

Contemporary Questions about God*

GILLES EMERY, O.P.

University of Fribourg

Fribourg, Switzerland

THE DOCTRINE of the Trinitarian God is at the heart of Christian theology. St. Thomas once explained to a Christian missionary who asked him to provide some doctrinal assistance for his confrontation with Islam in Syria that “the Christian faith principally consists in the confession of the Holy Trinity, and it glories particularly in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹ Today, confronted by questions old and new, the Christian who seeks to render an account of his faith in God can find the best guide in the immense body of teaching that Thomas devoted to the mystery of the Triune God. An overview of features of his teaching that trace out a path toward answering some contemporary questions will manifest the advantages of this teaching.

A God Who Transcends and Acts in the World

One of the first questions, which is among the deepest questions theology must address, is that of the formal object of theology’s reflection on God. Under what aspect should God be considered in biblical and Christian reflection? According to Thomas, theology is the science of the mystery of the revealed God. But is this the mystery of God in Himself, or only the mystery of God acting for the sake of His creatures? Early on, Thomists became involved in a lively debate on this topic. In fact, certain theologians from the end of the thirteenth century onwards sought to restrict theology to the study of God restoring and completing His work of

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¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De rationibus fidei*, chap. 1.

creation, by defining theology as a reflection on “God the Savior.” The Thomistic response was very clear: Christian doctrine cannot be restricted to the work of salvation; rather, its object is “God qua God,” i.e., God in the whole breadth of His mystery, insofar as man can attain it.²

This same question arose again in the Reformation, when Luther, accusing Scholastic theology of having led Christian thought astray into useless and imprudent research into the nature of God or the properties of the divine Persons, emphasized the experience of personal faith, which he claimed should condition the doctrine of God. The object of Christian reflection would therefore be God “for us,” or from a more individualistic standpoint, God “for me.” The same question is implicit in the boundaries laid out by modernity’s anthropocentric shift, within the currents of thought which assign to the doctrine of God the immediate task of reflecting on human experience, whether ecclesial or social. Other currents of thought restrict the doctrine of God to reflecting on the “God of salvation.” Are we to conceive of God in terms of man, or, conversely, should we illuminate human existence and the world in light of God Himself? This question touches the very heart of theology’s contemplative and sapiential status, and at a deeper level, the transcendence of the mystery of God.

St. Thomas guides us toward a reunion of Christian thought around the central mystery of God considered either in Himself, or insofar as He is the source and end of His creatures.³ Philosophically confirmed by the distinction between being and acting, and then by the Aristotelian distinction between immanent acts (those which remain in the acting subject, such as knowing and willing) and transitive acts (those which impact an exterior thing, in the order of “doing”), this twofold aspect of the divine mystery supplies the fundamental structure of the *Summa theologiae*.⁴ For this reason, in the method outlined by Thomas, the doctrine of God does not begin by examining the relationship between God and the world, but by studying God in His divine being. This is the doctrine of the “divine attributes,” i.e., the common characteristics pertaining to the being and acting of the three Persons of the divine Trinity. The transcendence of the mystery of a God Who remains unconfused with the world is clearly at stake: Thomas presents a strict and unambiguous interpretation of God’s simplicity (simplicity is the first divine attribute studied in the *Summa theologiae*, on which the rest of the whole treatise depends).

² See Gilles Emery, “Dieu, la foi et la théologie chez Durand de Saint-Pourçain,” *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 659–99, here 682–87.

³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 7.

⁴ See Gilles Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2006), 128–32.

St. Thomas's accurate insight into the transcendent unity of God, however, does not sever reflection on God from reflection on the human being and the world. Instead, it safeguards and manifests the gratuitous nature of divine action in the world, as well as the deep roots of the human being's and world's relations to God. Thus, for instance, identifying God as Wisdom, Thomas first explains that God knows Himself perfectly: from this it follows that in knowing Himself God knows all things, inasmuch as He is the cause and exemplar of all creatures by His self-knowledge.⁵ In the same way, exploring the Love of God, Thomas explains that this Love is the one with which God eternally loves Himself in Himself: thus he makes it possible to recognize that it is in loving Himself that God loves us.⁶

This approach offers considerable advantages. By respecting the transcendence and absolute primacy of God's being, as well as the primacy of the knowledge and love by which God knows and loves Himself, Thomas provides a foundation for creaturely participation in God's being and safeguards the total freedom of the actions that God exercises in the world for the sake of His creatures. Moreover, the acts of wisdom and love exercised by God in the world are really identical, in God, with His own essence. God's "transitive acts" (creation, providence, salvation) find their source and explanation in His "immanent acts:" God knows Himself and us by one and the same wisdom; God loves Himself and each one of His creatures with one and the same love.⁷ Here, where a cursory glance might lead one to accuse Thomas of neglecting the economy of creation and salvation, we discover in reality a doctrine that seeks to explain in the most profound way the divine foundations of this economy. In this way, for Thomas, creation and salvation are illuminated by the doctrine of God in Himself. One cannot account for the inmost depths of God's action simply by defining God in terms of His relations to the world, as an immense theological current flowing from Hegel does today. Rather, the opposite is true: the source of the divine economy is found through contemplation of the immanent and transcendent being of God.

⁵ ST I, q. 14, a. 5 and a. 8.

⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Bk. 1, chap. 75: "Because God wills Himself to be, He likewise wills other things, which are ordered to Him as to the end. . . . God, therefore, wills the multitude of things in willing and loving His own essence and perfection. . . . God, in that He wills and loves Himself, wills and loves other things."

⁷ ST I, q. 37, a. 2: "The Father and the Son love each other and love us by the Holy Spirit." Ibid., ad 3: "The Father loves not only the Son, but also Himself and us, by the Holy Spirit. . . . As the Father speaks Himself and every creature by His begotten Word . . . , so He loves Himself and every creature by the Holy Spirit."

Today, theological reflection on the Trinity is often undertaken in terms of the “immanent Trinity” and the “economic Trinity,” following the “fundamental axiom” formulated by Karl Rahner: “The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity.” Thomistic theology may welcome this fundamental rule, as long as one does not confuse God with the world or view the identity of “immanent Trinity” and “economic Trinity” as an *a priori* identity. But in fact, the contemporary approach to the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity tends to *start* with a formal distinction between the two aspects, and *then* attempts to reunite them. Aquinas’s teaching on the Trinity, by contrast, begins with the doctrine of the eternal processions of the persons, and it understands the divine missions as *including the eternal processions*: “The temporal procession [i.e., mission] is not essentially different from the eternal procession, but it only adds a reference to a temporal effect” (Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. 1, dist. 16, q. 1, a. 1). The missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit *bear within themselves the eternal mystery of the divine Persons*. The divine Persons themselves are given. At the same time, the doctrine of the missions maintains the essential difference between God and his created effects, with no danger of confusing the Trinity and his created gifts. In this way, St. Thomas’s doctrine of the divine processions and missions offers a powerful alternative to the scheme of the “economic Trinity” and the “immanent Trinity.” Insofar as it integrates the teaching on processions, on relations, and on Persons, the doctrine of the divine missions may be considered the pivot, indeed a real key, of St. Thomas’s Trinitarian theology.

Rahner himself, as well as many of his successors, presented his “fundamental axiom” as a critique of a Thomistic theology that is suspected of having isolated Trinitarian faith and obscured the links between the Trinitarian mystery and other areas of Christian faith (Christology, grace, our relationship to each divine Person, and so forth). Such a critique, however, rests on a serious error in reading Thomas. It presupposes, in fact, that Thomas separated the treatise “On the One God” from the treatise “On the Triune God,” which is not true, as will be shown later.

Further, theologians today often accuse Thomas of having constructed his Trinitarian doctrine on the basis of a “psychological analogy,” the analogy of Word and Love. Drawn from an analysis of the human soul rather than from God’s action in history, his doctrine supposedly obscures the economic dimensions of the Trinitarian mystery. But in reality, a reading of Thomas reveals exactly the opposite: by presenting the Trinitarian mystery in terms of the property of the Word “spoken” by the Father from all eternity and that of the Love “breathed” by the Father and His Word,

Thomistic theology is able to illuminate the very foundations of the economy established by God Who acts, creates, and saves by His Word and His Love. It is in His Word and through His Love, proceeding from Him from all eternity, that the Father creates us and comes to meet us in salvation. Here again we discover that, where a superficial approach claims to find a way of thinking severed from the economy of salvation, in reality Thomas presents a doctrine that, by explaining the properties of the eternal Trinity, can then provide the deepest insights into the divine economy.⁸

To summarize this advantage of the Thomistic approach: it is a speculative theology committed to probing the mystery of God in Himself (the *theologia* of the Fathers) and which therefore is also able to manifest the foundation for God's actions in history (the economy) and the extent of the relations that exist between us and God, in virtue of these actions.

Providence, Creatures, and God

St. Thomas explains God's relations to the world within the general framework of a threefold causality: God is the efficient, exemplar, and final cause of creatures.⁹ This analogical network of causality allows St. Thomas to illuminate the extent to which creatures are attached to God and depend on Him: in their existence, in that which they are, and in their actions. This structure of relations between God and the world rests on an even more fundamental distinction between first cause and second causes. Utterly rejecting all univocity in considering God and the world, that is, all attempts to place God and the world on the same level and organize them, so to speak, into one single category or into one single possession of the same perfection, the theology that follows Thomas firmly insists that "God is beyond every genus."¹⁰ God does not belong to the order of creatures: God and His creatures do not stand "face to face" like two beings in the same series. Just as the being of God is not identified with the being of creatures, so God (the first cause) does not work on the same level as creatures (second causes). The action of God is the source of the being and action of creatures; He is always their preventient transcendent cause.

This fundamental principle, which seems very simple on the surface, entails an extremely important consequence for the way in which the exercise of divine providence is perceived. In fact, since the acts of God are of another order than those of creatures, they are not "added" to the acts of creatures. God does not intervene in the world by limiting creaturely

⁸ See Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, 148–56.

⁹ *ST* I, q. 44.

¹⁰ *ST* I, q. 3, a. 5.

action: rather, He establishes the foundation of creaturely action. When a creature acts, under the motion of the provident Creator God, its act does not derive half from the creature and half from God, as though God and creatures have to split acts between them. Creaturely action—not only the natural action of beings lacking reason, but also the free and intelligent action of human beings—is attributed entirely to God and entirely to creatures, although according to different modes: God is wholly the source of the act insofar as He is the first cause (efficient, exemplar, and final), and the creature is wholly the source of its own act insofar as it is the second cause.¹¹

The collaboration or “co-operation” of creatures in God’s act constitutes a fundamental Thomistic doctrine, which is now more than ever vital to Christian preaching, because the doctrine excludes from God and the human being all competition, all destructive tension in which anything attributed to one has to be subtracted from the other. This doctrine is at the opposite pole from the forms of dialectical thought in which the constitution of creatures can be protected only at the cost of God’s withdrawal from the scene (affecting one’s conception of creation and the Passion of Christ) and in which, conversely, God can be exalted only at the cost of the creature vanishing.

In opposition to the theological and philosophical positions characterized by univocity and neglect of the doctrine of participation, the theology that originates in Thomas is thus able to present a profoundly religious view of the world and human life as subject to God’s action, while upholding a certain autonomy of the world as a “total cause” in all its dignity, within its own order. In the creature, there are two orders, two relations: first, an order toward God, and second, an internal ordering of the created universe. Neither one suppresses the other, but the first provides the foundation for the second.¹² In this respect, Thomas’s thought stands as an important source for the Vatican II constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, since it unifies, at their highest peak and in their inmost heart (that is, the participation of creatures in God’s being), the autonomy

¹¹ ScG, Bk. 3, chap. 70: “The same effect is not attributed to a natural cause and to divine power in such a way that it is partly done by God, and partly by the natural agent; rather, it is wholly done by both, according to a different way (*sed totus ab utroque secundum alium modum*).” On this central issue, see André de Muralt, “La métaphysique thomiste de la causalité divine,” in idem, *L’enjeu de la philosophie médiévale* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 331–51.

¹² St. Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 9: “The order of the parts of the universe to one another results from the order of the whole universe to God.” See also *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. 2, dist. 1, q. 2, a. 3; ScG, Bk. 1, chap. 78; ST I, q. 103, a. 2.

and dependence in relation to God which characterize the world, society, and human freedom. It is not difficult to recognize the crucial function that Thomistic metaphysics can have in the whole of theological reflection: moral doctrine, ecclesiology, ecumenism, spiritual life, and so forth.

An Immovable and Blissful God

In contemporary theology, special mention should be made of one of the areas of thought in which the Thomistic way of understanding the relations between God and the world is expressed most clearly: the defense of the immutability of God.¹³ The question usually arises in connection with the place granted to history in the doctrine of God. A vast current of twentieth-century theological reflection has promoted Trinitarian faith through the theme of God's manifestation or self-communication in history: God communicates Himself as Father in His Son Jesus and in the gift of the Spirit, so that history is understood as the "place" where God the Trinity unfolds. In some theories, the relationship between God and history is founded upon the "historicity of God" (Jürgen Moltmann). Such exploitation of history as an indispensable and constitutive element in the doctrine of the Triune God necessarily excludes divine immutability. Thus in contemporary theology, the immutability of God is often challenged on behalf of Trinitarian faith.

Many different modern solutions have been proposed for modifying the traditional doctrine of God's immutability. Some authors uphold the notion of a self-determined God in the process of becoming (the theological appropriation of a Hegelian theme). Others distinguish a primordial, immovable nature of God from a consequent nature in which God determines Himself by becoming (a distinction made by Whitehead). Still others propound a distinction between the immovable, necessary being of God in Himself, and the free love of the divine Persons, Who thus experience suffering in their mercy toward human beings (see for instance J. Galot). Finally, other authors have recourse to the notion of "kenosis" to explain the Trinity and its action in terms of "renunciation," "surrender," or "separation of God from Himself." The theme of God's "suffering," that is, the suffering of the divine Persons in their divinity and in their mutual relations, usually crystallizes within a theological interpretation of Christ's

¹³ For a more extended treatment of this issue, see Gilles Emery, "The Immutability of the God of Love and the Problem of Language Concerning the 'Suffering of God,'" in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, ed. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 27–76; Bruce D. Marshall, "The Dereliction of Christ and the Impassibility of God," *ibid.*, 246–98.

Passion and abandonment on the Cross. Various proposals introduce some sort of bipolarity, or “drama,” into God. But in reality, even if they do not confuse God with the world, they tend in various (and sometimes very subtle) ways at least to introduce characteristics of our created world into God, thereby jeopardizing his transcendent simplicity.

The way that Thomas proposes is, in my opinion, much more profound. By solidly upholding the absolute simplicity of God (without which God would not be God), Thomas defends His immovability and impassibility. Divine immutability is the immutability of pure Act: God is immovable, not by an absence of life, but “by excess,” so to speak, on account of a superabundance of life. God exceeds and surpasses all mutability. The immutability of God is one aspect of His pure and luminous simplicity. The doctrine of analogy reveals the immutability of God as completely different from that of a rock. Because of His pure and full actuality which nothing can perfect, God is subject neither to becoming nor to anything that belongs to becoming. His perfection specifically explains His creating and saving love and His mercy toward His creatures: God loves His creatures with the same immovable love with which He loves Himself eternally, freely granting them to receive, in the becoming of time, a participation in His own goodness. Rather than introducing history into God, thereby demolishing His unity and perfect actuality, Thomas leads us to consider how God is at the source of history: He is always prior to it, surpassing it as its transcendent source and end.

With Thomas, the Passion of Christ cannot be conceived of as a breach in the relations of the Trinity, or as a suffering of the three divine Persons (a theme that is unfortunately all too frequent in today’s theological and spiritual literature). The Passion is an event with Trinitarian features: it is not the story of one stage of development in the Trinity itself, but the revelation of the supreme love which unites the Father and Son in their distinction, even in the very flesh assumed by the Son of God. Thomas’s theology warns us against introducing any contradiction into God. On this subject, Charles Journet, a disciple of Thomas, wrote: “Mystery is adorable; contradiction is hateful.”

A similar observation applies to the notion of “event.” Today, with the goal of promoting a conception attentive to the concrete and historical dimension of the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ, it is not rare to find theologians employing the notion of “event” for expressing the Trinitarian being of God: “God is event.” Certainly, the notion of event suggests that the Being of God is a veritable fullness of life. However, it is necessary to recall that God is absolutely simple: He is Act, without composition, without movement, and without becoming. Illumined by the affirmation of

God as “pure Act,” the notion of “event” can be considered a *metaphor* that suggests the eternal newness of the divine Being. Even so, caution is necessary here, since the use of this metaphor can cause confusion.

Trinitarian Monotheism

As noted previously, Thomas and his disciples evince a very strong sense of the unity of God. Trinitarian faith is not an alteration of monotheism; on the contrary, it represents a strong monotheism. Our present-day situation, with its frequent encounters with Islam and Judaism, increases the need for a strict account of faith in the one and only God. Here again, the support provided by Thomas (who paid special attention to the critical importance of monotheism in encounters with Islam and, on another level, in philosophical reflection) reveals itself as particularly valuable and fruitful.

It should first be highlighted that Thomas never divided the study of God into a treatise “On the One God,” followed by a treatise “On the Triune God.” In the study of God, he distinguishes between that which concerns the divinity common to the three Persons (the three Persons are one single God), and that which concerns the property of each Person (the Persons are truly Three). This distinction carries forward the heritage of the Cappadocian Fathers, who, in order to respond to the most radical Arian challenges, had recognized that our knowledge of and language about the Triune God involve a sort of redoubling, that is, the “combination” of that which is common to the whole Trinity (essence and the “essential attributes”) and that which is proper to each Person in particular (the personal properties).¹⁴

The distinction between the aspects of unity and personal plurality should not, however, be understood as a juxtaposition. Rather, Thomas guides us toward a recognition of the integration between the aspect of divine unity and the aspect of distinction within the concept “divine Person.” In the *Summa theologiae*, the study of the essential attributes precedes the study of the properties of the Persons, because the theological understanding of a divine Person presupposes an understanding of the divine essence: by definition, a person is a subsisting reality, that is, a substance (first substance: hypostasis). Therefore, the notion of “divine Person” presupposes and integrates an understanding of the divine substance common to the Three. It is in the personalism of his doctrine of God that Thomas fully manifests his theology’s profound monotheism.

Progressing one step further, Thomas identifies relation as the key to the doctrine of God. In God, the Person must be grasped as a “subsisting

¹⁴ See Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca A. Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 44–48.

relation,” that is, a personal relation (the Father’s paternity, the Son’s filiation, the Spirit’s procession) that integrates *within itself* the divine substance and the distinction of the Persons from one another. Indeed, Thomas’s analysis of relation leads him to recognize two aspects or elements in a real relation: (1) its aspect of existence (a real relation is not a shadow; it has real consistence within the being which is its subject); (2) its formal aspect of rapport with another. Applied to God, with the adaptations necessitated by the simplicity of God, this analysis leads to the recognition that the relation distinguishing the Persons possesses God’s very being, with which it is identified. This is what is meant by the Thomistic notion of “subsisting relation.” In this way, reflection on God hinges on the study of *relation* which, at the pinnacle of theology, integrates all aspects of the mystery of God: the one essence and personal plurality of the Father, Son, and Spirit.¹⁵

For one who is willing to accept the conclusions of patient reflection, this doctrine has the invaluable advantage of presenting a rigorous Trinitarian monotheism. Thomas demonstrates to the Christian who reflects on the content of the *credo* that although his faith surpasses mere human thought, it harbors nothing of the irrational or absurd and is the foretaste of that which believers hope to contemplate some day in the splendor of the vision of the Triune God.

With the same stroke, Thomas also equips us to perceive the extent of the divine economy of creation and salvation, in which each divine Person intervenes in virtue of the divine essence, yet according to the mode of His personal property (the Father acts as Father, the Son as Son and Word, the Holy Spirit as Love and Gift). This Trinitarian monotheism specifically expresses the doctrine, often poorly grasped and misunderstood, namely, that of the Trinitarian “appropriations”: each divine Person operating as one God, yet in conformity with the mode of His constitutive and characteristic property.¹⁶ For instance, the adoptive filiation bestowed on us by God is appropriated to the Father as its Author (the Father acts as the “Author” or source of the Son and Spirit through Whom and in Whom He comes to meet us), to the Son as its Model (as Son, He is the Model of all filiation: He gives us a share in His sonship), and to the Holy Spirit as to the one Who imprints filiation in us (the Spirit acts as the Spirit of the Son Who communicates to us filial life). To recognize the unity of the divine act does not obscure the proper characteristics of each Person, but rather uncovers the presence of three indivisible Persons in the work they undertake on our behalf.

¹⁵ See Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 114–27.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 312–37 and 347–55.

As an additional benefit, this teaching enables us to connect consistently with the support offered by philosophy—which is no small advantage. For one thing, while reflecting on the essential unity of God, the theologian can integrate the best of metaphysical thought and equips himself for a true encounter with other forms of monotheism. Again, while considering the properties of the Persons in their distinction, theology can point out the true value of the analogies drawn from our knowledge of the world (relation, word, love, etc.), in accordance with the teaching of Holy Scripture. In short, the theologian who reflects with Thomas on the mystery of the Triune God can demonstrate the intelligibility of his faith, persevering in dialogue with other monotheistic religions and philosophy, and using the resources of human thought placed at the service of the faith.

The Unity of Salvation by the Gift of the Word and His Spirit

St. Thomas's Trinitarian doctrine likewise enables us to conceive of the universal act of the divine Persons in a broad and varied way. This feature is extremely important for today's ecclesiology (and for Christian theology of religions). For one thing, since God creates through His Word and His Love, Thomas shows that in the order of natural goods, all human beings participate in the gifts of the Son and the Holy Spirit offered through creation. Moreover, when God bestows His grace on a human being by an act of mercy, He makes Himself present by His Word (the Son) and His Love (the Holy Spirit), Who impress their seal (wisdom, a participation in the personal property of the Son, and charity, a participation in the personal property of the Holy Spirit as Love) upon this human being, enabling him, now graced, to return to the Triune God through supernatural acts of knowledge and charity. This is the very heart of the doctrine of "divine missions" with which Thomas concludes his study of the Trinity in the *Summa theologiae*.¹⁷ The doctrine of the sending of the Son and Holy Spirit, by which the Triune God becomes present in the souls of the just, is the crown of Thomistic teaching on God. At these heights, speculative theology and spiritual doctrine are one.

The gracious sending of the Persons is co-extensive through all of history (an invisible mission is also directed to the blessed at the very beginning of their beatitude in heaven).¹⁸ For Thomas, however, this does not mean that there are two parallel or complementary economies, one with a greater extent than the other: an economy of the Incarnate Word and the

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 360–412.

¹⁸ *ST* I, q. 43, a. 6, ad 3.

gift of the Spirit to the Church on one hand, and an economy of the invisible mission of the Word and His Spirit on the other, going beyond the work of Christ and the life of the Church. In no way can the theory of the twofold path or twofold economy, which sometimes poses a temptation to Christian theology of religions, claim to have support in Thomas.

The theology of Thomas clearly professes the unity of the Trinitarian work. The reason for this is simple and profound: Thomas explains that the work of the Spirit consists in “leading the faithful to the Son,” while the work of the Son consists in “leading us to the Father.”¹⁹ And “the vision of the Father is the end of all our desires and actions.”²⁰ The “invisible mission” of the Spirit in the souls of the just does not establish an economy parallel to that of the Son: the Spirit’s mission has no other goal than to manifest the Son and lead us toward Him. Before the Incarnation, the Spirit prepared believers for the Son Who was to come in the flesh; now, after the Incarnation, the Spirit manifests the Word united to the flesh from which He is now inseparable, that is, the Christ Who is the Head of His Church. The Holy Spirit configures human beings to Christ. Thus the mission of the Spirit in the hearts of the just is inseparable from the mission of the Son: Thomas explains that one cannot take place without the other.²¹ As a result, in the age of the Church, the gift of the Trinity is inseparable from the special stamp that the humanity of the Incarnate Son has imparted to every grace. Whoever receives the Spirit receives the Son, and whoever receives the Son receives Him in the grace that springs forth from the plenitude of His holy humanity. Thus the sending of the Spirit does not constitute a different salvific economy from that which builds up the Church of Christ. According to the principles clearly explained by Thomas, the gift of the Spirit incorporates its beneficiaries, whoever they may be, into Christ, that is, into the Church which is the Body of Christ. This very profound, coherent, and unified understanding of the Trinitarian economy provides the best source of inspiration for ecclesiological reflection and the theology of religions.²²

In all the areas we have briefly explored, the thought of Thomas emerges as a particularly fruitful way of confronting today’s questions about God.

¹⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on John* 14:26 (no. 1958).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14:8 (no. 1883).

²¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. 1, dist. 15, q. 4, a. 2.

²² For more on this, see Gilles Emery, “Le Christ médiateur: l’unicité et l’universalité de la médiation salvifique du Christ Jésus suivant Thomas d’Aquin,” in *Christus—Gottes schöpferisches Wort*, Festschrift für Christoph Kardinal Schönborn zum 65. Geburtstag, ed. George Augustin et alii (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2010), 337–55.

This fecundity helps Thomas's disciples to stay close to the Patristic heritage which inspires him, in all the rigor of a way of thought that respects the incomprehensibility of the mystery without straying into contradictions. In following the way outlined by Thomas, today's Thomistic theologian pursues the goal that Aquinas assigned to Trinitarian theology: to give an account of faith in God the Trinity, that is, to manifest the truth and intelligibility of the faith while avoiding error, in a foretaste of that which the believer hopes to contemplate in the beatific vision.²³ **N·V**

²³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 9, a. 5.