

## THE PERSONAL MODE OF TRINITARIAN ACTION IN SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS<sup>1</sup>

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WHEN SCHOLASTIC theologians explore the economic act of the Trinity, they frequently refer to the doctrine of appropriations. They understand by “appropriation” the attribution to one divine person of features common to the whole Trinity, in order to illumine better the distinct properties of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> It is in this way, for example, that the Scholastic authors of the thirteenth century generally considered the attribution of creation to the Father (“I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth”) or sanctification to the Holy Spirit (“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life”).<sup>3</sup> Resting on a complex analysis of the divine attributes, the theory of appropriations possesses a realism

<sup>1</sup> English translation by Matthew Levering. A portion of this article appeared in an earlier French version in the *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 50 (2003): 334-53.

<sup>2</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* I, c. 6 (*Opera omnia*, vol. 5 [Quaracchi: Ed. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1891], 214-15).

<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 45, a. 6, ad 2. The aim of appropriation is not to diminish the personal features of the Trinity (as is sometimes suggested by modern criticism) but, on the contrary, to make the persons more manifest to believers (*STh* I, q. 39, a. 7). References to Aquinas are taken from the following editions. *Summa Theologiae*: Leonine Edition, vols. 4-12 (Rome, 1888-1906); *Scriptum* on books I and II of the *Sentences*: ed. P. Mandonnet, 2 vols. (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929); *Summa contra Gentiles*: ed. P. Marc, C. Pera, and others, 3 vols. (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1961-67); *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*: Leonine Edition, vol. 22 (Rome, 1975-76); *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia*: ed. P. Bazzi and others (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1965); *Quaestiones De Quolibet*: Leonine Edition, vol. 25 (Rome, 1996); *Contra errores Graecorum*: Leonine Edition, vol. 40A (Rome, 1967); *Lectura in Ioannem*: ed. R. Cai (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1952); *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. R. Cai, 2 vols. (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1953).

that Albert the Great, for example, describes by explaining that Trinitarian appropriation is founded "on the side of the reality itself" and not solely in our mind.<sup>4</sup>

However, today the theory of appropriations provokes reservations among many theologians who accuse it of obscuring the personal dimension of the Trinitarian act or running the risk of being a mere linguistic game.<sup>5</sup> The appropriative method would be quite unsatisfying if one regarded the divine act as pertaining exclusively to the divine essence and the Trinitarian dimension as dependent only on an appropriation. In other words, appropriation would be badly understood if one used it in order to cover up or "disguise" a monist conception of divine action.

Is appropriation, however, the sole explication of the Trinitarian dimension of the divine act? Is it not necessary, rather, to recognize a mode of acting *proper* to each divine person, beyond the appropriations? Certain oft-repeated clichés in this domain aim at opposing the Thomist tradition to the Greek tradition (with the latter recognizing a distinct mode of acting of the hypostases in the single operation of the Trinity).<sup>6</sup> In fact, the texts show that Thomas Aquinas upholds a personal, proper modality of the act of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It is this teaching, too little known even today, that we wish to present here, by situating it in its doctrinal context.

The structure of this article will be as follows. I will describe first the fundamental principle of the thought of St. Thomas concerning the Trinitarian act: The Father creates and does everything by his Son in the Holy Spirit (1). This principle

<sup>4</sup> St. Albert the Great, I *Sent.*, d. 34, a. 5 (*Opera omnia*, ed. A. Borgnet, vol. 26 [Paris: Vivès, 1893], 171). Following his master, St. Thomas Aquinas explains: "From the standpoint of the reality, the likeness of the appropriated attribute to the person's property makes the congruity of the appropriation, *a congruence which would be there even if we did not exist*" (I *Sent.*, d. 31, q. 1, a. 2).

<sup>5</sup> See Yves Congar, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 346-61; for examples of a sharper criticism, see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 99-101; Anne Hunt, *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery: A Development in Recent Catholic Theology* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 113-14, 176.

<sup>6</sup> See for example H. Barré, *Trinité que j'adore: Perspectives théologiques* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1965), 150.

governs the speculative thesis of the “causality of the Trinitarian processions” that St. Thomas develops in a proper and original way (2). This affirmation of the personal dimension of the Trinitarian act raises a question (3): is it necessary to recognize a “proper role” or “a distinct action” of each divine person? In order to attempt to respond to this question, I propose to consider first the exegesis of John 1:3, in which St. Thomas shows that to be the one “through whom” the Father does all things is a *proper* feature of the Son (4). This exegesis rests on the Trinitarian doctrine of the distinct “mode of existence” of each divine person: because the mode of action reflects the mode of being, it is necessary to recognize a distinct *mode* of action of each divine person (5). This teaching can be illustrated by the exegesis of many biblical passages. As an example, I propose to consider the way in which St. Thomas shows that the Son and the Holy Spirit both exercise the role of Consoler, but in distinct *modes* (6). In all these explications, however, St. Thomas maintains quite firmly the unity of the divine action and the unity of the Trinity as the source of created effects: the doctrine of perichoresis permits him to show the profoundly personalist character of the rule of the unity of action of the Trinity (7). This unity of action does not signify that, in the life of faith, believers have only a relation to the undivided Trinity: there is rather, in the life of grace, a relationship of believers to each divine person in his distinction. This relationship is not found at the “entitative” level by which we are ontologically referred to the Trinity as cause, but at the level of the “intentional” or “objective” union with the divine persons; from this standpoint, the gifts of grace refer us to the divine persons in their distinctiveness (8). This theological path is complex but it is necessary if we are to render a faithful account of the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

#### I. THE FATHER CREATES AND ACCOMPLISHES ALL THINGS BY HIS SON IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The properties of the divine persons clarify not only their distinction and their subsistence in the immanence of the Trinity,

but equally their act in the world. With respect to the Father, Thomas Aquinas shows that paternity designates primarily the intra-Trinitarian relation of the Father to the Son and secondarily the relation that God the Father holds with the world according to diverse degrees of participation (paternity toward creatures lacking reason and toward creatures made to the image of God, divine paternity according to nature and according to grace): it is by participating in the relation that the Son holds with his Father that creatures have God for their Father.<sup>7</sup> In his study of the Son, Thomas establishes that the Word, by virtue of his personal property, possesses a relationship toward creatures, because the Father accomplishes all things by his Word. The very name of *Word* signifies the Son in his exemplar and efficient causality: it permits one to understand the foundation of the manifestation of the Father as accomplished by the Son.<sup>8</sup> The study of the name *Son* as well as the theme of the *Image* (a proper name of the Son) clarifies equally the creative and the salvific action of the Son.<sup>9</sup> One can hardly summarize, at one stroke, this vast teaching. Let us recall the master idea that guides Aquinas's explanations:

Whoever makes something must preconceive it in his wisdom, which is the form and pattern of the thing made: as the form preconceived in the mind of an artisan is the pattern of the cabinet to be made. God makes nothing except through the conception of his intellect, which is the eternally conceived Wisdom, that is, the Word of God and Son of God. Accordingly, it is impossible that God should make anything except through his Son. And so Augustine says, in his *De Trinitate*, that the Word is the Art full of the living patterns of all things. Thus it is manifest that all things which the Father makes, he makes through the Son.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *STh* I, q. 33, a. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *STh* I, q. 34, a. 3: the Word of God, insofar as he is the Word (*Verbum*), expresses and causes creatures.

<sup>9</sup> See notably *STh* III, q. 3, a. 8; *ScG* IV, c. 11 (#3474), c. 12 (#3483), c. 13, and c. 42. Throughout this article, parenthetical numbers refer to paragraphs in the Marietti edition.

<sup>10</sup> *In Ioan.* 1:3 (#77): "Quicumque enim aliquid facit, oportet quod illud praeconciat in sua sapientia, quae est forma et ratio rei factae: sicut forma in mente artificis praeconcepta est ratio arcae faciendae. Sic ergo Deus nihil facit nisi per conceptum sui intellectus, qui est sapientia ab aeterno concepta, scilicet Dei Verbum, et Dei Filius: et ideo impossibile est quod aliquid faciat nisi per Filium." The English translation (here with modifications) is taken from Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, part 1, trans. James A. Weisheipl and Fabian R. Larcher (Albany, N.Y.: Magi Books, 1980); part 2, trans. James A. Weisheipl and

This action of the Father “through his Word” concerns creation (the Word is the expression and the productive source of creatures), providence, the manifestation of the Father and his revelation, salvation, and the gift of filiation—in brief, the whole creative and salvific divine act. In every case, Thomas Aquinas explains the action of the Son by means of his property of Word, Son, and Image, that is, by means of what characterizes him distinctly in the Trinity.

In a similar manner, the personal property that manifests the distinction and the eternal existence of the Holy Spirit permits one also to account for his act in the economy of creation and grace. It is by means of the property of Love that Thomas Aquinas explicates the action of the Holy Spirit in creation, in the exercise of providence, in the movement of creatures, in vivification, sanctification, and the life of grace. Being personally Gift, the Holy Spirit is given to the saints and abides in them; he communicates the presence of the Father and of the Son, showering the Church with his gifts.<sup>11</sup> Let us note, here again, the guiding idea of this teaching:

Even as the Father utters himself and every creatures by the Word he begets, inasmuch as the Word begotten completely expresses the Father and every creature, so also he loves himself and every creature by the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit proceeds as Love for the primal goodness, the motive of the Father’s loving himself and every creature.<sup>12</sup>

This explanation implies that the Love by which the Father and the Son are mutually united is also the Love by which they associate us in their communion: “The Father and the Son are loving each other and us by the Holy Spirit or Love

Fabian R. Larcher (Petersham, Mass.: St. Bede’s Publications, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> See notably *ScG* IV, c. 20-22.

<sup>12</sup> *STh* I, q. 37, a. 2, ad 3: “Sicut Pater dicit se et omnem creaturam Verbo quod genuit, inquantum Verbum genitum sufficienter repraesentat Patrem et omnem creaturam; ita diligit se et omnem creaturam Spiritu Sancto, inquantum Spiritus Sanctus procedit ut Amor bonitatis primae, secundum quam Pater amat se et omnem creaturam.” It is the reason why the name “Love” (*Amor*), as a proper name of the Holy Spirit, includes not only intra-Trinitarian relationship but can also imply a reference to creatures: “By the Holy Spirit, the Father loves not only the Son but Himself and us as well” (*ibid.*).

proceeding.”<sup>13</sup> The theological exposition of divine action rests thus on the study of the persons in their common essence and in their properties.<sup>14</sup> In his analysis of the names *Word*, *Love*, and *Gift*, Thomas shows that these names bear a relationship to creatures.<sup>15</sup> He specifies that the divine person (the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit) is related to creatures not directly according to the pure relation of origin that it holds within the eternal Trinity, but under the aspect by which this person includes the divine essence:

The name of ‘person’ includes the nature indirectly: a person is an individual substance of intelligent nature. Thus the name of a divine person does not imply a reference to the creature according to the personal relation [of this person], but such a name does imply a reference to the creature according to what belongs to the nature [of this person]. However, nothing prevents such a name, as including the essence in its signification, from bearing a relationship to the creature. Just as it is proper to the Son that he be the Son, so also it is proper to him that he be ‘God begotten’ or ‘Creator begotten’. That is how the name ‘Word’ bears a relationship to creatures.<sup>16</sup>

One finds in these explanations the structure of *relation* and the elements of the Thomistic notion of *person*, applied to the Trinitarian economy. Relation, we note briefly, bears a double aspect: (1) it is pure relationship to an other, and (2) it possesses existence in a subject. The first aspect constitutes the proper notion or *ratio* of relation (relationship to another), and the second aspect accounts for the being (*esse*) of a real relation.

<sup>13</sup> *STh* I, q. 37, a. 2: “Pater et Filius dicuntur diligentes Spiritu Sancto vel Amore procedente et se et nos.”

<sup>14</sup> On the Trinitarian dimension of divine economic actions, see G. Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, Mich.: Sapientia Press, 2003), 33-70 and 171-75.

<sup>15</sup> *STh* I, q. 34, a. 3, ad 1 (on the name *Word*); see q. 37, a. 2, ad 3 (*Love*); q. 38, a. 1, ad 4 (*Gift*).

<sup>16</sup> *STh* I, q. 34, a. 3, ad 1: “In nomine personae includitur etiam natura oblique, nam persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia. In nomine igitur personae divinae, quantum ad relationem personalem, non importatur respectus ad creaturam, sed importatur in eo quod pertinet ad naturam. Nihil tamen prohibet, inquantum includitur in significatione eius essentia, quod importetur respectus ad creaturam: sicut enim proprium est Filio quod sit Filius, ita proprium est ei quod sit genitus Deus, vel genitus Creator. Et per hunc modum importatur relatio ad creaturam in nomine Verbi.”

These two aspects are required for every real relation. In God, the first aspect consists in the pure relationship of person to person according to origin (paternity, filiation, spiration, procession). As regards the second aspect, the divine relation is identified with the very being of the divine essence; it *is* this divine essence, it is God.<sup>17</sup> The combination of this double aspect allows one to conceive of the divine person as a relation that subsists: the person is distinct under the aspect of relationship to another according to origin (the first aspect of relation) and it subsists in virtue of the divine being that it formally includes and with which it is identified (second aspect of relation).<sup>18</sup> It is this analysis that Thomas applies to the relationship that the divine persons hold with creatures. We will examine more closely these two aspects of relation.

According to Thomas Aquinas, the relationship to creatures does not intervene in the first aspect of the divine relation, that is, in the aspect of the pure relationship to another which constitutes the “proper reason” of the relation. Under this first aspect, the intra-Trinitarian relation is a pure relationship of person to person according to origin. The divine person, distinguished and constituted by a relation, is not distinguished and constituted by a relationship to creatures, but by the relation it holds with another divine person. To introduce the relationship to creatures in this first aspect would amount to thinking that the very existence of the Trinity (the real distinction of persons) depended on the action of God in the world, as if the world intervened to make a divine person exist. Such a view of things would imply a pantheist conception of the Trinity or would lead to the difficulties of Arianism and of Sabellianism which understood the procession of persons along the lines of an action of God in the world.<sup>19</sup> One could no longer account for the divinity of the persons and their eternal distinction.

<sup>17</sup> *STh* I, q. 28, a. 2; *De Pot.*, q. 8, a. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *STh* I, q. 29, a. 4; *De Pot.*, q. 9, a. 4. On this doctrine of divine relation, see Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, 139-44.

<sup>19</sup> *STh* I, q. 27, a. 1.

The relationship to creatures, however, is included in the second aspect of the divine relation, which “includes” the divine essence and possesses the being of the divine essence. The divine essence contains the ideas of the creatures which preexist in it, and it is the source or the cause of creatures (exemplar, efficient, and final cause). These elements have been explained in the treatise of the essential attributes that concern the divine operation (the knowledge of God, his will and love, his power). It is by his essence that God creates: by his wisdom, by his will and his love, by his mercy, by his power.<sup>20</sup> In other words, God creates because he is God and insofar as he is God. This is why the relationship to creatures belongs not in the personal relation as pure “relationship to another” (first aspect of relation), but rather in relation under the aspect of its divine being (second aspect of relation). And what one explains in terms of *relations* applies also to *person*. The divine person bears a relationship to creatures not under the aspect of his pure relationship toward another divine person, but rather under the aspect of his divinity. The Holy Spirit saves, the Son creates, because the Son and the Holy Spirit are *divine* persons, that is, because they are God and inasmuch as they are God.<sup>21</sup>

This is what St. Thomas explains regarding the names *Word*, *Love*, and *Gift*: the relationship to creatures belongs not in the “personal relation,” but in the divine essence that the person “includes.” It is in this manner that the Son is the “begotten Creator”: the word *begotten* signifies the Son in his relationship to the Father and the word *Creator* signifies the Son in his divine being. The notion of “divine person” gathers or includes these two aspects. In Aquinas, the theological understanding of the relationship that a divine person holds with the world implies the fundamental elements of the speculative synthesis on relation and person.

In affirming that the relationship to creatures pertains to the divine essence common to the three persons, and not to the pure

<sup>20</sup> *STh* I, q. 14, a. 8; q. 19, a. 4; q. 20, a. 2; q. 21, a. 4; q. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *In Ioan.* 3:5 (#444); 10:35 (#1460); 17:3 (#2187); etc.

relationship of person to person, has Thomas obscured the personal features of the Trinitarian economy? Has he suggested that the essence alone (and not the person as such) is involved in the creation and the economy of grace? No, because the person is not constituted solely by the relationship to another, but also by the essence in virtue of which it is a person. This is why Thomas explains that the relationship to creatures is indeed “included” in the notion of divine person, or that it belongs “in second place” in the proper name of the divine person. When Christians confess that the Son is the Word, or when one recognizes that the Holy Spirit is Love and Gift, the relationship to creatures is present in these personal names “in the way that essence enters the meaning of ‘person’.”<sup>22</sup> In explaining that the relationship to the created world concerns the divine essence, Thomas clearly holds that this relationship belongs to the *person*, since the essence formally pertains to the person *as person*.

In order better to grasp the personal dimension of the creative and salvific act, it is necessary therefore to take an additional step. In the relationship to creatures, what “role” should one grant to what each person possesses as a personal property? How does the property of each person belong in the action of the Trinity in the world? Before answering this question, let us note briefly the theme of the “causality of the Trinitarian processions” which extends the above reflections.

## II. THE “CAUSALITY” OF THE TRINITARIAN PROCESSIONS

Beginning with his first synthesis of theology, the commentary on the *Sentences*, Thomas Aquinas formulated this central thesis: “The eternal processions of the persons are the cause and the reason [*causa et ratio*] of the entire production of creatures.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *STh* I, q. 38, a. 1, ad 4 (about the name *Donum* proper to the Holy Spirit): “Nec tamen per hoc quod importatur respectus ad creaturam oportet quod sit essenziale, sed quod aliquid essenziale in suo intellectu includatur, *sicut essentia includitur in intellectu personae*, ut supra dictum est.”

<sup>23</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1: “Processiones personarum aeternae sunt causa et ratio totius productionis creaturarum.”

The words *cause* and *reason* are completed by other terms specifying the Trinitarian foundation of creation. The procession of persons is the source or origin (*origo*),<sup>24</sup> the principle (*principium*)<sup>25</sup> and the model (*exemplar*)<sup>26</sup> of the procession of creatures. This affirmation is presented as a theological exegesis of biblical texts concerning the action of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. One finds it almost twenty times in the Thomistic corpus, in the same terms<sup>27</sup> or in related formulations: "The temporal procession of creatures derives from the eternal procession of the persons,"<sup>28</sup> "the going forth of persons in the unity of essence is the cause of the going forth of creatures in the diversity of essence."<sup>29</sup>

Saint Thomas was able to find this theological thesis in his master, St. Albert the Great.<sup>30</sup> It is also manifestly inspired by St. Bonaventure who, without expressly formulating this thesis, likewise taught that the procession of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit possess a causality and an exemplarity with regard to creatures: the "extrinsic diffusion" of the good (the act of God in the world) has for its reason the "intrinsic diffusion" of the sovereign Good in the divine persons, in a manner in which the first reality is the cause of all the secondary realities that derive from it. However, neither Albert nor Bonaventure developed the creative causality of the Trinitarian processions in a manner comparable to Thomas: the systematic exploitation of this thesis

<sup>24</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 32, q. 1, a. 3: "Processio divinarum personarum est et quaedam origo processionis creaturarum."

<sup>25</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 35, *divisio textus*: "de processione divinarum personarum in unitate essentiae, quae est principium creaturarum et causa."

<sup>26</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 29, q. 1, a. 2, qcla 2; *De Pot.*, q. 10, a. 2, sc 2.

<sup>27</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 10, q. 1, a. 1; I *Sent.*, d. 14, q. 2, a. 2; I *Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2; I *Sent.*, d. 27, q. 2, a. 3, ad 6; *De Pot.*, q. 10, a. 2, arg. 19 and ad 19; *STh* I, q. 45, a. 6, c. et ad 1; q. 45, a. 7, ad 3.

<sup>28</sup> General Prologue of the *Scriptum* on the *Sentences*: "Sicut trames a fluvio derivatur, ita processus temporalis creaturarum ab aeterno processu personarum." See also *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, prol.

<sup>29</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 2, *divisio textus*: "Exitus enim personarum in unitate essentiae, est causa exitus creaturarum in essentiae diversitate."

<sup>30</sup> St. Albert, I *Sent.*, d. 20, a. 3, sc; I *Sent.*, d. 29, a. 2, sc 2 (*Opera omnia*, ed. A. Borgnet, vol. 25, p. 191; vol. 26, p. 76).

appears as a characteristic feature of his theology. The Trinitarian processions are the exemplary, efficient, and final source of the procession of creatures (creation and grace), the motive of the creative action on the part of God, and the principle of creatures in the ontological order and in the order of intelligibility.<sup>31</sup> A correct and integral understanding of God's action in the world therefore requires knowledge of the procession of the divine persons.<sup>32</sup>

In these explanations, creation is not attributed in a proper or exclusive manner to a single divine person. God is creator in virtue of his essence, which is common to the three persons: the three persons are one single Creator God.<sup>33</sup> The creative "causality" is not therefore attributed in a proper manner to one divine person; rather, Thomas relates it to the Trinitarian processions. The word *procession* means the origin—the coming to being, the way to the existence—of a reality from its principle.<sup>34</sup> In considering in an analogous manner the Trinity and creation under the aspect of procession (the Son and the Spirit *proceed* eternally and creatures also *proceed* from God, although on a completely different order), Thomas uses a concept that permits one to grasp analogously the *communication of being*. Creation and the economy of grace are not connected solely to a particular divine person but to the Trinity: Thomas emphasizes the influence of the whole "Trinitarian process."

"Procession" in the Trinity signifies the personal communication of the plenitude of the divinity: the Father communicates eternally the plenitude of his divinity to the Son; with the Son, he communicates it to the Holy Spirit. When one speaks of "procession" in God, one considers the persons under the dynamic aspect of the eternal communication of the divinity. With regard

<sup>31</sup> G. Emery, *La Trinité créatrice* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1995). For a shorter account, see Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, 33-70.

<sup>32</sup> *STh* I, q. 32, a. 1, ad 3: "Cognitio divinarum personarum fuit necessaria nobis dupliciter. Uno modo, ad recte sentiendum de creatione rerum."

<sup>33</sup> *STh* I, q. 45, a. 6.

<sup>34</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 1: "Dicitur processioeductio principiatia suo principio." *STh* I, q. 40, a. 2: "Origo autem alicuius rei . . . significatur . . . ut via quaedam a re vel ad rem." The *procession* or *origin* is signified in the mode of an act (*ibid.*).

to creation, in an entirely different order, "procession" consists in a participation of creatures in being and in the divine perfections (as communicated by God's action in the world). It is at this level of the communication of a participation of divine perfections, implying the doctrine of analogy, that Trinitarian causality is situated. The communication of the entire divine essence in the Trinity is the cause and the reason of the communication of a participation of the divine essence to creatures, in a radically different order: "The going forth of persons in the unity of essence is the cause of the going forth of creatures in the diversity of essence."<sup>35</sup> As one easily ascertains, it is a question of the distinction and the relationship between the immanent action (Trinitarian processions) and the transitive action (action of God in the world): the first is the "reason" of the second.<sup>36</sup>

Thomas Aquinas provided successively two interpretations of this "causality" of Trinitarian processions, the first in his commentary on the *Sentences* and the second in the *Summa Theologiae*. One discovers here a deepening of understanding. In his first work, Thomas explains that, in order to understand the action of divine persons, it is necessary to take account of two complementary rules: (1) the efficiency of the divine essence and (2) the causality of the eternal procession of the persons. "The procession of divine persons is also a certain origin of the procession of creatures, since everything that is first in some genus is the cause of what comes after; but the efficiency with regard to creatures is nevertheless attributed to the common essence."<sup>37</sup> This double principle is invoked in order to explain in what manner "the Father and the Son love us *by the Holy Spirit*." It permits one also to show in what way "the Father speaks all things *by his Word*." The divine act is not explained solely by the divine nature, that is, by the essential knowledge and will of the Trinity.

<sup>35</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 2, *divisio textus*.

<sup>36</sup> In *ScG* II, c. 1 (#854), after having distinguished between "immanent actions" and "transitive actions," Aquinas explains: "Oportet quod prima dictarum operationum sit ratio secundae et eam praecedat naturaliter, sicut causa effectum."

<sup>37</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 32, q. 1, a. 3: "Processio divinarum personarum est et quaedam origo processionis creaturarum; cum omne quod est primum in aliquo genere sit causa eorum quae sunt post; sed tamen efficientia creaturarum essentiae communi attribuitur."

It is explained also by the Trinitarian processions which are the reason of the works that God accomplishes in the world: the Word is the efficient model of all communication that God accomplishes by his wisdom, and the Holy Spirit is the reason of all communication that God accomplishes by the generosity of his love. The Word is the sole person who, in God, proceeds by mode of intellect: he is thereby the uncreated model and reason of the procession of works of wisdom accomplished by God. The Holy Spirit is the sole person who, in God, proceeds by mode of love: he is thereby the reason of the procession of creatures which come forth from God by the mode of a divine gift. Under this aspect, the creative causality ("efficiency") belongs to the divine essence, but the reason of this causality ("reason of the efficiency") pertains to the procession of the Son and to the procession of the Holy Spirit in virtue of the proper and distinct mode of these processions.<sup>38</sup> Creation is the common work of the three persons, acting by their essence, and each person is involved in this act according to his personal property.

In the *Summa*, Thomas explains the exemplarity and the causality of the Trinitarian processions, with more precision, by means of his doctrine of relation. This explanation bears the mark of the progress of his Trinitarian theology. Whereas in his first work he based his Trinitarian doctrine on the notion of procession, he organizes it more resolutely in the *Summa* around the notion of relation, following the two aspects of divine relation that we have described above (the relationship to another and the divine essence):

The divine Persons, according to the formal feature of their procession, have a causality respecting the creation of things. For as was said above [*STh* I, q. 14, a. 8; q. 19, a. 4] when treating of the knowledge and will of God, God is the cause of things by his intellect and will, like an artist is the cause of works of art. Now an artist works through the word conceived in his mind, and through the love of his will bent on something. Hence also God the Father made the creature through his Word, which is His Son; and through his Love, which is the Holy

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. It is a question of the "reason of the efficiency not with regard to the agent but with regard to creatures" ("ratio efficientiae non ex parte efficientis sed ex parte effectorum"). In other words, the Trinitarian processions are not the cause of God's action (they do not cause God to act), but they are the cause of creatures.

Spirit. In this way also the processions of the persons are the “reasons” of the production of creatures, inasmuch as they include the essential attributes of knowing and willing.<sup>39</sup>

This explanation invokes the analogy of intelligence and will. It is a question, once again, of making explicit the relationships that the immanent acts (Trinitarian processions) maintain with the acts that proceed toward an exterior reality (creation and salvation). The seeming simplicity of the example of the artist should not deceive: this analogy implies a very powerful metaphysical reflection on the transcendental principles of action. For our purpose, it is the conclusion that deserves attention: the personal processions are the reason or “the cause of creation”<sup>40</sup> inasmuch as they “include” the essential attributes of knowledge and will. Thomas no longer exploits two complementary rules, as in his commentary on the *Sentences*, but rather one single theological principle: the personal procession of a divine person includes the essence. This explanation is attached to the doctrine of person and relation, whose results are henceforth applied to the divine act. In the divine action, the essence is not on one side, with the personal properties on the other side. Everything converges in the relation (conceived as based on the procession) and in the person who formally gathers the aspect of the distinction and the aspect of the essence.<sup>41</sup> The persons create and

<sup>39</sup> *STh* I, q. 45, a. 6: “Divinae Personae secundum rationem suae processionis habent causalitatem respectu creationis rerum. Ut enim supra ostensum est, cum de Dei scientia et voluntate ageretur, Deus est causa rerum per suum intellectum et voluntatem, sicut artifex rerum artificiarum. Artifex autem per verbum in intellectu conceptum, et per amorem suae voluntatis ad aliquid relatum, operatur. Unde et Deus Pater operatus est creaturam per suum Verbum, quod est Filius; et per suum Amorem, qui est Spiritus Sanctus. Et secundum hoc processiones Personarum sunt rationes productionis creaturarum, inquantum includunt essentialia attributa, quae sunt scientia et voluntas.” On the continuity and evolution of this teaching in Aquinas, see G. Marengo, *Trinità e Creazione: Indagine sulla teologia di Tommaso d'Aquino* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> *STh* I, q. 45, a. 6, ad 1: “Processiones divinarum Personarum sunt causa creationis, sicut dictum est.”

<sup>41</sup> It is in this sense that, in his commentary on the *Sentences* (I *Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2), St. Thomas explains: “All procession and multiplication of creatures are caused by the procession of the distinct divine persons” (“ex processione personarum divinarum distinctarum causatur omnis creaturarum processio et multiplicatio”), in order to show the

act in the world in virtue of the processions (i.e., the Father acts through the Son whom he begets and in the Holy Spirit whom he spirates with the Son), insofar as the processions include the essence (as the relations also do)—that is, because the personal processions are *divine*. We find again precisely the path of explication that Thomas followed when he examined the properties of the Word, of Love, and of Gift.

### III. THE “PROPER ROLE” OF PERSONS

The theological manifestation of the creative and salvific act of the divine persons brings us back to our first question: in the divine act, what “role” should one recognize for that which each person possesses in a proper manner? Following the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, two solutions should be avoided. Let us examine them briefly.

(1) A first path toward a (unsatisfying) solution responds that there is no proper mode in the action of a divine person, because the persons act solely according to that which is absolutely common to them—namely, the divine nature, which is the principle of their act. This solution takes account of the Orthodox rule of the unity of energy of the three persons, or the Augustinian principle of the indivisibility of the works of the Trinity *ad extra*. The distinction of persons would then be involved in their eternal relationships but not in the act which they exercise in our favor. This explanation has been supported by various authors in modern Scholasticism and one finds it in certain Trinitarian treatises of the twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> It led to connecting the economy of creation and grace to the “one God” (*De Deo uno*), thereby pushing aside the role of the Trinitarian

creative influence of the divine *relations*. The divine relation, however, does not have such a causality insofar as it consists of a reference to another (the “ratio” of the relation), but rather inasmuch as it is divine (the “being” of the relation): “ex hoc quod est relatio divina” (ibid.).

<sup>42</sup> Among the clearest examples of this line of thought, see P. Galtier, *L’habitation en nous des trois personnes* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1949). The central thesis of this work is the following: no action of a divine person is really personal; in the economic action of the Holy Spirit, nothing belongs properly to him.

plurality for understanding the divine act. Likewise, it weakened the value of the doctrine of appropriations in making these appropriations the only way to grasp the Trinitarian dimension of the divine act.

The rule of the unity of action of the Trinity is fundamental, and the reader of Thomas Aquinas must not fail to observe its importance; it is found at the heart of the Trinitarian treatise.<sup>43</sup> Creation and grace are not the exclusive work of a single person; rather, the three persons are all together the source, by reason of their common divine nature. Not to recognize this would lead one to reject the Trinitarian consubstantiality. At the same time, appropriation is a valuable method, the foundations of which have been clearly underlined by Aquinas.<sup>44</sup> The mistake of this first response does not therefore consist in an error about the principles invoked (the unity of the divine act and the appropriations), but rather in the *exclusivity* that it attributes to them, as if the rule of the unity of operation constituted, by itself, all the explication, the single key for understanding the action of the Trinity. Aquinas's theology does not present such an exclusivity. The constant presence of the Trinitarian act in the study of the properties clearly shows this. In other words, the rule of the indivisibility of the Trinity in its act *ad extra* is perfectly exact and fundamental, but its application is excessive if one attempts to reduce to it all the aspects of the action of the divine persons.

(2) A second path of response, reacting vigorously against the preceding one, affirms that each divine person exercises a proper action in our favor. The thought of many theologians today seems to be favorable to this manner of conceiving the act of the divine persons. Such thought attempts then to specify the "personal causality," the "proper activity," the "proper function," or the "specific role" of each divine person.<sup>45</sup> Grace, for example, would

<sup>43</sup> Cf. notably *STh* I, q. 32, a. 1; q. 45, a. 6.

<sup>44</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 31, q. 1, a. 2; see note 4 above.

<sup>45</sup> As representative of this second line of thought, see H. Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1963); idem, "Person und Appropriation. Zum Verständnis des Axioms: In Deo omnia sunt unum, ubi non obviat relationis oppositio," in *Münchener*

be attributed in a specific way to the Holy Spirit, as if it fell properly to the Holy Spirit (unlike the other persons) to procure this grace. The same line of thought emphasizes, concerning the gift of adoptive filiation, that filiation makes us children of the person of the Father to the exclusion of the other divine persons. The thesis of a “(quasi-)formal causality” of a divine person is often advanced in such accounts, notably in the case of the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> The Holy Spirit, personally given to the saints, would himself exercise the role of immanent principle of the human acts of faith and charity. One could thus explain the distinct work of persons and, more profoundly, the properly personal foundation of the Trinitarian gifts.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to the problem of the confusion of God and the world raised by the theory of a divine “formal causality” (because a *form* is, by definition, inherent to a creature, it is one of its constitutive ontological elements, it enters into real composition with the creature),<sup>48</sup> the thesis of the proper action of one divine person presents a difficulty that is insurmountable with regard to the principles of Thomistic theology. To reserve an action and a divine gift to one person rather than to another is to put in

*Theologische Zeitschrift* 16 (1965): 37-57. The Trinitarian thought of Mühlen, a leading theologian on this question, had a very large influence.

<sup>46</sup> The vocabulary of the “quasi-formal” causality of divine persons is not unknown among the Scholastics. Albert the Great, for instance, employs it in order to designate the Holy Spirit as the one by whom we love God and neighbor. But he specifies immediately that neither the habit nor the act of charity are “by essence” the Holy Spirit: rather they are effects of the Holy Spirit. See St. Albert, *Summa Theologiae* I, tract. 8, q. 36, c. 3, in: *Opera omnia*, Editio Coloniensis, vol. 34/1 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), 282. We thus find again the affirmation of the inseparable causality of the Trinity, with the doctrine of appropriations (*Summa Theologiae* I, tract. 7, q. 32, c. 2, [*Opera omnia* 34/1:254]).

<sup>47</sup> For an exposition on this theme, in the wake of Karl Rahner, see K. Obenauer, *Thomistische Metaphysik und Trinitätstheologie* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2000); cf. my critical review in *Revue Thomiste* 101 (2001): 614-17.

<sup>48</sup> Aquinas clearly emphasizes the *exemplarity* of the Holy Spirit in the gift of charity, but without considering the Holy Spirit as a formal inherent cause in the saints, and without excluding the Father and the Son: “Oportet ponere charitatem esse habitum creatum in anima; quae quidem efficienter est a tota Trinitate, sed exemplariter manat ab amore qui est Spiritus Sanctus” (*I Sent.*, d. 17, q. 1, a 1, sol.; cf. *STh* I-II, q. 110, a. 1; *STh*, II-II, q. 23, a. 2). If we were to consider the Holy Spirit as the formal cause of charity, this would imply that the saints had a divine being or were hypostatically united to the Holy Spirit, a thesis that, of course, Aquinas rejects (*I Sent.*, d. 17, q. 1, a 1, sc 3).

question the unity of the Trinity both in its essence and in its relations. It is a question of a principle absolutely fundamental in Thomas Aquinas: the three persons act by a single action or operation,<sup>49</sup> in virtue of their common nature, and consequently the effects of the divine action always have for their source the entire Trinity.<sup>50</sup> The incarnation of the Son—that is, the assumption of the human nature by the person of the Son—does not constitute an exception to this rule. Aquinas distinguishes between the *act* of assuming (*actus assumptis*: the uniting of the human nature to the Word of God) and the *term* of the assumption (*terminus assumptionis*: the person of the Word to whom the human nature is united), and states: “What belongs to the *act* of assuming is common to the three persons; but what pertains to the *term* belongs to one person in such a way that it does not belong to another. For the three persons caused the human nature to be united to one person, the Son.”<sup>51</sup> Theological reflection on the Trinitarian economy can never go against this rule, which comes into play as a fundamental aspect of the question.

In sum, the attempt to highlight the Trinitarian dimension of the divine act appears in the following perspective: the rule of the essential unity of the three persons furnishes a determinative criterion, but Aquinas does not claim that such a rule constitutes the sole aspect of the Trinitarian act. Rather, he distinguishes a proper mode of action of each divine person. This teaching on the Trinitarian mode of action deserves closer examination.

#### IV. “ALL THINGS WERE MADE THROUGH HIM”: A PROPERTY OF THE SON

The three persons act inseparably in virtue of their common divine nature, and each effect has for its source the entire Trinity.

<sup>49</sup> See for example ScG IV, c. 25 (#3625): “The Three Persons are one principle of creatures and they produce creatures by a single action [*una actione*].”

<sup>50</sup> See for example STh III, q. 23, a. 2.

<sup>51</sup> STh III, q. 3, a. 4: “Quod est actionis in assumptione commune est tribus personis; sed id quod pertinet ad rationem termini convenit ita uni personae quod non alii. Tres enim personae fecerunt ut humana natura uniretur uni personae Filii.”

But, in this common action, each person acts in the distinct mode of his relation with the other persons. This thesis can be illustrated by Aquinas's teaching on the creative act of the Word. In his exegesis of John 1:3 ("all things were made through him"), St. Thomas explains that the Word is the one through whom (*per quem*) the Father does all things. He then offers a more extended reflection on the act of the Son: What does the fact of being the one "through whom" the Father does all things mean? It can be understood in two ways.<sup>52</sup>

(1) If one takes "through whom" to refer to the "formal principle" (*causa formalis*) of the action—that is, the principle of the act of the Father (the "in virtue of which" the Father acts)—then it is necessary to recognize there the divine essence. The Father, like the Son and like the Holy Spirit, acts through his essence: it is through its nature that a being acts.<sup>53</sup> Thomas speaks here of "formal" principle in order to avoid all idea of an "efficient" principle, because nothing, including any person, pushes or moves the Father to act in the manner of an efficient cause.<sup>54</sup> As regards the "formal" principle of the Father's action, Aquinas holds that neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit is such a "principle" of action of the Father, because the Son and the Holy Spirit do not have a relation of principle with regard to the Father: the Trinitarian *order* does not permit one to see, in the Son or the Holy Spirit, a principle of being of the Father, or a principle of action of the Father. If one takes "through whom" to refer to the formal principle, it would therefore be appropriated to the Son, because God the Father acts through his essential wisdom which is appropriated to the Son:

If the *through* denotes a formal cause, as when the Father operates through his wisdom, which is his essence, he operates through his wisdom as he operates through his essence. And because the wisdom and power of the Father are

<sup>52</sup> In *Ioan.* 1:3 (#76).

<sup>53</sup> In this context, "nature" (*natura*) means the inner principle of action and hence the specific essence of a being (*STh* III, q. 2, a. 1; cf. *STh* I, q. 29, a. 1, ad 4).

<sup>54</sup> In *Ioan.* 1:3 (#76): "Sic ergo cum dicitur *omnia per ipsum facta sunt*; si *ly per* denotet efficientem causam, seu moventem Patrem ad operandum, dicendum est quod Pater nihil operatur per Filium, sed per seipsum omnia operatur."

attributed to the Son, as when we say “Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24), then by appropriation we say that the Father does all things through the Son, i.e., through his wisdom.<sup>55</sup>

It is for this reason that, in themselves, the biblical formulas “from whom,” “through whom,” and “in whom” (see Rom 11:36) are not proper to a person, but rather are appropriated.<sup>56</sup> With these explanations, one has obviously moved away from the apparent sense of John 1:3, but one has made an important specification: to say that the Father acts through the Son is not to make the Word a principle of the act of the Father. The Father does not receive his act from the Son. One cannot say that the Father acts “through the Son” as one says of a man that he acts “by his mind” or “by his nature.” In this sense, the Father acts through himself or through his essence. Saint Augustine had already noted that when one holds that “the Father is wise by his begotten wisdom,” one cannot mean that the Son is the cause of the wisdom of the Father (one would arrive at this “absurd” conclusion: the Father would not be wise by himself but by his Son, and the Father would therefore have his essence from the Son). The Father and the Son are one single wisdom as they are one single essence. The Son is not the wisdom by virtue of which the Father is wise, but he is the “begotten Wisdom” come forth from the Father.<sup>57</sup> The same reflections are applied to the *act* of the Father.

(2) However, if in the formula “through him” of John 1:3 one understands the causality of the Word with regard to creatures,<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *In Ioan.* 1:3 (#76): “Si vero *per* denotet causam formalem, sic cum Pater operetur *per* sapientiam suam, quae est sua essentia, operatur *per* suam sapientiam, sicut operatur *per* suam essentiam; et quia sapientia et virtus Patris attribuitur Filio, I Cor. I, 24, dicimus: *Christum Dei virtutem, et Dei sapientiam*, ideo appropriate dicimus quod Pater omnia operatur *per* Filium, idest *per* sapientiam suam.”

<sup>56</sup> *STh* I, q. 39, a. 8.

<sup>57</sup> St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 7.1.1-2; 15.7.12 (Sancti Aurelii Augustini, *De Trinitate libri XV*, ed. W. J. Mountain, 2 vols. [Turnhout: Brepols, 1968]: 1:244-49; 2:475-77). Aquinas, *I Sent.*, d. 32, q. 2, a. 1; *STh* I, q. 34, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>58</sup> In this second sense, the preposition “*per*” refers not to a causality towards the Father’s act (*ex parte operantis*), but to a causality towards creatures (*ex parte operati*) that are made by the Father “through his Word.” See also *II Sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 5. See above, note 38.

then it is a question strictly of a property of the Son. This is without doubt the more manifest sense of John 1:3. Taken in this sense, the expression “through him” designates not the principle of the action of the Father (this would lead us back to the first consideration), but the principle or the cause of creatures, and it is here that one should recognize a proper feature of the Word, going beyond appropriation:

If the “through” [*all things were made through him*] denotes causality from the standpoint of the thing 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 he is a cause of creatures is had from someone else, namely, the Father, from whom he has being.<sup>59</sup>

The Son is the one “through whom” the Father acts because he is the Son and Word begotten by the Father. In the act of the Father through the Son, the preposition “through” refers to the *auctoritas* of the Father, the property of the Father as principle of the Son. The Son *exists* in receiving eternally his being from the Father and he *acts* in receiving eternally his act from the Father. The action of the Father and the Son is one; the principle of this action is also one (it is the divine nature or essence); the effects of the action are common to the Father and to the Son. But the actors (the subjects of the act: *operantes*) are personally distinct and their mode of action is also distinct.<sup>60</sup> Thomas writes likewise in the *Summa Theologiae*:

In some instances the preposition “through” applies to a median cause, e.g. in the statement that a smith works through his hammer. And so the preposition “through” is not always appropriated to the Son but sometimes means a property

<sup>59</sup> In *Ioan.* 1:3 (#76): “Si vero *ly 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.” One sees here that, for St. Thomas, the verse of John 1:3 is not limited to creation in a strict sense but concerns the divine action in the world.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *II Sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 5, ad 4: “It is by reason of the Father’s *auctoritas* towards the Son, inasmuch as the Son holds his being and his action from the Father, that the Father acts through the Son.” In Trinitarian context, the word “*auctoritas*” means the relationship of a divine person as principle or source of another person (see *STh* I, q. 33, a. 1, ad 2; *I Sent.*, d. 29, q. 1, a. 1; *De Pot.*, q. 10, a. 1, arg. 17 and ad 17).

of the Son, according to this verse of St. John (1:3): "All things were made through him"; not because the Son is an instrument, but because he is the "principle from the principle."<sup>61</sup>

Such is the path by which Thomas Aquinas gives weight to the distinction of the persons in their act. The formula "*principium de principio*" refers to the person of the Son as the principle begotten by the Father. The Son exists from the Father and, accordingly, acts by receiving his being and his power of action from the Father: the Son acts *as* the "principle from the principle." This means no subordination but only the relation of origin by which the Son is referred to the Father. This distinction does not divide the action of the Trinity, or its power, or the principle of action, which are common to the three persons by reason of their one nature. It also does not concern the effects of the action: these effects come forth from the three persons in virtue of their one action. One could also, indeed, show this by the doctrine of perichoresis: the Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father, the Holy Spirit is in the Father and in the Son, and reciprocally. For this reason, the action of the three persons is inseparable. Thomas Aquinas explains, for example: "The Son acts by reason of the Father who dwells in him by a unity of nature."<sup>62</sup> The profundity of the perichoresis is such that, in the act of the Son, the Father himself acts, and the Holy Spirit acts in them, inseparably. The action of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is not therefore different from that of the Father, since the persons act in indwelling the one in the other, according to their mutual immanence and thus by one and the same operation.

In this common action, however, each person acts according to the mode of his relative personal property. This mode of action

<sup>61</sup> *STh* 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." This observation has generally escaped the majority of studies, perhaps because it is found in the question on appropriations.

<sup>62</sup> *In Ioan.* 14:12 (#1898): "Filius operatur propter Patrem in se manentem *per unitatem naturae*."

does not express anything other than the personal property. One sees this well in the explanations regarding the act of the Father through his Word. The distinct mode of the action of the Son (the Son is the Word by whom or through whom the Father acts) does not consist in an exclusive relationship of the Son as regards creatures; rather, it consists in the proper relationship that the Son has with his Father within the Trinity. The same applies to the action of the Holy Spirit: the Son acts through the Holy Spirit, in such a way that what is done by the Holy Spirit is also done by the Son.<sup>63</sup> In other words, this proper mode lies in the intra-Trinitarian relation of person to person, and not in a different relation with creatures.

This is exactly what Thomas explains, from another point of view, with regard to the names *Word*, *Love*, and *Gift*: in the Trinitarian act, the personal distinction does not belong on the side of the relationship to creatures, but rather on the side of the intra-Trinitarian relation. And if, when drawing these two aspects together, one brings the personal intra-Trinitarian relation to the forefront, then one can then understand what is meant by the “proper mode of act” of the divine persons. The Father creates the world and saves humankind through the Son in the Spirit: this mode of acting through the Son in the Spirit is proper to the Father. It belongs properly to the Son to be the one through whom the Father creates and accomplishes all things: in the Trinity, the Son is the only one who acts in this way, as befits his property of Son, Word, and Image of the Father. And it belongs properly to the Holy Spirit to be the one by whom or through whom the Father and the Son act, in virtue of his property of Love and Gift. This is what Thomas explains when he shows that “the Father utters all creatures by his Word” and that “the Father and the Son love us by the Holy Spirit,”<sup>64</sup> or when he teaches that “the processions of the persons are the cause of the procession of

<sup>63</sup> *In Ad Eph.* 2:18 (#121): “Sic autem habemus accessum ad Patrem per Christum, quoniam Christus operatur per Spiritum Sanctum. . . . Et ideo quidquid fit per Spiritum Sanctum, etiam fit per Christum.”

<sup>64</sup> *STh* I, q. 34, a. 3; q. 37, a. 2, ad 3.

creatures.”<sup>65</sup> These expressions have a proper, not (only) appropriated, sense. Appropriation is not our only resource for understanding the Trinitarian dimension of the divine act.

## V. PERSONAL MODE OF BEING AND PERSONAL MODE OF ACTING

These observations are confirmed by many aspects of the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, notably by the relationship between the mode of being and the mode of acting of the persons, as well as by the distinction of the persons in their same action on behalf of creatures (creation and grace). A being acts according to what it is: as one is, so one acts. The mode of acting (*modus operandi*) is grounded in the mode of being (*modus essendi*), which it manifests.<sup>66</sup> Now, if the *being* of the three persons is identical, their *mode of being* is distinct. This mode of being consists in the manner according to which a person possesses the divine essence, in accordance with his relative property (fatherhood, sonship, procession): “Though the same nature is in Father and Son, it is in each *by a different mode of existence*, that is to say, with a different relation.”<sup>67</sup> The essence of the three persons is one, but each person possesses this divine essence (more precisely, each person “is” this divine essence) according to a distinct relation. Thus, the divine nature is found in each person according to a proper and distinct manner which consists of the personal relation of each person. Saint Thomas explains it with great clarity:

Just as the three persons have one and the same essence, it is not in each under the same relation or with the same mode of existence.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 32, q. 1, a. 3.

<sup>66</sup> *STh* I, q. 89, a. 1: “As nothing acts except in so far as it is actual, the mode of action [*modus operandi*] in every agent follows from its mode of existence [*modus essendi*]”; see also I, q. 50, a. 5; I, q. 75, a. 2: “Only what actually exists acts, and its manner of acting follows from its manner of being.”

<sup>67</sup> *De Pot.*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 13: “Licet eadem natura sit in Patre et Filio, est tamen secundum alium modum existendi, scilicet cum alia relatione.”

<sup>68</sup> *De Pot.*, 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.” This distinct “mode of existence” applies to the essence in each divine person and hence to all divine attributes (here all-mightiness) in each divine person.

Though the same nature is in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it has not the same mode of existence in each one of the three, and when I say "mode of existence" I mean in respect of the relation. Nature is in the Father as not received from another, but in the Son it is as received from the Father.<sup>69</sup>

Although the Godhead is wholly and perfectly in each of the three persons according to its proper mode of existence, yet it belongs to the perfection of the Godhead that there be several modes of existence in God, namely, that there be one from whom another proceeds yet proceeds from no other, and one proceeding from another. For there would not be full perfection in God unless there were in him procession of the Word and of Love.<sup>70</sup>

The teaching on the "modes of existing" restates the Cappadocian Trinitarian doctrine formulated by Basil of Caesarea: each divine hypostasis is characterized by a *tropos tēs huparxeōs* (literally, "mode of existence") which defines the concrete content of its proper hypostatic subsistence.<sup>71</sup> Medieval Western theologians had access to this teaching through the Latin translation of John Damascene.<sup>72</sup> Each person exists in a distinct manner according to a relation. For Thomas, this means that the personal property designates the relational mode of being proper to each person: the Father exists in the mode of the unbegotten source, the Son exists in the mode of filiation insofar as he

<sup>69</sup> *De Pot.*, 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."

<sup>70</sup> *De Pot.*, q. 9, a. 5, ad 23: "Licet tota et perfecta divinitas sit in qualibet trium personarum secundum proprium modum existendi, tamen ad perfectionem divinitatis pertinet ut sint plures modi existendi in divinis ut scilicet sit ibi a quo alius et ipse a nullo, et aliquis qui est ab alio. Non enim esset omnimoda perfectio in divinis nisi esset ibi processio Verbi et Amoris."

<sup>71</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 18.46 (see the critical edition by B. Pruche: Basile de Césarée, *Sur le Saint-Esprit*, Sources Chrétiennes 17 bis [Paris: Cerf, 1968], 408-9). See also Basil of Caesarea, *Letter* 235.2 (critical edition by Y. Courtonne: Saint Basile, *Lettres*, vol. 3 [Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1966], 45); idem, *Homily* 24.6 (PG 31:613).

<sup>72</sup> *De fide orthodoxa* 1.8. See Saint John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa: Versions of Burgundio and Cerbanus*, ed. E. M. Buytaert (Louvain: Nauwelaerts; Paderborn: Schöningh, 1955), 35: "Etsi enim Spiritus Sanctus ex Patre procedit, sed non generabiliter, sed processibiliter. Alius modus existentiae est hic, incomprehensibilis et ignotus, sicut et Filii generatio. Ideoque omnia quaecumque habet Pater, eius sunt, praeter ingenerationem, quae non significat substantiae differentiam neque dignitatem, sed modum existentiae."

receives his existence from the Father through generation, the Holy Spirit exists in the mode of Love who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Each person is characterized therefore by a relative mode of existence (the content of the “proper mode of existence” lies in the personal relation). This distinct mode does not disappear in the action of the persons; it remains present and qualifies intrinsically this act. The distinct mode of acting bears the same noteworthiness and the same profundity as does the mode of existing.

A precision should be made: in the Trinity, the personal distinction does not modify the divine being or nature as such, or the power of acting, or the action. But the three persons are distinct under the aspect of the mode of being of the divine essence in them and, consequently, under the aspect of the mode of acting corresponding to the mode of being. The distinction of these modes concerns therefore the proper relation of the person, that is, the intra-Trinitarian relationship of person to person according to origin. Each person exists and acts in accordance with his relation to the other persons. This mode of being and of acting expresses the order (*ordo*) of the persons, since the real plurality of the divine persons rests in this order. For Thomas Aquinas, indeed, the personal distinction is not based solely on the difference of origin of the Son and the Holy Spirit (generation and spiration), nor even on the mode of the procession of the Son and Holy Spirit (mode of nature or intellect, mode of will or love), but on the order of origin within the Trinity: the Son has his existence from the Father, the Holy Spirit has his existence from the Father and the Son.<sup>73</sup> This order of origin consists solely in the fact that a person has his existence from another, without any priority or posteriority.<sup>74</sup> It is this order that ultimately grounds personal plurality: “It is necessary that there is procession from procession, and that one of the persons who proceed comes forth from the other: this is what makes a real difference in

<sup>73</sup> *De Pot.*, q. 10, a. 2; *ScG IV*, c. 24 (#3615-16).

<sup>74</sup> *STh I*, q. 42, a. 3.

God.”<sup>75</sup> The mode of existence in divine persons and their distinct mode of action consist therefore in this personal order according to origin, that is, in the relation of origin. This is what Thomas explains in saying that it belongs properly to the Son to be the one “through whom” the Father acts.

In order to account for the Trinitarian dimension of creation and grace, it is therefore necessary to consider the persons who act—the subjects of the action (the “agents”)—by paying more attention to the mutual relation of these persons. Concerning the relationship of the Father and the Son, Aquinas states:

It is from the Father that the Son has being and acting, and this is why the Father acts through the Son.<sup>76</sup>

The Son, who is acting, exists from the Father.<sup>77</sup>

We say that the Father acts through the Son, because the Son is the cause of what is accomplished in virtue of one same and indivisible power, power that the Son possesses in common with the Father but which he receives, nevertheless, from the Father by his generation.<sup>78</sup>

This relative order has been illumined by means of the property signified by the name *Word*: in naming the Son *Word*, we identify him as the “operative cause” of the works that the Father accomplishes by him.<sup>79</sup> The exegesis of John 1:3 also specified this point: the Son is a subject of action (an *operans*) distinct from the Father.<sup>80</sup> The Father acts “through the Son” because the Father, in the eternal generation, gives to the Son the divine essence by which the Son acts.

<sup>75</sup> *De Pot.*, q. 10, a. 2, ad 7: “Et sic oportet processionem esse ex processione, et procedentem ex procedente; hoc autem facit realem differentiam in divinis.”

<sup>76</sup> *II Sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 5, ad 4: “Filius a Patre habet et esse et operari, ratione cuius Pater per Filium operatur.”

<sup>77</sup> *II Sent.*, d. 13, *expositio textus*: “Filius, qui et operans, a Patre est.”

<sup>78</sup> *II Sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 5, sol.: “Sic dicimus Patrem per Filium operari, quia est causa ipsorum operatorum una et indivisibili virtute cum Patre, quam tamen a Patre nascendo recepit.”

<sup>79</sup> *STh I*, q. 34, a. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *In Ioan.* 1:3 (#85).

The explanations of the action of the Holy Spirit show his personal distinction in a comparable way. The Father and the Son, spirating the Holy Spirit, give to the Holy Spirit the divine essence and, with it, the power of acting. This is the reason why the Father and the Son act “in the Holy Spirit” or “through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>81</sup> The Father and the Son are, in this regard, the principle of the act that the Holy Spirit performs, insofar as they communicate to him the divine power of acting.<sup>82</sup> Thomas makes explicit this teaching by means of the property signified by the personal names *Love* and *Gift*. In recognizing the Holy Spirit as Love and Gift (these names express his distinct property), we signify him as the source of the effects that the Father and the Son accomplish through him, that is, as the Love by which the Father and the Son love us and procure for us their gifts.<sup>83</sup>

In sum: “Whatever the Son does he has from the Father.”<sup>84</sup> Likewise, the Holy Spirit acts by receiving his action from the Father and the Son, because he receives from them the divine nature. It is from the Father and from the Son that the Holy Spirit receives being and the power of acting, and it is thus that he accomplishes his actions. When commenting on John 16:13 (“He will not speak from himself”), St. Thomas explains that

Just as the Son does not act from himself but from the Father, so the Holy Spirit, because he is from another, that is from the Father and the Son, will not speak from himself, but whatever he will hear by receiving knowledge as well as his essence from eternity he will speak.<sup>85</sup>

The three persons act in one same action, but each performs this action in the distinct mode of his personal relation, that is,

<sup>81</sup> *De Pot.*, q. 10, a. 4.

<sup>82</sup> *Contra errores Graecorum* II, c. 4: “The Son is the principle by whom the Holy Spirit acts [*principium operandi Spiritui Sancto*], because the Son gives the power of action to the Holy Spirit.” This communication of the power of action belongs to the spiration of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son, and it explains that “the Son acts through the Holy Spirit” (*ibid.*). Cf. *De Pot.*, q. 10, a. 4.

<sup>83</sup> *STh* I, q. 37, a. 2, ad 3; q. 38, a. 2.

<sup>84</sup> *In Ioan.* 15:26 (#2061): “Filius quidquid operatur, habet a Patre.”

<sup>85</sup> *In Ioan.* 16:13 (#2103): “Sicut enim Filius non operatur a semetipso sed a Patre, ita Spiritus Sanctus, quia et ab alio, scilicet a Patre et Filio, non loquetur a semetipso sed quaecumque audiet, accipiendo scientiam sicut et essentia ab aeterno, haec loquetur.”

according to his proper “mode of existing” in accordance with the Trinitarian order. The Father acts as source of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the Son acts as Word of the Father, the Holy Spirit acts as Love and Gift of the Father and the Son. We are not in the domain of an appropriation, but rather in the domain of a *property* of the person, as Thomas expressly explains with regard to the Word. The proper mode of the persons’ acting, we repeat, does not give rise to an exclusive action of one person in the world; rather, it concerns the hypostatic relation (the relation of divine person to divine person) always implied in the action that the Three perform in creating the world and saving humankind.

#### VI. AN EXAMPLE OF DOCTRINAL EXEGESIS: THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT AS “PARACLETE”

We already noted above the way in which St. Thomas finds in John 1:3 the property that characterizes the mode of acting of the Son. This teaching can equally be illustrated by other explanations that allow one to apprehend better the Son’s mode of acting. One of the most illuminating examples is the exegesis of John 14:16 on the name *Paraclete*: “I will pray the Father and he will give you another Paraclete.” Saint Thomas’s interpretation shows his concern, in specifying the distinct modality of the action of each person, to maintain the unity of the action of the divine persons in virtue of their common nature. The exegesis on this verse also manifests the unity of speculative theology and biblical exegesis in St. Thomas, as well as the tight bonds that unite Trinitarian theology and Christology.

Saint Thomas explains that *Paraclete* means the “advocate” or the “consoler.”<sup>86</sup> It is thus a name that designates the Holy Spirit in his economic act. This act of the Holy Spirit consists in the mission that he receives from the Father and the Son: to dwell amongst the disciples so as to obtain the presence of Father and

<sup>86</sup> *In Ioan.* 14:16 (#1911-1912): “Sed attende quod hoc nomen Paracritus est graecum, et significat consolatorem. . . . Spiritus Sanctus est consolator et advocatus.” In his exegesis, Aquinas also often associates with the Holy Spirit words stemming from “deprecator” (intercessor).

Son for them, to lead the disciples to the full understanding of Christ's teaching, to bear witness to them on behalf of the Son. In a first step, St. Thomas explains briefly why this name is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The term *Paraclete* fits well for designating the Holy Spirit "since he is the Spirit of Love": he is the love that procures spiritual consolation, joy, intercession.<sup>87</sup> The attribution of the name *Paraclete* to the Holy Spirit is therefore justified by the affinity between the action of the Holy Spirit and his personal property (Love):<sup>88</sup> Love is the principle of action signified by the name *Paraclete*. In a second step, however, St. Thomas notes that the New Testament does not exclusively restrict the name *Paraclete* to the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the Fourth Gospel designates the Holy Spirit by the name *Paraclete* (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7), specifying that the Spirit is "*another Paraclete*" (John 14:16): Christ is also named *Paraclete* (1 John 2:1). This raises a question under the form of an objection:

The word *Paraclete* imports an action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, by saying *another Paraclete*, a difference in nature seems to be indicated, because different actions indicate different natures. Thus the Holy Spirit does not have the same nature as the Son.<sup>89</sup>

The principle invoked by this objection is clear: a being acts in virtue of what it is, that is, according to its nature, because the nature is the principle of action. For this very reason, action makes manifest the nature of a being: "For the clearest indication of the nature of a thing is taken from its works."<sup>90</sup> Saint Thomas often invokes this metaphysical law in order to show the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit: "When we want to know whether a certain thing is true, we can determine it from two aspects: its nature [*natura*] and its power [*virtus*]. For true gold is that which

<sup>87</sup> In *Ioan.* 14:16 (#1911): "Cum sit Spiritus Amoris; amor autem facit spirituales consolationem et gaudium."

<sup>88</sup> On Love (that is to say the "impression" or "affection of Love") as the personal property of the Holy Spirit according to Aquinas, see *STh* I, q. 37; see Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, 153-56.

<sup>89</sup> In *Ioan.* 14:16 (#1912).

<sup>90</sup> In *Ioan.* 10:38 (#1466).

has the species of true gold; and we determine it if it acts like true gold.”<sup>91</sup> Such is the principle that guides the “soteriological argument” that St. Thomas draws from the Fathers of the Church:<sup>92</sup> because the Son does the works proper to God (to pardon sins, to judge, to save, etc.), this shows that he is true God. In the same manner, St. Thomas shows the divinity of the Holy Spirit from the works that the Holy Spirit produces: because he accomplishes the works proper to God (to sanctify, to deify), the Holy Spirit is God. Here is a brief example of this doctrinal exegesis often practiced by St. Thomas: “He from whom men are spiritually reborn is God; but men are spiritually reborn through the Holy Spirit, as it is stated [in John 3:5]; therefore, the Holy Spirit is God.”<sup>93</sup> One easily perceives the governing idea of this teaching: the action is the sign that allows one to identify the nature of the one who acts. The objection raised regarding the name *Paraclete* rests on these explanations: because the Holy Spirit is “another” Paraclete, and because this name signifies an action, does the gospel suggest that the Holy Spirit exercises another action than the Son, and therefore that the Spirit is of another nature than the Son? So would the action of the Spirit-Paraclete be different than that of the Son-Paraclete? Or, inversely, would the action of the Spirit be conflated with the action of the Son-Paraclete? The doctrinal stakes of the question are manifest: how can we account for the action of the Son and the Holy Spirit while avoiding the pitfalls of Arianism and Sabellianism? Saint Thomas’s response deserves to be pondered over in depth.

I reply that the Holy Spirit is a Consoler and Advocate, and so is the Son. John says that the Son is an Advocate: “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous One” (1 John 2:1). In Isaiah we are told that he is a Consoler: “The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to comfort those who mourn” (Isa 61:1). Yet the Son and the Holy Spirit are Consolers and Advocates in a different way [*alia et alia ratione*], if we consider what is congruent to each person. Christ

<sup>91</sup> *In Ioan.* 17:3 (#2187).

<sup>92</sup> See for example St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *De synodis* 51 (PG 26:784).

<sup>93</sup> *In Ioan.* 3:5 (#444). On the same soteriological argument, see *In Ioan.* 10:35 (#1460) and 17:3 (#2187); *ScG IV*, c. 17 (#3528).

is called an Advocate because as a human being he intercedes for us to the Father; the Holy Spirit is an Advocate because he makes us ask.

Again, the Holy Spirit is called a Consoler inasmuch as he is formally Love [*inquantum est amor formaliter*]. But the Son is a Consoler inasmuch as he is the Word [*inquantum est Verbum*]. The Son is a Consoler in two ways: because of his teaching and because the Son gives the Holy Spirit and incites love in our hearts. Thus the word "another" does not indicate a different nature in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Rather, it indicates the different mode in which each of them is both an Advocate and a Consoler [*designat alium modum quo uterque est consolater et advocatus*].<sup>94</sup>

The effects of the action of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in helping the disciples are identical: consolation, joy, forceful witnessing, adhesion to the word of God, assurance in prayer. But if the action of the Son is like that of the Spirit (under this heading, both of them are Paraclete), this action takes a distinct mode. The solution of St. Thomas comprises two moments: the first concerns the term *Advocate* and the second the word *Consoler* (these two terms both specify an aspect of the name *Paraclete*). Following the first approach, the distinct mode of the act of the Son is characterized by the action of his humanity. Indeed, to speak properly, "to intercede" or "to pray" is the action of a rational creature, inferior to the divine nature.<sup>95</sup> Thus, it is in his humanity (*secundum quod homo*) that the Son intercedes for us before the Father. In this case, because of the hypostatic union, it is a question of the proper action of the Son, inasmuch as this action has for its formal principle the humanity proper to the Son incarnate. The actions accomplished by the humanity of Christ are properly attributed to his divine person, because the person is the subject of actions performed either in virtue of his divine nature or in virtue of his human nature.<sup>96</sup> One can extend this response to all the acts that Christ accomplishes in his humanity: insofar as the action of the Word incarnate implies the cooperation of his humanity as a proper instrument, conjoined and free, this theandric action belongs properly to the person of the Son. By

<sup>94</sup> In *Ioan.* 14:16 (#1912).

<sup>95</sup> *STh* II-II, q. 83, a. 10: "Prayer is an act of reason by which a superior is petitioned."

<sup>96</sup> *STh* III, q. 16, a. 4; cf. *STh* III, q. 19, a. 1.

reason of his personal humanity, only the Son is born of the Virgin Mary, preaches, suffers, dies, rises from the dead, ascends, intercedes for us before the Father. The action of the Holy Spirit as Advocate is of another order. Indeed, the Holy Spirit does not exercise personally a created action,<sup>97</sup> but he is the cause of a human action: the Holy Spirit “intercedes” insofar as he is the source of the prayer of the saints. This first exegesis of the name *Advocate* can be summarized in the following way: “The Son is said to ask or to pray according to his assumed nature, that is, not according to his divine nature but according to his human nature. The Holy Spirit is said to ask because he prompts us to ask.”<sup>98</sup>

In a second moment in his commentary on John 14:16, St. Thomas considers the name *Consoler* as signifying an action of the Son and the Holy Spirit according to their divine personal property. In this case, the personal mode of the action of the Son no longer concerns his humanity as such. The Son “consoles” in the mode of his divine and incommunicable personal property, which is being the Word of the Father. In this regard, the Son gives interior teaching and spreads the Holy Spirit: this belongs to the Word as Word. Indeed, it is by reason of his property of Word of the Father that the Son reveals the truth and makes known the Father, because he is personally the expression of the whole wisdom of the Father,<sup>99</sup> he proceeds as the “begotten Wisdom” of the Father.<sup>100</sup> For this reason, St. Thomas states, “Since the doctrine of anyone is nothing else than his word, and the Son of God is the Word of God, it follows that the doctrine of the Father is the Son himself.”<sup>101</sup> At the same time, it is by reason of his property of Word, that is, inasmuch as he is the

<sup>97</sup> This would imply an Arian or Macedonian understanding of the Holy Spirit, because “to intercede or to ask is the act of an inferior” (“postulare enim est minoris”; *In Ad Rom.* 8:26 [#692]).

<sup>98</sup> *STh* II-II, q. 83, a. 10, ad 1.

<sup>99</sup> *ScG* IV, c. 13 (#3495); *In Ioan.* 1:9 (#127-29); *In Ioan.* 17:25 (#2267): “Human wisdom consists in knowing God. But this knowledge flows to us from the Word, because to the extent that we share in the Word of God, to that extent do we know God.”

<sup>100</sup> *STh* I, q. 34, a. 1, ad 2; *ScG* IV, c. 12 (#3484).

<sup>101</sup> *In Ioan.* 7:16 (#1037): “Cum doctrina uniuscuiusque nihil aliud sit quam verbum eius, Filius autem Dei sit Verbum eius: sequitur ergo quod doctrina Patris sit ipse Filius.”

divine Word, that the Son spirates the Holy Spirit: "The Son is the Word; not, however, just any word, but the Word breathing Love."<sup>102</sup> It is in this manner that the Son procures the knowledge of God by faith: the Son interiorly teaches believers "by giving them the Holy Spirit."<sup>103</sup> Such is the completely personal mode by which the Son, according to his property of Word, is the Consoler by his teaching. On the part of the Holy Spirit, the mode of action comes from his personal property as Love. The Holy Spirit is properly and personally the Love who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Existing personally as Love, he acts in the mode of the "impression" or the "affection" of love of the Father and the Son, in communicating to human beings the impulsion of love which gives them their union to God: he spreads charity, that is, he communicates a participation in his personal property, obtaining consolation and joy (which belongs formally to the Spirit as Love).<sup>104</sup>

In this way, St. Thomas can explain that the Son and the Holy Spirit, possessing the same nature, exercise the same action: to console. They receive therefore, under this aspect, the same name: *Consoler*. This is moreover the reason why the name *Consoler* is appropriated: it is not proper to a person, as the New Testament attests. But each person exercises this action according to his proper mode (*alius modus*). The Son consoles in accordance with his property of Word: he is the Word through whom the Father consoles and who, with the Father, sends the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit consoles in a manner that corresponds to his property of Love: he is the Gift through whom the Father and Son console us and give us a share in their Love. The proper mode of the personal action does not imply that the effect is exclusively proper to one person (the created effect, like the divine action that

<sup>102</sup> *STh* I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2: "Filius autem est Verbum, non quaecumque, sed spirans Amorem;" cf. *STh* I, q. 36, a. 2; *I Sent.*, d. 15, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>103</sup> *In Ioan.* 17:26 (#2269): "Alia cognitio est interior per Spiritum Sanctum; et quantum ad hoc dicit *Et notum faciam*, scilicet eis dando Spiritum Sanctum."

<sup>104</sup> *ScG* IV, c. 21 (#3578), and c. 22 (#3586); *In Ioan.* 14:26 (#1959).

produces that effect, is appropriated);<sup>105</sup> rather, this mode concerns the relative property of the persons, the intra-Trinitarian relation of person to person: the Son acts inasmuch as he is begotten as Word of the Father, the Holy Spirit acts inasmuch as he is personally Love proceeding from the Father and his Word, and the Father acts through the Son whom he begets and in the Holy Spirit whom he spirates with the Son.

## VII. IMMANENT TRINITY, ECONOMIC TRINITY, AND PERICHORESIS

In explaining that the distinction of the mode of action applies on the side of the relation of divine person to divine person (personal property), and not on the side of effects of the divine action, is St. Thomas truly able to show the personal dimension of the relationships that the divine persons have with us? In other words, does this doctrine honor sufficiently the aspect *quoad nos* of the Trinitarian act in its personal dimension? We have already indicated above the reasons why Thomist thought can accept neither that a created effect be attributed in a proper manner to one divine person to the exclusion of others, nor that an action in the world belongs to one person rather than to another. But the objection remains, because it could seem that the Thomist explication has divided the Trinity by a kind of dichotomy: on the one hand, the intra-Trinitarian relations in which one observes a personal distinction and a distinct mode of action, and on the other, the relations to creatures in which the personal distinction no longer intervenes directly and cedes its place to the unity of the Trinity.

This difficulty can be formulated in terms derived from Karl Rahner: does not St. Thomas's explanation divide the "immanent Trinity" and the "economic Trinity"? Indeed, following the thought of St. Thomas, the distinct mode of action of the persons consists in their eternal personal properties ("immanent Trinity")

<sup>105</sup> Appropriation is based precisely upon the affinity between the effect (or the essential attribute) and the relative property of the divine person.

and not in a different relation of persons with creatures ("economic Trinity"). In this case, can one still affirm that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice-versa"? Does not the Rahnerian *Grundaxiom* imply that the solution of St. Thomas ought to be avoided?

In reality, the teaching of St. Thomas leads rather to the following position: the Trinity acts in the world, reveals itself and gives itself ("economic Trinity"), as it is in itself ("immanent Trinity"). In themselves, in the intra-Trinitarian life, the divine persons are distinguished by their relative properties. The Trinitarian plurality arises neither from a difference of essence, nor from a different relationship of persons toward something exterior to the Trinity;<sup>106</sup> instead, it arises from relations of origin, in the measure in which one person proceeds from another. In the same way, when the persons act in the world, they are distinguished neither by a difference of essence, nor by a different relationship to creatures; instead, they are distinguished by their mutual relations, in the measure in which the persons who act are each referred to the others. This point bears repeating: in the "immanent Trinity," the real distinction of persons arises only from their personal relations and consists in these opposed relations;<sup>107</sup> in the same way, in the "economic Trinity," the distinction of persons who act resides entirely in these mutual relations according to origin. This is what is expressed by the affirmation of the "relative mode of acting" of the persons within their common action for us. Precisely where, at first glance, one could have suspected a division of the "immanent Trinity" and the "economic Trinity," it is instead necessary to recognize that St. Thomas coherently maintains the identity of the Trinity in itself and in its act for us.

<sup>106</sup> This is the reason why speculative Trinitarian theology, in St. Thomas, is founded on the doctrine of the *immanent* processions: if one began from the act of God in the world (transitive action), Arianism and Sabellianism could no longer be avoided; cf. *STh* I, q. 27, a. 1.

<sup>107</sup> *Quodlibet* XII, q. 1, a. 1: "Veritas fidei habet quod in divinis solum est distinctio quae est secundum relationes oppositas."

This teaching can be illustrated by the doctrine of the missions and, even better, by that of perichoresis. The sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in grace ("invisible mission"), according to St. Thomas, consists in a twofold relation: the relation of origin of the person sent (Trinitarian relation) and a relation to the created effect.<sup>108</sup> The first relation is the eternal relation that constitutes the person of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The second relation implies a created effect that is appropriated to the person sent, in virtue of an affinity between the created effect (wisdom, charity) and the personal property of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the mission of the divine person includes his eternal procession, to which it adds a created effect in virtue of which this person is made present in a new manner (one then speaks of the "temporal procession" of the divine person).<sup>109</sup> The Son and the Holy Spirit are sent according to their relation of origin: the person sent is the person *proceeding*, the person inasmuch as he proceeds. The completely proper character of the invisible mission of the Son and of the mission of the Spirit does not primarily reside in the created effect (this effect, common to the whole Trinity, is appropriated to one person), but instead resides in the eternal personal relation that the mission includes: the Son is sent in being turned toward the Father who begets him; the Holy Spirit is sent and given according to his relation to the Father and the Son who spirate him.

Extending these reflections, St. Thomas explains that the "visible mission" of the persons, that is, the incarnation of the Son and the manifestation of the Spirit by sensible signs, consists in a twofold manifestation: the manifestation of the eternal procession of the person sent, and the manifestation of a plenitude of grace

<sup>108</sup> *STh* I, q. 43, a. 1: "In ratione missionis duo importantur: quorum unum est habitudo missi ad eum a quo mittitur; aliud est habitudo missi ad terminum ad quem mittitur. . . . Missio igitur divinae Personae convenire potest, secundum quod importat ex una parte processionem originis a mittente; et secundum quod importat ex alia parte novum modum existendi in aliquo." Cf. *STh* I, q. 43, a. 2; q. 43, a. 5.

<sup>109</sup> *STh* I, q. 43, a. 2, ad 3: "Missio includit processionem aeternam, et aliquid addit, scilicet temporalem effectum." Cf. *I Sent.*, d. 14, qq. 1-2. The created gift is a disposition (dispositive cause) to receive the uncreated Gift, that is the divine person himself (efficient, exemplar, and final cause).

that flows forth visibly, in the presence of witnesses, in order to establish the Church in faith and charity.<sup>110</sup> Here again, the proper foundation of the “visible mission” is taken from the eternal property of the person: the visible mission manifests the Holy Spirit insofar as he is personally Love and Gift (this is his relative property),<sup>111</sup> that is, insofar as he is the “sanctifying Gift” of the Father and the Son; as regards the Son, he is sent insofar as he is, according to his property, the principle and the giver of the Holy Spirit, that is, insofar as he is “the author of sanctification.”<sup>112</sup> The Son is manifested by the holy humanity that he assumes: this holy humanity, participating instrumentally in the power of the divinity, works to procure salvation. The human act of Christ collaborates with his divine act and reveals the person of the Son in his personal traits, because this human act manifests the Son as Son of the Father and as principle of the Spirit. The proper characteristics of the act of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in their mission, are thus taken principally from the eternal relation that this mission makes manifest.

The doctrine of perichoresis offers a synthesis of this teaching. Saint Thomas explains that the divine persons are mutually “each in the other” according to a threefold point of view. Each person is interior to the others: (1) in virtue of their common essence, because where there is the essence of a person, there is the person himself; (2) in virtue of their relations, because each relation implies in itself its correlative; (3) in virtue of the processions, because these processions are “immanent”: the person who proceeds dwells in the person from whom he proceeds.<sup>113</sup> The latter two aspects also permit one to understand the reciprocity of

<sup>110</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 16, q. 1, aa. 1-2.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. *STh* I, q. 37-38.

<sup>112</sup> *STh* I, q. 43, a. 7: “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.” Cf. *ibid.*, ad 4.

<sup>113</sup> *STh* I, q. 42, a. 5. Saint Thomas explains, with regard to the procession of the Son, that “the Son came forth from the Father from all eternity in such a way that the Son is still in the Father from all eternity. And so when the Son is in the Father, he comes forth, and when the Son comes forth he is in the Father: so the Son is always in the Father and always coming forth from the Father” (*In Ioan.* 16:28 [#2161]).

the divine persons. Indeed, under the aspect of the unity of essence, the Father is in the Son in the same way as the Son is in the Father, that is, by identity of nature, because each person possesses the same divine nature.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, under the aspect of relations, the mutual presence of persons assumes the proper mode of the relation. This mode is not interchangeable but distinct in reciprocity. The Son is in the Father insofar as he is related to the Father as his Son, just as the Father is in the Son insofar as he is his Father. Paternity and filiation thus imply two distinct modes of presence in reciprocity: "On the side of the relation, the mode [of presence of the Father in the Son and of the Son in the Father] is *different*, according to the different relationship of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father."<sup>115</sup> The same point holds when one considers the persons under the aspect of origin: the Father is in the Son insofar as he begets the Son, the Son is in the Father insofar as he is begotten by the Father; the Holy Spirit is in the Father and the Son insofar as he proceeds from them, just as the Father and the Son are in the Holy Spirit insofar as they spirate him.<sup>116</sup> The relations are therefore not limited to "distinguishing" the persons by reason of the "opposition" that they have; they are also the reason of the *unity* of the persons that they distinguish.<sup>117</sup> Relation thus grounds the Trinitarian communion.

Perichoresis sheds light not just on the being and the relations of the Trinity in itself, but also on the act of the Trinity within this world. In the first place, the mutual "being in" of the persons

<sup>114</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 19, q. 3, a. 2, ad 3: "Si accipiat Pater esse in Filio propter unitatem essentiae, eodem modo est Pater in Filio et Filius in Patre: et tunc haec praepositio 'in' non importabit aliquam relationem realem, sed tantum relationem rationis, qualis est inter essentiam et personam, secundum quam essentia dicitur esse in persona."

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.: "Si autem hoc accipiamus ex parte relationis, tunc est alius modus, ut dictum est, secundum diversam habitudinem Patris ad Filium, et Filii ad Patrem." In this case, the relations are really distinct (fatherhood and sonship).

<sup>116</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 19, q. 3, a. 2, ad 1: "Unde Filius est in Patre sicut originatum in originante, et e converso Pater in Filio sicut originans in originato."

<sup>117</sup> Relations account for the unity and for the real distinction in the Trinity: "Quamvis Pater sit in Filio per unitatem essentiae, et quantum ad intellectum relationis; tamen relatio, inquantum habet rationem oppositionis, distinguit Patrem a Filio secundum suppositum" (I *Sent.*, d. 21, q. 1, a. 2, ad 4).

implies their common act. Just as the persons *exist* indivisibly, they *act* inseparably: the Father who acts is in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, the acting Son is in the Father and in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who acts is in the Father and in the Son, in such a way that their action is common and that the effects of this action are also common. The action of persons in the world cannot be different, since each acts by having the others in him and by being in the others. Likewise, the effects cannot be related to a single person, because the three persons act mutually "one in the other." But the persons are not conflated: the Son acts in being turned toward the Father by his filiation and in being turned toward the Holy Spirit by spiration (the Son acts *a Patre* and *per Spiritum Sanctum*), the Father acts in being turned toward the Son by his paternity and toward the Holy Spirit by spiration (the Father acts *per Filium* and *per Spiritum Sanctum*), and the Holy Spirit acts in being turned toward the Father and the Son by his procession (the Holy Spirit acts *a Patre* and *a Filio*). Such is the proper "mode" by which each person is distinctly in the other and acts distinctly in the other under the aspect of personal relation. Perichoresis shows the depth of the communion of persons (unity and distinction) in their act.

Working inseparably in the economy, the three divine persons are therefore also inseparably present. This presence concerns, in the first place, the mysteries of the Son of God in his flesh: in Christ, the Son incarnate, the whole Trinity is made present to humankind, by reason of the divine consubstantiality and by reason of the Trinitarian relations. The presence of the Trinity is also given when the Son and the Holy Spirit are sent into the souls of saints ("invisible mission" of the divine person). The Father is not "sent," because he does have a principle: he is rather the one who sends the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the Father comes to dwell in the hearts of the saints, along with the Son and the Spirit whom he sends. In both cases, perichoresis accounts for the coming and for the presence of the three persons together:

The Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father, and both are in the Holy Spirit. For this reason, when the Son is sent, the Father and the Holy Spirit come also, simultaneously. This takes place in the Son's advent in the flesh, as he says himself in John 8:16: *I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent me*. This holds also when he comes into the soul [of saints], as he likewise says himself in John 14:23: *We will come to him, and we will make our home with him*. This is why the coming and the inhabitation belong to the whole Trinity.<sup>118</sup>

Due to perichoresis, the coming of the Son in the economy of salvation is a presence not only of the Son, but also of the whole Trinity. This is the reason why the incarnation and the mysteries of the life of Christ are a revelation of the Trinity. And, in the gift of grace, the perichoresis of divine persons is extended to us. When the Holy Spirit is given with the charity that he spreads, when the Son comes to inhabit human beings by living faith, it is the whole Trinity which is made inseparably present, as much in virtue of the common essence of the persons as in virtue of their relations. The mutual indwelling of the divine persons, explicated by the doctrines of processions, relations, and essence (the pillars of Trinitarian doctrine), thus illumines the two aspects of the Trinitarian act: (1) the inseparable unity of the action of the persons, the unity of their presence in the economy, and the unity of their effects; (2) the personal dimension of the Trinitarian act, which is rooted in the proper mode of being of the persons and in their mode of action according to their distinctive property.

#### VIII. OUR RELATION IN GRACE TO EACH DIVINE PERSON: OBJECTIVE UNION

In the explications that we have undertaken to this point, we have principally considered the causal action of the Trinity, that is, the divine persons as efficient and exemplar source of the gifts of nature and of grace. Under this aspect, St. Thomas invites us to

<sup>118</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 15, q. 2, ad 4: "Cum Pater sit in Filio, et Filius in Patre, et uterque in Spiritu Sancto, quando Filius mittitur, simul et venit Pater et Spiritus Sanctus; sive intelligatur de adventu Filii in carnem, cum ipse dicat, Joan. 8:16, *Solus non sum, sed ego, et qui misit me Pater*, sive intelligatur de adventu in mentem, cum ipse dicat, Joan. 14:23, *Ad eum veniemus, et mansionem apud eum faciemus*. Et ideo adventus vel inhabitatio convenit toti Trinitati."

recognize the unity of the Trinity, because the three persons exercise together one single causal action. This is why the created effects, considered in an “ontological” or “entitative” manner, refer us to the three persons in their inseparable causality.<sup>119</sup>

Does not, however, the experience of faith give us a relation with each divine person in particular? Consequently, is it not necessary to recognize that grace enables us to enter into relation not only with the unity of the Trinity, but with each person in his distinct personality? Saint Thomas responds clearly: yes, when the Son and the Holy Spirit are sent to the saints in grace, the saints come to “enjoy” each person in his personal property. But this relation to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit in their distinct personality is no longer situated at the level of the *causality* of the Trinity (the ontological or entitative aspect): it concerns the *intentional* or *objective* engagement with the divine persons who are really “given” and “possessed” by the beneficiaries of grace.

Saint Thomas explains that, by grace, the Trinity dwells in the human being “as the known is in the knower and as the beloved is in the one who loves.”<sup>120</sup> The Trinity, in the distinction of persons, is given to human beings as “object” of acts of supernatural knowledge (faith, beatific vision) and as “object” of charitable acts (charity, fruition). The divine persons are no longer only understood as the cause of the effects which they procure in us, but rather they are given and present “as the object of the operation is present in the one who operates.”<sup>121</sup> The word *object* in this context should be rightly understood. It does not indicate any depersonalization of God (in the manner in which, today, one may distinguish a relationship to another in terms of “subject” or “object”). The word *object* is taken here in its formal sense and

<sup>119</sup> Recall that the divine action or the created effect can be appropriated to one person in particular, but this appropriation finds its place within the common causality of the whole Trinity.

<sup>120</sup> *STh* I, q. 43, a. 3. This new relation to the divine persons does not pertain to the order of nature (creation), but exclusively to that of grace.

<sup>121</sup> *STh* I, q. 8, a. 3 : “sicut objectum operationis est in operante”; cf. I *Sent.*, d. 37, q. 1, a. 2 ; d. 37, *exp. prim. part. text.*: “per modum objecti.”

designates what is directly attained or apprehended by an action, the end toward which the activity or the "operation" is carried out by an acting subject. When applied to God, this word means that, by the habits or the acts of wisdom and of charity, human beings attain, apprehend, or "possess" the divine persons inasmuch as they are united to these persons by knowledge and love. This is why, in order to designate this relation to the divine persons, the Thomist tradition speaks of the objective presence of the Trinity, or of the intentional presence of the divine persons (the terms *intentional* or *spiritual* designate, by opposition to *natural*, the mode of being that a reality assumes in the subject who knows it and who loves it).<sup>122</sup>

One can summarize the explications of St. Thomas in the following manner. The whole Trinity, in one same action, is the source or the cause of sanctifying grace (grace is appropriated to the Holy Spirit, by reason of the affinity that grace possesses to the property of the Holy Spirit as Love and Gift of the Father and the Son). The whole Trinity is the source or the cause of our filial adoption (adoption is appropriated to the Father as its author, to the Son as its model, and to the Holy Spirit as to the one who inscribes it in our hearts).<sup>123</sup> The whole Trinity is the cause of the gifts of wisdom and of love (the gifts that illumine the intelligence are appropriated to the Son, while the gifts that inflame charity are appropriated to the Holy Spirit).<sup>124</sup> But salvation consists in the reception of the divine persons themselves: the presence of the Son and of the Holy Spirit who are sent, and the presence of the Father who comes to indwell the hearts of his children with the Son and the Holy Spirit whom he sends.<sup>125</sup> The created gifts caused by the Trinity (sanctifying grace, wisdom, charity) are a disposition conferred upon human beings to make them capable of receiving the divine persons who are themselves really given

<sup>122</sup> The vocabulary of intentionality is of philosophical origin; it comes from Arab authors (Averroës); see the note of Fr. René-Antoine Gauthier in *Sentencia libri de anima*, Leonine Edition, t. 45/1, p. 169.

<sup>123</sup> *STh* III, q. 23, a. 2, ad 3.

<sup>124</sup> *STh* I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 1, ad 2 and ad 3.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. *STh* I, q. 43, a. 4.

and substantially present.<sup>126</sup> In order to designate this relationship to divine persons, St. Thomas speaks of “fruition” (*frui, fruitio*).<sup>127</sup> This word designates the union of love with the divine persons who are the ultimate end of the human being and in whom the human being finds his happiness.<sup>128</sup> Saint Thomas is very clear: by grace, “we enjoy [*fruimur*] the property of each person.”<sup>129</sup> To enjoy the divine persons, or to “possess” (*habere*) the divine persons,<sup>130</sup> is to be united to the divine persons as they are the “object” of knowledge and of love, to be caught up in the divine persons known and loved by faith (and then by the vision) and by charity (fruition).

The doctrine of the image of the Trinity in the human being develops the same points. It is in knowing and loving the divine persons that we are conformed to these persons, and it is then that the image of the Trinity in the human being attains its highest degree (image of grace and of glory). According to Aquinas’s teaching, the perfect image of God in the human being is accomplished when the human being is conformed to the Trinity (assimilation to the divine persons) by his acts of knowledge and of love (“objective” union)—that is, when the human being, configured to the Word and to the Holy Spirit who are sent, is united to the Trinity known and loved.<sup>131</sup> It is in this “objective” order that the fruition of the divine persons and the indwelling of these persons in the heart of the human being is realized. The divine persons are not ontologically mixed with the creature, but the creature is enabled to be united to the divine persons who are really present in the mode of a known and loved “object.”

<sup>126</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 14, q. 2, a. 1, q1a 1; d. 14, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2; d. 15, q. 4, a. 1; cf. *STh* I, q. 43, a. 3, sol., ad 1, and ad 2. The just receive not only created gifts, but the uncreated Gift himself, that is to say, the divine persons. The divine persons are the “cause” and the “end” of the created gifts. This is why the gift of the uncreated divine person is absolutely primary (*simpliciter prius*) in relationship to the created gifts (*I Sent.*, d. 14, q. 2, a. 2, q1a 2).

<sup>127</sup> *STh* I, q. 43, a. 3; cf. *STh* I, q. 38, a. 1.

<sup>128</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 1, q. 2; d. 14, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2; cf. *STh* I-II, q. 11.

<sup>129</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 1, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2: “proprietate uniuscujusque personae fruimur.”

<sup>130</sup> *STh* I, q. 43, a. 3.

<sup>131</sup> *STh* I, q. 93, aa. 7-8: the image of God is found in the human being according to the acts which have God for their object.

In this context St. Thomas speaks of our “experience” of the Son and the Holy Spirit in their proper personality. This teaching extends that of St. Augustine. The bishop of Hippo had explained that the Son is sent in the soul of the saints when he is “known as having his origin in the Father”; in the same way, the Holy Spirit is sent when he is known as proceeding from the Father and from the Son.<sup>132</sup> In his mission, the divine person is manifested; the Son and the Holy Spirit are made known by the gifts that represent them and that are appropriated to them.<sup>133</sup> And when the person is thus manifested, the person is given in his personal relation. The Son is made known in his relation to the Father: in faith, he is received as the one sent from the Father and as the Son of the Father. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is made known in his relation to the Father and to the Son: he is received as the Spirit of the Father and the Son. As regards the Father, he is known as the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit whom he sends into our hearts.<sup>134</sup> This knowledge of the divine person in his personal distinction belongs to the very notion of “mission.”<sup>135</sup> In order to make explicit such a grasp of the persons in their mission, St. Thomas speaks of an “experimental knowledge” of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The expression, in St. Thomas, is not rare in this context: one finds it many times, as much in the *Commentary on the Sentences* as in the *Summa*, and always in reference to the love that makes knowledge perfect.<sup>136</sup> This knowledge is an experience of the divine person present and acting, a “fruitful knowledge” (*fruitio*) of the divine person. This theme of “experimental knowledge” makes explicit the union given by the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, that is, the union to the

<sup>132</sup> Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate* 4.20.29 (Mountain, ed., 1:199).

<sup>133</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 15, q. 4, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>134</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 15, q. 4, a. 1 ; cf. d. 14, q. 2, a. 2.

<sup>135</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 15, q. 2, ad 5 ; d. 15, q. 4, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>136</sup> *I Sent.*, d. 14, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 ; d. 15, q. 2, ad 5 ; d. 15, exp. text. ; d. 16, q. 1, a. 2 ; *STh* I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2. On this theme, see in particular Albert Patfoort, “*Cognitio ista est quasi experimentalis*” (*I Sent.*, d. 14, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3m),” *Angelicum* 63 (1986): 3-13; idem, “Missions divines et expérience des personnes divines selon S. Thomas,” *Angelicum* 63 (1986): 545-59; Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 94-98.

Son and to the Holy Spirit inasmuch as we are “conformed” or “assimilated” to them through our acts of knowledge and charity.

According to these explanations, therefore, it is necessary to distinguish the “ontological” aspect and the “intentional” aspect of grace.<sup>137</sup> Under its “ontological” or “entitative” aspect, that is, considered in itself (in the subject to which it is given), grace is the effect of the action of the whole Trinity and refers us therefore to the Trinity in the unity of the three persons.<sup>138</sup> Under its “intentional” aspect, when one considers it in its dynamism, that is, from the side of the *object* or the end toward which it leads us (the “objective” manifestation of known and loved divine persons), the gift of grace (wisdom and charity) refers us to the three persons inasmuch as these persons are distinct from each other and are apprehended in their proper singularity, one as Father, the second as only-begotten Son, the third as Holy Spirit come forth from the Father and the Son.<sup>139</sup>

## IX. CONCLUSION

Aquinas firmly recognizes the unity of action of the divine persons, the unity of their principle of action and the unity of their relationship to created effects. Appropriations come into the picture at this level: that of the action itself (e.g., to create, to vivify, to sanctify, to comfort), that of the principles of action (e.g., power, wisdom, goodness) and of created effects (e.g., being, grace, adoptive filiation, consolation) which, being common to the three persons, are nevertheless attributed specially to one person in virtue of an affinity with the exclusive property of this person. But Aquinas also clearly maintains a *relational mode of acting* of each person, a proper and distinct mode which consists in the personal intra-Trinitarian relationship qualifying

<sup>137</sup> For further discussion, see Charles Journet, *L'Église du Verbe Incarné: Essai de théologie spéculative*, vol. 2, : *Sa structure interne et son unité catholique* (Saint-Maurice : Editions Saint-Augustin, 1999), 454-68.

<sup>138</sup> It is here that the appropriations find a place. Cf. III *Sent.*, d. 4, a. 1, a. 2, qc1a 1.

<sup>139</sup> Under this aspect, it is no longer a question of appropriation, but of a relation to the three divine persons, each one being apprehended in his proper and distinct personality.

intrinsically the act of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The recognition of a *proper* mode of acting of each divine person gives more value to the doctrine of appropriation, because appropriation of essential features rests precisely on the relative property that characterizes the distinct mode of existence and act of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By accounting for the personal dimension of the divine action, the proper mode of acting of the persons grounds the Trinitarian structure of the economy: all comes forth from the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit.

At another level, in the order of the objective union to the Trinity known and loved (and no longer only in the order of the causality of the divine act), St. Thomas shows that the gifts of grace enable human beings to enter into relation with each person in particular, that is, each person apprehended in a proper and distinct way.

In highlighting the proper features of the act of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, this doctrine gives a particular prominence to the person of the Father: being the source in the Trinity, the Father is the "ultimate term"<sup>140</sup> to which the Holy Spirit and the Son lead human beings. Creation and salvation are accomplished in the rhythm of the Trinitarian relations.

<sup>140</sup> I *Sent.*, d. 14, q. 2, a. 2.