diss. University of Fribourg, 2009.

⁹ See, for instance, *Sententia Libri Politicorum*, lib. I, cap. 2 (Leonine ed., vol. 48 A, p. 82): “De yconomia, que est dispensatiua uel gubernatiua domus. [...] yconomia qua aliquis scit gubernare domum.” See also *In I Epist ad Timotheum*, cap. 2, lect. 2 (Marietti ed., 1953, #104).

¹⁰ *STh* III, q. 2 a. 6 ad 1: “*Et in theologia*, idest in deitate personarum, *et in dispensatione*, idest in mysterio incarnationis.”

secundum quod in se est.¹¹ And for what we call 'economy', in this context, his main word is *dispensatio*.¹² But Aquinas has many other ways to express this. The following example is taken from the commentary on John 1,1 (*In principio erat Verbum*). This example makes clear that, in the order of our access to the knowledge of the Trinity, the *dispensatio* comes first.

Order is found in learning, and this in two ways: as to nature (*secundum naturam*), and as to ourselves (*quoad nos*). And in both cases we can speak of a beginning (*principium*). [...] As to nature, in Christian doctrine the beginning and principle of our wisdom is Christ, inasmuch as he is the Wisdom and the Word of God, that is to say, in his divinity. But as to ourselves, the beginning is Christ himself inasmuch as he is the Word of God made flesh, that is to say, by his incarnation.¹³

We can use these explanations to identify the two ways according to which a doctrine of the Trinity may be exposed: either by beginning with the divine persons in their divinity, or by beginning with the incarnation of the Son and with the mission of the Holy Spirit. In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas follows the first path. In his commentaries on Scripture, he follows both paths. Now, *quoad nos*, priority clearly belongs to the *dispensatio*, as Aquinas makes clear in other places: One

¹¹ *STh* I, q. 2, Prologue.

¹² See, for instance, *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* XI,27 (Marietti ed., Turin and Rome, 1952, #1520).

¹³ *Lectura in Iohannis euangelium* I,1 (Marietti ed., #34): "Invenitur ordo in disciplinis, et hic est duplex: secundum naturam, et quoad nos; et utroque modo dicitur principium. Hebr. V: *Deberetis esse magistri propter tempus*. Et hoc modo, secundum naturam quidem, in disciplina christiana initium et principium sapientiae nostrae est Christus, inquantum est Sapientia et Verbum Dei, idest secundum divinitatem. Quoad nos vero principium est ipse Christus, inquantum Verbum caro factum est, idest secundum eius incarnationem."

must first receive the nourishment of the “Word made flesh” in order to be able to grow and become capable of receiving the teaching concerning “the Word that was in the beginning with God”.¹⁴

Further, the mystery of the Trinity in itself, that is, the mystery of the persons in their common divinity and in their personal properties, is *revealed* and *made present* within the *dispensatio* itself. The eternal generation of the Son, and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit, are really included *in* their mission.¹⁵ Aquinas maintains this without confusing the economy with theology. The eternal mystery of the Trinity is present and disclosed in the Son made flesh, and in the Holy Spirit himself who is given. I will come back to that later. For now, I suggest looking at Aquinas’ explanations about the revelation of the Trinity.

Trinitarian faith comes from the recognition of the *divinity* of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, together with the Father, and it comes simultaneously from the recognition of the *personal distinction* of the Three. This revelation is brought about by the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit reveal their consubstantiality with the Father, as they reveal their personal property as well.

First, the action and teaching of the Son, and the action of the Holy Spirit, reveal their *divinity*. “When we want to know if a certain thing is true, we can determine it from two things: its nature, and its power. For true gold is that which has the species of true gold; and we determine this if it acts like true gold. Therefore, if we maintain that the Son has the true nature of God, because the Son exercises the true activities of divinity, it is clear that the Son is true God. Now the Son does perform true works of divinity, for we read, *Whatever he* [the

¹⁴ *STh* II–II, q. 189 a. 1 ad 4; cf. arg. 4. See also *Contra doctrinam retrahentium*, cap. 7 (Leonine ed., vol. 41 C, p. 50).

¹⁵ See below, note 49.

Father] *does, that the Son does likewise*".¹⁶ This is, for Aquinas, the central teaching of the Fourth Gospel. At the beginning of his commentary on the second chapter of St. John, Aquinas explains:

Above, the Evangelist showed the dignity of the incarnate Word and gave various evidence for it. Now he begins to relate the effects and actions by which the divinity of the incarnate Word was made known to the world. First, he tells *the things Christ did, while living in the world, that show his divinity*. Secondly, he tells *how Christ showed his divinity while dying*; and this from chapter twelve on.¹⁷

The full revelation of the divinity of Christ takes place at Easter, that is to say, in Christ's death and resurrection.¹⁸ Aquinas does not neglect the mystery of Easter as a central place of the revelation of Christ's divinity and, consequently, of the Trinity. It is "after the resurrection that the apostles

¹⁶ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* XVII,3 (Marietti ed., #2187): "Constat enim quod cum volumus scire de re aliqua utrum sit vera, ex duobus scire possumus: scilicet ex natura et ex virtute eius. Verum enim aurum est quod habet veri auri speciem; quod quidem scimus, si facit veri auri operationem. Si ergo habemus de Filio quod habeat veram Dei naturam, et hoc per veram operationem divinitatis quam exercet, manifestum est quod est verus Deus. Quod autem exerceat Filius vera opera divinitatis, patet supra V: *Quaecumque Pater facit, haec et Filius similiter facit.*"

¹⁷ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* II (Marietti ed., #335): "Supra Evangelista ostendit dignitatem Verbi incarnati, et evidentiam eius multipliciter; hic consequenter incipit determinare de effectibus et operibus quibus manifestata est mundo divinitas Verbi incarnati, et primo narrat ea quae Christus fecit in mundo vivendo, ad manifestationem suae divinitatis; secundo quomodo Christus suam divinitatem monstravit moriendo; et hoc a XII cap. et ultra." The emphasis is mine.

¹⁸ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* XIII,1 (Marietti ed., #1734): "Promotiva fuit passio Christi et exaltativa, et non oppressiva."

clearly understood that Christ was God, through what he had shown with regard to his passion and resurrection.”¹⁹ Faith in Christ’s resurrection made the apostles firmly believe that he is true God,²⁰ when Christ’s humanity was made fully participant of the glory of the Father.²¹

Mutatis mutandis, the same applies to the revelation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit: “It is clear that the Holy Spirit is God, since he says, *unless one is born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.* [...] From this we can form the following argument: He from whom men are spiritually reborn is God; but men are spiritually reborn through the Holy Spirit [...] therefore, the Holy Spirit is God.”²²

¹⁹ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* II,21 (Marietti ed., #414): “Sed post resurrectionem, quando iam plene cognoverant Christum esse Deum, per ea quae circa passionem et resurrectionem ostenderat, et quando sacramentum resurrectionis ipsius didicerant, tunc *recordati sunt discipuli eius quia hoc dicebat de corpore suo, et tunc crediderunt Scripturae.*”

²⁰ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* XVI,25 (Marietti ed., #2151): “Nam per illos quadraginta dies quibus apparuit eis, multa mysteria eos docuit et multa de se et Patre annuntiavit; et cum iam per fidem resurrectionis eum firmiter Deum verum esse credentes elevati essent ad altiora.”

²¹ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* XIII,1 (Marietti ed., #1734): “*Ut transeat ex hoc mundo ad Patrem*, idest, faciendo humanam naturam participem paternae gloriae. [...] Intantum dicitur ad eum rediisse in quantum etiam secundum humanitatem factum est consors paternae gloriae.”

²² *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* III,5 (Marietti ed., #444): “Per hoc autem quod hic dicit *Nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu Sancto*, manifeste apparet Spiritum Sanctum esse Deum. Supra enim I, dicit: *Non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate carnis, neque ex voluntate viri, sed ex Deo nati sunt.* Ex quo sic formatur ratio. Ille ex quo spiritualiter renascuntur homines, est Deus; sed homines renascuntur spiritualiter per Spiritum Sanctum, ut hic dicitur: ergo Spiritus Sanctus est Deus.”

In a similar way, when commenting on Scripture, Aquinas pays great attention to the *distinction* and *relations* of the divine persons. In many passages of his commentary on St. John, St. Thomas notes that Christ's *deeds* and *words* show his personal distinction from the Father, to the point that "Whenever Christ mentions the unity and equality [of the Father and Son], he immediately also adds the distinction of persons according to origin, and conversely."²³ In this context, Aquinas formulates a fundamental principle of his Trinitarian theology: the mission shows the origin (*in missione demonstratur origo*).²⁴ The sending of the Son shows the eternal origin of the Son from the Father, and the sending of the Holy Spirit shows the eternal origin of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. An example regarding the Holy Spirit can be found in St. Thomas' commentary on John 20,22: the risen Christ breathed on the apostles and said to them, *receive the Holy Spirit*. Quoting St. Augustine, St. Thomas comments: "This bodily breath was not the substance of the Holy Spirit, but a fitting sign that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from

²³ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* V,23 (Marietti ed., #769): "Et ideo ubicumque facit mentionem de unitate et aequalitate, statim addit et distinctionem personarum secundum originem, et e converso. Unde, quia innuit originem personarum, dicens: *Non potest Filius a seipso facere quidquam, nisi quod viderit Patrem facientem*, ne crederes inaequalitatem, statim subiungit: *Quaecumque enim ille fecerit, haec et Filius similiter facit*. Et, e converso, cum innuit aequalitatem, dicens: *Sicut Pater suscitavit mortuos et vivificavit, ita et Filius quos vult vivificavit*, ne discredas originem et Filium genitum, subiungit: *Neque enim Pater iudicat quemquam; sed omne iudicium dedit Filio*. Eodem modo cum insinuat aequalitatem personarum, dicens *Ut omnes honorificent Filium, sicut honorificant Patrem*, statim subiungit de missione, in qua demonstratur origo, dicens *Qui non honorificat Filium, non honorificat Patrem, qui misit illum [...]*."

²⁴ Ibid.

the Father, but also from the Son.”²⁵ The relations of the three persons are found in the biblical text. These personal relations ground our return to God through the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: “Just as the effect of the mission of the Son was to lead us to the Father, so the effect of the mission of the Holy Spirit is to lead the faithful to the Son.”²⁶ Commenting on Christ’s baptism, Aquinas gives a summary of his understanding of the revelation of the Trinity: “As the Son, existing from the Father, manifests the Father, [...] so the Holy Spirit, existing from the Son, manifests the Son.”²⁷ In the *dispensatio*, the person who eternally proceeds from another manifests that other and leads us to him.

So far, we can affirm that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are made known to us in their consubstantiality and in their personal relations according to origin: this revelation takes place through and in Christ’s action and words, and through the Holy Spirit who was sent.

3. Two remarks on *theologia* and *dispensatio*

At this point, two remarks should be made. First, the purpose of the revelation of the Trinity clearly belongs to the soteriological order, that is to say, it is *for our salvation*. “There are two reasons why the knowledge of the divine persons was necessary for us. First, it was necessary for the

²⁵ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* XX,22 (Marietti ed., #2538): “Unde Augustinus dicit IV *De Trinitate*: Flatus ille corporeus substantia Spiritus Sancti non fuit, sed demonstratio per congruam significationem non tantum a Patre sed etiam a Filio procedere Spiritum Sanctum.”

²⁶ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* XIV,26 (Marietti ed., #1958): “Nam, sicut effectus missionis Filii fuit ducere ad Patrem, ita effectus missionis Spiritus Sancti est ducere fideles ad Filium.”

²⁷ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* I,32 (Marietti ed., #268): “Sicut Filius existens a Patre, manifestat Patrem [...], ita et Spiritus Sanctus a Filio existens, Filium manifestat.”

right understanding of creation. [...] In another way, and chiefly, the knowledge of the divine persons was necessary so that we may think rightly concerning the salvation of the human race, accomplished by the Incarnate Son and by the gift of the Holy Spirit.”²⁸ This statement must be grasped with reference to the first article of the *Summa theologiae*, where St. Thomas explains that a teaching coming from revelation was necessary for the salvation of human beings, in order that they might know that they are directed to God as to their end, an end that surpasses reason. So, the knowledge of the Trinity which is ‘necessary for us’ refers to the work of our salvation performed by the Son made flesh and by the Holy Spirit who is given, and it refers to the Son and to the Holy Spirit *themselves*, insofar as the Son and the Holy Spirit are, together with the Father, the ultimate end whose vision makes human beings fully happy.

Second, if we want to read Aquinas correctly, we should not think of the Bible as dealing only with the Trinitarian *dispensatio*, as if the doctrine of the Trinity in itself (*theologia*) were a later construct by the Church. For Aquinas, as the mystery of the eternal Trinity is present within the *dispensatio*, so the *theologia* is taught by Scripture. Here are two examples. When commenting on John 16,28 (“I came [*exivi*] from the Father, and have come [*veni*] into the world”), Aquinas explains that the first part of this sentence refers to the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, whereas the second part is about his temporal procession, that is, his mission.²⁹ And, when commenting on John 15,26 (“When the

²⁸ *STh* I, q. 32 a. 1 ad. 3: “Cognitio divinarum personarum fuit necessaria nobis dupliciter. Uno modo, ad recte sentiendum de creatione rerum [...] Alio modo, et principalius, ad recte sentiendum de salute generis humani, quae perficitur per Filium incarnatum et per donum Spiritus Sancti.” The last words, “per donum Spiritus Sancti”, mean: ‘by the Holy Spirit who was given’.

²⁹ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* XVI,28 (Marietti ed., #2161-2162): “*Exivi a Patre et veni in mundum* [...] Est autem duplex

Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father”), Aquinas explains that the first part of this verse concerns the mission of the Holy Spirit in time, whereas the second part of the same verse, beginning with “the Spirit of Truth,” teaches his eternal procession from the Father and the Son.³⁰ So, the eternal origin of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is made known to us through their mission (the mission demonstrates the origin), and Christ’s words teach us both the mission *and* the eternal procession of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

As a summary, I would suggest that the elaboration of a doctrine of the Trinity works in three stages, or three steps. (1) The first step consists of the acknowledgement of the revelation of the Trinity through the sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, listening to and following the witness of Scripture. A good example is the soteriological point which Thomas liked: the Son and Spirit show us their divinity by making us participate in divine life; they show us their distinction by taking us into the Father’s communion, following the order of their personal relations. This first step already includes a teaching on the Trinity in its transcendent life, that is to say, on the eternal generation of the Son from

processio Filii a Patre: una scilicet aeterna, alia temporalis. Aeternam quidem designat cum dicit *exivi a Patre*, ab eo aeternaliter genitus [...] Temporalem autem processionem eius designat dicens *et veni in mundum*.” See also the commentary on John 17,8 (“they know in truth that I came [*exivi*] from you; and they have believed that you did send me”), Marietti ed., #2204.

³⁰ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* XV,26 (Marietti ed., #2061-2062): “*Cum autem venerit Paraclitus quem ego mittam vobis a Patre, Spiritum veritatis qui a Patre procedit* [...] Tertio ponit processionem Spiritus Sancti duplicem. Primo quidem temporalem, cum dicit *quem ego mittam vobis a Patre* [...] Secundo ponit processionem aeternam, ubi similiter Spiritum Sanctum ostendit pertinere ad Filium, cum dicit *Spiritum veritatis*; ipse enim est veritas [...]”

the Father, and on the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. (2) In the second stage, the theologian puts forward a speculative reflection on the persons, in their distinction and their unity, in order to *account* for the teaching of Scripture, that is to say, in order to make the teaching of Scripture more articulate and manifest to our minds. This is where the doctrine of personal distinction through relations of origin is found, or the understanding of the divine person as a subsisting relation, and so on. This second stage may be said to correspond to what Aquinas did in the *Summa theologiae, Prima Pars*, questions 2 to 43. It is also found in his biblical commentaries.³¹ (3) A third and final phase uses the results of the speculative reflection in order to highlight the action of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as taught by Scripture: this is where a genuine doctrine of the action of the Trinity, the Trinity as 'principle and end of creatures', is conveyed: this third step is present in the *Summa Theologiae* as well as in Aquinas's biblical commentaries. All three steps move not only from, but *within* Scripture itself.

4. Relation, procession, and person

Relation plays a central role in Aquinas' account of Trinitarian faith. More than any other theologian of his time, St. Thomas developed his theology of the Trinity using relation as a central piece. The core of this elaboration may be found in his doctrine of the divine person as a "subsisting relation".³² The centrality of relation led Aquinas to begin his exposition, in question 27 of the *Prima Pars*, with processions, for

³¹ See Gilles Emery, *Biblical Exegesis and the Speculative Doctrine of the Trinity in St. Thomas Aquinas' Commentary on St. John*, in M. Dauphinais and M. Levering (eds.), *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas - Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, Washington D.C. 2005, 23-61.

³² *STh* I, q. 29 a. 4.

processions are grasped as the foundation of real relations. Relation enabled St. Thomas to account for the divine person, and to explain how Trinitarian faith is faith in one God. In this theological enterprise, Aquinas used the distinction between the *being* of a real relation (its *esse*, which, in the case of personal relations in the Trinity, is identical with God's essence), and the *ratio* of the relation (the pure relationship to another, which is proper to one person). On this basis, St. Thomas developed a detailed understanding of real relations. The doctrine of the Word and of Love draws its richness from the relations that it manifests. Every doctrinal move calls on relation: the Trinitarian order, the personal plurality, the mutual '*esse in*' of the divine persons, and so forth. There is not a single question which does not engage the analysis of relation.

An example, among others, is Aquinas' disagreement with Bonaventure on the understanding of the person of the Father. Whereas Bonaventure tends to conceive of the Father as constituted initially (*inchoatur*) through innascibility as fontal plenitude, Aquinas firmly maintains that the fontality of the Father lies exclusively in the fact that the Father is the principle of the Son, and the principle of the Holy Spirit.³³ In the same way, Aquinas firmly maintains that the divine persons are not only *manifested* by relations, but they are *constituted* as such by relation, so that, if we abstract from

³³ *STh* I, q. 33 a. 4 ad 1: "Quidam dicunt quod innascibilitas, quam significat hoc nomen ingenuus, secundum quod est proprietas Patris, non dicitur tantum negative; sed importat vel utrumque simul, scilicet quod Pater a nullo est, et quod est principium aliorum; vel importat universalem auctoritatem; vel etiam fontalem plenitudinem. Sed hoc non videtur verum. Quia sic innascibilitas non esset alia proprietas a paternitate et spiratione, sed includeret eas, sicut includitur proprium in communi, nam fontalitas et auctoritas nihil aliud significant in divinis quam principium originis." On this, see Emmanuel Durand, *Le Père, Alpha et Oméga de la vie trinitaire*, Paris 2008, 183-244.

relation, the understanding of the divine persons disappears from our mind.³⁴ The most famous thesis is probably the following one. If we consider paternity not just as a pure relationship to the Son, but insofar as paternity constitutes the person of the Father, then, in the order of understanding, the personal property of paternity is presupposed to the act of generation:³⁵ *Quia Pater est, generat*. Because he is Father, he begets.

Among other benefits, the doctrine of relation shows that there is no passivity in the Son who is begotten, nor is there any passivity in the Holy Spirit who proceeds. Aquinas makes this clear with regard to the Son: generation signifies a relation by the mode of an operation. For the Son, to be begotten is an act. It is by *one and the same* operation that the Father begets, and that the Son is begotten; but this operation is in the Father and in the Son according to a distinct relation: fatherhood, and sonship.³⁶ The same must be applied to spiration and to the procession of the Holy Spirit. There is as much action in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, as there is in the Father and the Son who breathe the Holy Spirit, for it is the same operation, but under another relation.

³⁴ *STh* I, q. 40 a. 2 and a. 3.

³⁵ *STh* I, q. 40 a. 4. "Sed proprietas personalis Patris potest considerari dupliciter. Uno modo, ut est relatio, et sic iterum, secundum intellectum, praesupponit actum notionalem; quia relatio, in quantum huiusmodi, fundatur super actum. Alio modo, secundum quod est constitutiva personae, et sic oportet quod praeintelligatur relatio actui notionali, sicut persona agens praeintelligitur actioni."

³⁶ *I Sent.*, dist. 20, q. 1 a. 1 ad 1: "Generatio significat relationem per modum operationis, et etiam est operatio aliqua divinae naturae, secundum Damascenum. Et quamvis generatio non conveniat Filio, non tamen sequitur quod aliqua operatio conveniat Patri quae non conveniat Filio: una enim et eadem operatione Pater generat et Filius nascitur; sed haec operatio est in Patre et Filio secundum aliam et aliam relationem."

Finally, the relational understanding of the divine person leads Aquinas to maintain what may be called the ‘proper and distinct mode of action’ of each divine person. The nature of the Trinity is one; the power of the Trinity is one, and so is the creative and sanctifying operation of the Trinity as well. But, within the one operation of the Trinity, each person acts according to his proper relation. The foundation of this proper mode of action is found in the distinct mode of being (*modus existendi*) of each divine person: each person exists according to a proper mode of being, a mode which follows from the personal relation, that is to say, a mode of being which consists of the way each person possesses the divine essence.³⁷ Now, as one exists, one acts. The mode of action follows from the mode of being. Aquinas makes this explicit with reference to the Son. Commenting on John 1,3 (“Through him all things were made”), Aquinas explains that, if the formula “through him” of John 1,3 is taken to signify the causality of the Word with regard to the things produced, then the statement, “The Father does all things *through* the Son”, is not appropriation, but it is *proper* to the Word, because the fact that the Son is a cause of creatures is had from someone else, namely from the Father, from whom the Son has being.³⁸ The Son acts insofar

³⁷ *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 13 : “Licet eadem natura sit in Patre et Filio, est tamen secundum alium modum existendi, scilicet cum alia relatione.” *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 5, ad 5 : “Sicut una et eadem est essentia trium personarum, non tamen sub eadem relatione, vel secundum eundem modum existendi est in tribus personis.” *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 15, ad 17: “Licet eadem natura sit Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, non tamen eundem modum existendi habet in tribus, et dico modum existendi secundum relationem. In Patre enim est ut non accepta ab alio, in Filio vero ut a Patre accepta.”

³⁸ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium* I,3 (Marietti ed., #76) “Si vero *per* denotet causalitatem ex parte operati, tunc hoc quod dicimus Patrem omnia operari *per* Filium, non est appropriatum Verbo, sed proprium eius, quia hoc quod est causa creaturarum, habet ab alio, scilicet a Patre, a quo habet esse.” The same explanation is given in

as he receives his being and his operation from the Father by generation. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit acts insofar as he receives his being and his operation from the Father and the Son from whom he proceeds. And the Father acts through the Son and through the Holy Spirit to whom he communicates being and operation.

Each divine person acts by virtue of the common divine power, and according to the mode of his personal relation, a mode which concerns the relation of divine person to divine person. So, for instance, when commenting on John 14,16 on the name "Paraclete", St. Thomas explains that both the Son and the Holy Spirit are called *Consolator*. The Son is a Consoler on account of his teaching and because he gives the Holy Spirit (he is the *Verbum spirans Amorem*): the Son is a Consoler insofar as he is the *Word*, whereas the Holy Spirit is a Consoler because he is formally *Love*, so that the phrase "another Paraclete" (John 14,16) indicates the different *mode* by which each acts as a Consoler.³⁹

The doctrine of relation, together with that of the Word and Love, accounts for the personal dimension of Trinitarian action in the world. Here we have a good example of the way in which a speculative doctrine of the Trinity (the

the *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 39 a. 8): "Haec vero praepositio *per* designat quidem quandoque causam mediam; sicut dicimus quod faber operatur per martellum. Et sic *ly per* quandoque non est appropriatum, sed proprium Filii, secundum illud Ioan. I, *Omnia per ipsum facta sunt*; non quia Filius sit instrumentum, sed quia ipse est principium de principio."

³⁹ *Lectura in Iohannis evangelium XIV,16* (Marietti ed., #1912): "*Et alium Paraclitum dabit vobis* [...] Item Spiritus Sanctus dicitur consolator in quantum est Amor formaliter; Filius vero in quantum est Verbum. Et hoc dupliciter: quia per doctrinam, et in quantum ipse Filius dat Spiritum Sanctum, et incendit amorem in cordibus nostris. Sic ergo *ly alium* non designat alietatem naturae in Filio et Spiritu Sancto; sed designat alium modum, quo uterque est consolator et advocatus."

doctrine of the personal mode of existence according to relation, and the doctrine of the Word and Love) throws light on the *dispensatio*.

5. Word and Love

In Aquinas, the theological exposition of the person of the Son and of the person of the Holy Spirit is built on the similitude (*similitudo*) of ‘word’ and ‘love’. Without discussing this at length, I would like to emphasize two aspects of this doctrine.

First, the power and value of this doctrine lies in the fact that the similitudes of ‘word’ and ‘love’ allow us to manifest a relation according to origin: the relation to a principle is formally included in the very *ratio* of word and love as such.⁴⁰ The similitudes of ‘word’ and ‘love’ also allow us to manifest the procession of a reality that remains *within* its principle: the word is uttered by the intellect and it remains *in* the intellect;⁴¹ in the same way, love proceeds from the will and remains *in* the will from which it proceeds. Moreover, the procession of love follows from the speaking of the word.

⁴⁰ *ScG* IV, cap. 11 (Marietti ed., 1961, #3473): “Comparatur igitur Verbum Dei ad Deum intelligentem, cuius est Verbum, sicut ad eum a quo est: hoc enim est de ratione verbi. Cum igitur in Deo intelligens, intelligere, et intentio intellecta, sive Verbum, sint per essentiam unum, et per hoc necesse sit quod quodlibet horum sit Deus; remanet tamen sola distinctio relationis, prout Verbum refertur ad concipientem ut a quo est.” For the doctrine of Love, see *ScG* IV, cap. 19; *STh* I, q. 37, a. 1 and a. 2.

⁴¹ *STh* I, q. 27 a. 1: “[...] Ita secundum actionem quae manet in ipso agente, attenditur processio quaedam ad intra. Et hoc maxime patet in intellectu, cuius actio, scilicet intelligere, manet in intelligente. Quicumque enim intelligit, ex hoc ipso quod intelligit, procedit aliquid intra ipsum, quod est conceptio rei intellectae, ex vi intellectiva proveniens, et ex eius notitia procedens. Quam quidem conceptionem vox significat, et dicitur verbum cordis, significatum verbo vocis.”

These two aspects (that of the real relation according to origin, and that of the intimacy or interiority of what proceeds with regard to its principle) allow us to account for the *real order* in the divine persons who are one and the same God: "There is procession from procession, and proceeding person from proceeding person: and this is what makes a real distinction in God."⁴²

Second, because the doctrine of the Word and Love accounts for the distinct subsistence of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, it also helps us to account for the work of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in the economy of creation and grace. This is especially obvious in the *Summa contra Gentiles*: here, after Aquinas exposes the property of the Son as Word, he shows that this enables one to account for the entire action of the Son in the world.⁴³ In the same way, after Aquinas manifests the Holy Spirit as Love, he shows that the property of Love enables one to better grasp the entire action of the Holy Spirit in the economy, from creation to divinization and final beatitude.⁴⁴

The same appears in the *Summa Theologiae*. Let us consider the Holy Spirit. First, in question 37 of the *Prima Pars* on the Holy Spirit as Love, St. Thomas concentrates on the intra-Trinitarian property, because this is what enables him to disclose the personal distinction and eternal subsistence of the Holy Spirit. But he immediately goes on to take up the idea of the *mutual Love* of Father and Son, widening his approach to the Trinitarian communion. The economic current now makes itself evident: the Holy Spirit is the Love through

⁴² *De potentia*, q. 10, a. 2 ad 7: "Unde illa processio per modum naturae intelligitur in divinis quae nullam aliam praesupponit; illa vero per modum voluntatis quae ex praesupposita processione principium sumit. Et sic oportet processionem esse ex processione, et procedentem ex procedente; hoc autem facit realem differentiam in divinis."

⁴³ See *ScG* IV, cap. 11-13.

⁴⁴ See *ScG* IV, cap. 19-22.

whom the Father and the Son love one another *and* love us.⁴⁵ St. Thomas then follows up on this teaching by showing that, because he is Love, the Holy Spirit is the Gift, the sanctifying Gift of the Father and the Son who is given to human beings and angels, so that they may receive the Holy Spirit *in person* and enjoy him.⁴⁶ As Gift, the Holy Spirit is the source of all participation in Trinitarian life. We receive the Son in the Holy Spirit. It is from and in the Holy Spirit that we are given a share in sanctity and communion.

6. The mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit

Finally, I would like to return to my first theme, namely: the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas accounts for the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit by means of their eternal property, that is, Word and Love. On the one hand, the divine missions are the starting point of Trinitarian theology; and on the other hand, the doctrine of divine missions is the final fruit of Trinitarian theology. The paradigm for the doctrine of the missions is the incarnation of the Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let us start with the ‘visible’ missions, although this is not how Aquinas proceeds in the *Summa Theologiae*.

⁴⁵ *STh* I, q. 37 a. 2: “Dicitur Pater dicens Verbo vel Filio, se et creaturam, et Pater et Filius dicuntur diligentes Spiritu Sancto, vel Amore procedente, et se et nos.” *Ibid.*, ad 3: “Sicut Pater dicit se et omnem creaturam Verbo quod genuit, in quantum Verbum genitum sufficienter repraesentat Patrem et omnem creaturam; ita diligit se et omnem creaturam Spiritu Sancto, in quantum Spiritus Sanctus procedit ut amor bonitatis primae, secundum quam Pater amat se et omnem creaturam. Et sic etiam patet quod respectus importatur ad creaturam et in Verbo et in Amore procedente, quasi secundo; in quantum scilicet veritas et bonitas divina est principium intelligendi et amandi omnem creaturam.”

⁴⁶ *STh* I, q. 38 a. 1 and a. 2.

By 'visible mission', Aquinas understands the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit through visible signs (at Christ's baptism, at Christ's transfiguration, at Easter according to St. John, and at Pentecost followings the Acts of the Apostles). A person is *sent* by the one from whom this person *proceeds*: the eternal relation of origin is included in the mission itself; the person is sent according to his personal property. The Holy Spirit is sent as the "Gift of sanctification" (*sanctificationis donum*): the Holy Spirit is interiorly given as the Gift who sanctifies, and the visible signs (the dove, the breath, the tongues "as of fire") manifest him as such. As for the Son, he is sent in the flesh insofar as he is the Son and the Word, that is to say, insofar as he is the principle of the Holy Spirit (to be the principle of the Holy Spirit properly belongs to the Son as Son and Word), and therefore he is sent as the "author of sanctification" (*sanctificationis auctor*).⁴⁷ In this way, St. Thomas links the incarnation to the fact that the Son, *because he is the Son and Word of the Father*, takes on a humanity by which he gives the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ Christology finds its roots here, and we should note that the Holy Spirit is at the heart of Aquinas's account of the incarnation of the Son.

As for the 'invisible missions', that is to say, the sending of the Holy Spirit and of the Son into angels and into

⁴⁷ *STh* I, q. 43 a. 7: "[...] Conveniens fuit ut etiam invisibiles missiones divinarum personarum secundum aliquas visibiles creaturas manifestarentur. Aliter tamen Filius et Spiritus Sanctus. Nam Spiritui Sancto, in quantum procedit ut Amor, competit esse sanctificationis donum, Filio autem, in quantum est Spiritus Sancti principium, competit esse sanctificationis huius auctorem. Et ideo Filius visibiliter missus est tanquam sanctificationis auctor, sed Spiritus Sanctus tanquam sanctificationis indicium."

⁴⁸ *STh* I, q. 43 a. 7 ad 4: "Personam Filii declarari oportuit ut sanctificationis auctorem, ut dictum est, et ideo oportuit quod missio visibilis Filii fieret secundum naturam rationalem, cuius est agere, et cui potest competere sanctificare [...]."

human souls, they give us the fundamental structure of divinization. Here the reference, or paradigm, is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who is given. In his *Scriptum super Sententiis*, Aquinas explains that the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit consists of two elements, or two aspects: first, his eternal procession, which is really present in the mission itself. Put otherwise, the Holy Spirit is sent *as proceeding* from the Father and the Son. Second, the mission takes place by virtue of a temporal effect in the order of sanctifying grace.⁴⁹ This temporal effect, a created gift, is *caused* by the Holy Spirit and *disposes* us to receive the Holy Spirit himself. From the standpoint of our assimilation to the Holy Spirit, the created gift of sanctifying grace is primary: it is the priority of a *disposition*. But from the standpoint of the *cause* of grace, and of the *end* to which grace disposes us (that is, receiving the Holy Spirit in person), the reception of the Holy Spirit has priority over that of his gifts: in this sense, the gift of the Holy Spirit himself is *absolutely primary*.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ I *Sent.*, dist. 16, q. 1 a. 1: “Sicut processio temporalis non est alia quam processio aeterna essentialiter, sed addit aliquem respectum ad effectum temporalem; ita etiam missio visibilis non est alia essentialiter ab invisibili missione Spiritus Sancti, sed addit solam rationem manifestationis per visibile signum.” Consequently, the ‘visible mission’ of the Holy Spirit consists of *three* aspects: (1) his eternal procession; (2) a created gift of grace; (3) a sign that manifests both the eternal procession and the abundant gift of grace.

⁵⁰ I *Sent.*, dist. 14, q. 2, a. 1, quaestiuncula 2: “Ordo aliquorum secundum naturam potest dupliciter considerari. Aut ex parte recipientis vel materiae; et sic dispositio est prior quam id ad quod disponit: et sic per prius recipimus dona Spiritus Sancti quam ipsum Spiritum, quia per ipsa dona recepta Spiritui Sancto assimilamur. Aut ex parte agentis et finis; et sic quod propinquius erit fini et agenti, dicitur esse prius: et ita per prius recipimus Spiritum Sanctum quam dona ejus, quia et Filius per amorem suum alia nobis donavit. Et hoc est simpliciter esse prius.”

The same teaching is clearly present in the *Summa Theologiae*:

By the gift of sanctifying grace the rational creature is perfected so that it can not only use freely the created gift, but also enjoy the divine person himself; and so the invisible mission takes place according to a gift in the order of sanctifying grace; and yet the divine person himself is given.⁵¹

Sanctifying grace disposes the soul to possess the divine person; and this is signified when it is said that the Holy Spirit is given according to a gift of grace; nevertheless the gift itself of grace is from the Holy Spirit; which is meant by the words, *the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit*.⁵²

Aquinas' commentary of Romans 5,5 is perhaps the best passage on this theme. Here, St. Thomas shows that the Holy Spirit in person is given; and when the Holy Spirit is given, he gives us a participation in his personal property, that is, charity:

The *charity of God* can be understood two-fold. In one way, as the charity by which *God loves us*. 'I have loved you with an everlasting love' (Jer 31,3). In another way,

⁵¹ *STh* I, q. 43 a. 3 ad 1: "Per donum gratiae gratum facientis perficitur creatura rationalis, ad hoc quod libere non solum ipso dono creato utatur, sed ut ipsa divina persona fruatur. Et ideo missio invisibilis fit secundum donum gratiae gratum facientis, et tamen ipsa persona divina datur." These 'gifts of sanctifying grace' are the gift of wisdom (mission of the Son) and the gift of charity (mission of the Holy Spirit), as article 5 of the same question specifies. See below, note 54.

⁵² *STh* I, q. 43 a. 3 ad 2: "Gratia gratum faciens disponit animam ad habendam divinam personam, et significatur hoc, cum dicitur quod Spiritus Sanctus datur secundum donum gratiae. Sed tamen ipsum donum gratiae est a Spiritu Sancto, et hoc significatur, cum dicitur quod *caritas Dei diffunditur in cordibus nostris per Spiritum Sanctum*."

the charity of God can be said to be that by which *we ourselves love God*, below 8,38f.: ‘For I am certain that neither death nor life will separate us from the love of God’. Nevertheless, in both cases the charity of God is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For the Holy Spirit, who is the Love of the Father and the Son, to be given to us, is to lead us to the participation of Love, which is the Holy Spirit, from which participation we are made lovers of God (*efficimur Dei amatores*). And the fact that we love him is a sign that he loves us. Prov 8,17: ‘I love the ones loving me’. ‘Not as if we have loved God first, but because he loved us first’, as it is said in 1 Jn 4,10. Now the charity, by which he loves us, is said to be *poured into* our hearts, because it is shown clearly in our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit impressed in us. 1 Jn 3,24: ‘By this we know, that he remains in us, from the Spirit which he gave to us’. On the other hand, the charity by which we love God is said to be poured into our hearts because it extends itself to the perfecting of all habits and acts of the soul; for, as it is said in 1 Cor 13,4: ‘Love is patient, love is kind’, etc.⁵³

⁵³ *In Epist. ad Romanos* V,5 (Marietti ed., #392): “Charitas Dei autem dupliciter accipi potest. Uno modo pro charitate qua diligit nos Deus, Ier. XXXI: *Charitate perpetua dilexi te*; alio modo potest dici charitas Dei, qua nos Deum diligimus, infra VIII: *Certus sum quod neque mors neque vita separabit nos a charitate Dei*. Utraque autem charitas Dei in cordibus nostris diffunditur per Spiritum Sanctum qui datus est nobis. Spiritum enim Sanctum, qui est Amor Patris et Filii, dari nobis, est nos adduci ad participationem Amoris, qui est Spiritus Sanctus, a qua quidem participatione efficimur Dei amatores. Et hoc quod ipsum amamus, signum est, quod ipse nos amet. Prov. VIII: *Ego diligentes me diligo. Non quasi nos primo dilexerimus Deum, sed quoniam ipse prior dilexit nos*, ut dicitur I Io. IV. Dicitur autem charitas, qua nos diligit, in cordibus nostris diffusa esse, quia est in cordibus nostris patenter ostensa per donum Sancti Spiritus nobis impressum. Io. III: *In hoc scimus, quoniam manet in nobis Deus*, etc. Charitas autem qua nos Deum diligimus, dicitur in

In the exposition of the divine missions, then, we find again the doctrine of the Word and Love. The Son is sent invisibly into souls when he dwells there according to the gift of wisdom, or sanctifying knowledge, which breaks forth into the affection of love, since the Son is the Word who breathes forth Love. And the Holy Spirit is sent into souls when he dwells in them according to the gift of charity.⁵⁴ The gift of wisdom is a participation in the personal property of the Son, and the gift of charity is a participation in the personal property of the Holy Spirit. And so, the Son and the Holy Spirit lead us to the Father according to the way in which they refer *themselves* to the Father; they make saints participate in the way they are in relation with the Father: the Son as the Word of the Father, and the Holy Spirit as Love.⁵⁵ A similar structure will be found again in the teaching on the image of God, on the theological virtues, and on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the

cordibus nostris diffusa, id est quia ad omnes mores et actus animae perficiendos se extendit; nam, ut dicitur I Cor. XIII: *Charitas patiens est, benigna est*, etc.” The emphasis is mine.

⁵⁴ *STh* I, q. 43 a. 5 ad 2: “Anima per gratiam conformatur Deo. Unde ad hoc quod aliqua persona divina mittatur ad aliquem per gratiam, oportet quod fiat assimilatio illius ad divinam personam quae mittitur per aliquod gratiae donum. Et quia Spiritus Sanctus est Amor, per donum caritatis anima Spiritui Sancto assimilatur, unde secundum donum caritatis attenditur missio Spiritus Sancti. Filius autem est Verbum, non quaecumque, sed spirans Amorem, unde Augustinus dicit, in IX libro de Trin., *Verbum quod insinuare intendimus, cum amore notitia est*. Non igitur secundum quamlibet perfectionem intellectus mittitur Filius, sed secundum talem instructionem intellectus, qua prorumpat in affectum amoris, ut dicitur Ioan. VI, *Omnis qui audivit a Patre, et didicit, venit ad me*; et in Psalm., *In meditatione mea exardescet ignis*. Et ideo signanter dicit Augustinus quod Filius mittitur, cum a quoquam cognoscitur atque percipitur; perceptio enim experimentalem quandam notitiam significat. Et haec proprie dicitur sapientia, quasi sapida scientia, secundum illud Eccli. VI, *Sapientia doctrinae secundum nomen eius est*.”

⁵⁵ See *I Sent.*, dist. 15, q. 4, a. 1.

Word and Love thus provides us with a unified understanding of the Trinity in itself, of Trinitarian action, of the divine missions, and of theological anthropology.

As a conclusion, I would suggest that St. Thomas' doctrine of divine missions offers a powerful alternative to the scheme of the 'economic Trinity' and the 'immanent Trinity'. Today's scheme of the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity tends to start with a formal distinction between the two aspects, and then attempts to reunite them. Instead, Aquinas' doctrine of missions starts with the affirmation of the eternal procession being included in the mission itself, and with the clear statement that the divine persons themselves are given. At the same time, the doctrine of the missions maintains the essential difference between God and his created effects, with no danger of confusing the Trinity and his created gifts. This doctrine of the divine missions, insofar as it integrates the teaching on processions, on relations and on persons, may be considered as the pivot, indeed a real key, of St. Thomas' Trinitarian theology.

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INHOUDSOPGAVE

<i>Henk J.M. Schoot</i>	
INTRODUCTION.....	5
<i>Gilles Emery, O.P.</i>	
KEY THEMES IN ST. THOMAS' THEOLOGY OF THE TRINITY.....	9
1. The Triune God and the order of 'consideratio de Deo'.....	9
2. <i>Theologia</i> and <i>dispensatio</i>	12
3. Two remarks on <i>theologia</i> and <i>dispensatio</i>	18
4. Relation, procession, and person.....	21
5. Word and Love.....	26
6. The mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit.....	28
<i>Harm van Grol</i>	
DE DRIE GEZICHTEN VAN PSALM 51.....	35
1. De strofische ordening van Psalm 51.....	38
2. Versstructuur en tekstsyntaxis.....	39
3. Langs de strofen lopen.....	48
4. Wellust en wijsheid.....	51
5. De nieuwe mens.....	55
6. De nieuwe stad.....	58
7. De boetegang van David.....	62

<i>Martin J.M. Hoondert</i>	
“HERSCHEP MIJN HART”. Psalm 51 verklankt.....	69
1. Psalm 51 in de liturgie.....	70
2. Psalm 51 als onderdeel van de boetepsalmen.....	77
3. <i>Sonic environment</i>	78
<i>Herwi Rikhof</i>	
MAGNA MISERICORDIA.	
Uit Thomas’commentaar op Psalm 51 (50).....	83
1. Inleiding.....	83
2. Commentaar op het eerste gedeelte.....	87
3. Besluit.....	108
<i>Jos Moons</i>	
THOMAS DOCTOR EUCHARISTICUS?	
Voorstudie over de samenhang van theologie en liturgie in verband met de eucharistie.....	109
1. Inleiding	109
2. Systematische Theologie.....	110
3. Preken (Liturgie I).....	117
4. Gebeden: <i>Adoro Te</i> (Liturgie II).....	123
5. Liturgie Sacramentsdag (Liturgie III).....	132
6. Conclusie.....	137
<i>Cristina M. Pumplun</i>	
ANNUAL REPORT 2008.....	141