

Toward an East–West Ultramontane Polyphony: On Dogma, Ecclesial Unity, and the *Filioque*

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The book that the contributors to this symposium have commented upon with graciousness and remarkable intellectual acuity is a work consisting of four parts. There are four main claims to the book associated with these four parts, each of which is divided into sub-themes. Thus, one can denote a number of inevitably controversial ideas advanced by the book. In clarifying the nature of these claims, I can initially respond to some of the main points advanced by various of the helpful review essays in this symposium.

Framing the Argument of the Book

The first part of the work posits that there is a fundamental developmental continuity between Old and New Testament revelation, wherein God is revealed first to Israel as the one Creator, and subsequently in Jesus Christ as three distinct persons, the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹ This revelation is in turn received in the pre-Nicene era of the early Church, principally under a twofold conceptual format, according firstly to a model of God as a single transcendent subject of wisdom who sends his Word into the world in human nature, and inspires the prophets by his Spirit (the apologists' monotheistic model, exemplified by Justin Martyr) and, secondly, to

¹ On the Old and New Testament revelation of God in the book, see Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022), chs. 3–6.

a model of economic Trinitarian activity, of the Father, Son and Spirit, who are each divine and one in being, active in sacred history (Irenaeus).² Nicene Trinitarian authors sought in various ways to find a deeper concordance of the two approaches, one of which emphasized more the immanent unity of God (potentially tending toward a danger of Sabellianism) and the other of which emphasized real distinction of persons active in the economy (potentially tending toward the danger of subordinationism).³ Pro-Nicene figures like Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Augustine, among others, paved the way for a mature doctrine of immanent Trinitarian life, in which God was understood to be characterized, mysteriously, by eternal processions of the Word and the Spirit who originate from the Father, and receive from him the plenitude of their deity or divine nature, and thus are equally and identically the one God.⁴ God is mysteriously three persons who are truly one both in essence and being.

The second part of the book is concerned with the theological exploration of what it means to speak of God as one, and of the divine nature of God. This determination of Christian theological wisdom stems from a threefold exigency: first, to uncover the inner unity of revelation itself, as indeed the Israelite revelation of the divine unity and the oneness of God the transcendent Creator is thematic to both Testaments;⁵ second, to consider the preconditions of Nicene orthodoxy, as indeed the claim that the three persons in God are one in essence or nature presupposes that there is a nature of God that is one common to the three persons;⁶ third, to consider what must be said about the inner life of God as truth and love, as a precondition for thinking about the processional life of the Word and Spirit, who are immanent distinct persons in God who receive and possess this fullness of life but who do not divide this one eternal life in God or cause it to evolve due to their relational proceeding.⁷

I argue that a consideration of God's nature as simple, perfect, good, eternal, immutable, and so forth is essential to any theology that takes the biblical revelation of the unity and transcendence of God seriously, and therefore confesses the revelation of the Trinity integrally.⁸ Furthermore, regarding

² White, *Trinity*, 113–20 (in ch. 7).

³ White, *Trinity*, 120–28 (in ch. 7).

⁴ White, *Trinity*, 130–36 (in ch. 7; see also chs. 8 and 9).

⁵ White, *Trinity*, 185–86 (in ch. 11).

⁶ White, *Trinity*, 185–86 (in ch. 11).

⁷ White, *Trinity*, 321–22 (in ch. 18).

⁸ Prof. Chalameet speaks of the Thomistic approach as if it were idiosyncratic in this regard, since it is distinct from that of figures like Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, or

the apophatic contours of this form of reflection, I hold that it is precisely in order to guarantee the kind of circumspect avoidance of “non-biblical speculation” about positive knowledge of God outside of Christ that it is necessary to qualify rightly how God is not identifiable with creation and thus remains unknown in his inner divine nature and eternal life apart from and outside of his divine self-disclosure in the revelation of the Old and New Testaments. Philosophical reflection is an aid to this form of distinctly biblical reflection on the mystery of the Creator, thematically subservient to the theological enterprise.⁹ The estimable Christophe Chalamet and I, therefore, both disagree in significant ways and agree to some extent on what the important theological tasks must be. From my perspective, Rowan Williams represents what I take to be a more representative Protestant and Anglican tradition, given that the classical Reformers and their successors generally retained the kinds of claims and qualifications about the divine nature that I find biblically and theologically necessary. Williams helpfully shows in his essay what is at stake in Aquinas’s apophatic treatment of divine unity and draws relevant inferences that are deeply in accord with both classical Reformed spiritual sensibility and Catholic Scholastic traditions, in

Hans Urs von Balthasar. However, it seems to me clear that the theological consideration of the “attributes” of the divine nature is at the heart of Trinitarian theology, not only in classical figures like Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Bonaventure, and Aquinas, but also in classical and modern Reformed thinkers. Here I would refer the reader to the writings of Amandus Polanus, Francis Turretin, Johann Quenstedt, John Owen, and Herman Bavinck, whose works are arguably far more representative of classical Reformed theological principles than those of Barth or Moltmann. Undoubtedly such thinkers are to be considered non-influential in the modern university, but so are Barth or Moltmann today. And, at any rate, this fact of cultural “viability” does not address the question of whether such thought is true and based on Scripture. There are a great number of contemporary Reformed authors who are deeply influenced by these classical sources, and quite openly in public agreement with the Thomistic approach to the theology of God, something it seems to me that Prof. Chalamet fails to acknowledge with sufficient transparency. See in this regard the representative contemporary work of Steven J. Duby, *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism: Biblical Christology in Light of the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022). There are many young Reformed theologians today who find the Thomistic approach to the theology of the Trinity to be faithful to Scripture and more reflective of Reformed principles than the post-Hegelian theologies of the twentieth century. This seems to me to be of important ecumenical significance when thinking about the Thomistic-Reformed context of discussions about the Trinity.

⁹ I make an argument to this effect in ch. 11 of *Trinity*. The viewpoint is commonly found among Reformed and Lutheran theologians, as well as among a wide range of Catholic and Orthodox theologians. See most recently, *Natural Theology in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, ed. R. Swinburne and D. Bradshaw (St. Paul, MN: IOTA, 2021).

regard to the acknowledgement of the transcendence of God and practical freedom from idolatry.

The third part of the work is concerned to identify the inner processional life of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, making use of the analysis of the New Testament revelation provided by Thomas Aquinas, as a reader of Scripture understood in light of the Nicene patristic tradition. Central to this section is the consideration of the notion of eternal immaterial processions, relations of origin, and persons as subsistent relations in St. Thomas's understanding of the mysterious life of the Trinity.¹⁰ His approach is compared to and contrasted with alternative Franciscan options (Bonaventure, Scotus) and nominalist options (Ockham) in thinking constructively about the inner life of God as it has been revealed in the sending of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit into the world.¹¹ In this section, a number of original and controversial claims are made: first, that we best understand divine persons in a radically relational way, so as to safeguard both Cappadocian and Augustinian insights (together) regarding the real distinction of persons in God, processional relations of origin, and the unicity of the divine nature;¹² second, that we can locate truly literal analogies for the inner processional life of God only from the consideration of human immaterial spiritual operations of knowledge and love.¹³

Here, as will be clear, I disagree respectfully with the essay of Isidoros Katsos regarding the so-called analogy from light and heat in God, but not without valuing much of what he has to say. I am aware (less perfectly than I could be, to be sure) of the patristic use of light and heat images that are employed to designate the shared divine life and essence of the three persons in God. I make some modest appeal to them myself in the book, and they are clearly central to both Athanasian and Cappadocian theology. I also am happy to agree with the ancient metaphysical idea that, in the realm of physical reality, light possesses qualities most ontologically similar to immaterial reality. It is no accident that Aristotle speaks of the agent intellect as being like a light, or that the prologue of St. John's Gospel speaks of

¹⁰ See White, *Trinity*, chs. 21–23.

¹¹ My approach in this regard, outlined in ch. 21 of *Trinity*, is influenced in part by Russell L. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Theology from Aquinas to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and *Intellectual Traditions at the Medieval University: The Use of Philosophical Psychology in Trinitarian Theology among the Franciscans and Dominicans, 1250–1350*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

¹² See, for example, the arguments of *Trinity*, 409–11 (in ch. 22); ch. 23; 449–51 (in ch. 24).

¹³ See, for example, *Trinity*, 383–86 (in ch. 21); 411–15, 421–24 (in ch. 22).

the Logos of the Father by using notions of light.¹⁴ Natural and supernatural likenesses surely exist as Fr. Katsos rightly notes, but the similitudes in question are metaphorical, not literal.¹⁵ God is literally wise and good and literally possesses eternal knowledge and love. God is not said rightly to be literal light as he is said rightly to be literal truth. Truth, goodness, wisdom, and love are ascribed literally and analogically to God, albeit with strong apophatic qualifications: In this life we know that God is eternal truth, but we do not know God's eternal truth in itself, except by way of supernatural faith. Meanwhile, however, light and heat are ascribed to God only metaphorically.

The point of this distinction is not to cast doubt or disfavor on metaphors (as is often supposed). The metaphors that the Bible and that the Fathers ascribe to God not only are important, but can be in their own way more richly revelatory than the literal notions for the triune life of God, as Dionysius and Aquinas both observe.¹⁶ But the use of and appeal

¹⁴ Aristotle, *De anima* 3.5.430a14–17: “And in fact thought, as we have described it, is what it is by virtue of becoming all things, while there is another which is what it is by virtue of making all things: this is a sort of positive state like light; for in a sense light makes potential colours into actual colours” (*The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. J. A. Smith, ed. J. Barnes, 2 vols. [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984]). See also John 1:1–5: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (RSV trans.).

¹⁵ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 13, a. 3, ad 1: “There are some names which signify these perfections flowing from God to creatures in such a way that the imperfect way in which creatures receive the divine perfection is part of the very signification of the name itself as ‘stone’ signifies a material being, and names of this kind can be applied to God only in a metaphorical sense. Other names, however, express these perfections absolutely, without any such mode of participation being part of their signification as the words ‘being,’ ‘good,’ ‘living,’ and the like, and such names can be literally applied to God.” (trans. Dominican Fathers of the English Province [New York: Benziger, 1947]). Aquinas distinguishes properly analogical significations, literally attributed to God, from metaphorical ones, attributed non-literally. In the case of the metaphor, the essential content or *ratio* of the reality signified (“stone,” for example), cannot be employed in its complete content to signify what God is essentially. In the case of the proper analogate (“goodness,” for example), *all* that is contained in the *ratio* of goodness (its essential content, so to speak) can truly designate what God is in himself, albeit in an analogous and imperfect mode. God is essentially good, but God is not essentially a physical stone. See, on this point, ST I, q. 13, a. 6.

¹⁶ Aquinas provides positive appraisals of the significance of biblical metaphors for God, and makes appeal to the theology of Dionysius when doing so, in many places,

to metaphors must be qualified by an equally important use of and appeal to literal (analogical and apophatic) notions that are applied to God more properly. The light and heat metaphors make sense in light of the immanent significations of God's immanent life as processional knowledge and love, and without such "higher" or more precise significations, it is hard to grasp rightly how the metaphorical similitudes of light and heat *enrich* and fructify our meager proper and literal designations of God as processional Logos or Spirit, or as a shared life of wisdom and goodness. The distinction of literal versus metaphorical similitudes is one that is fruitful, mutually enriching, and reciprocally necessary. It is already overtly present in Cappadocian theology as well as in both Eastern and Western Scholasticism. Thus, it is not something distinctly Thomistic, although Aquinas's thought helps us recover a sense of it in our contemporary context. Such a way of thinking helps one protect and advance a theology that retains and explores metaphors of light and heat, whereas a theology that fails to distinguish literal from metaphorical designations would risk consigning significant patristic themes of such metaphorical knowledge of God to the dust-heap of incomprehension and historical anachronism. Paradoxically, in this case such images are more likely to be taken as pre-rational mythology or arbitrary post-scriptural theologoumena.

The fourth part of the book is concerned with the application of the classical distinction of eternal processions and temporal missions of the Son and Spirit, with application to various explorations of modern Trinitarian theologians. The book considers features of the economic Trinitarianism of various figures like Karl Rahner, Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, Sergius Bulgakov, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, which it treats as imperfect explorations, subject to potential critique or reformulation by consideration of traditional sources. Here, as noted by Professor Chalamet and Serge-Thomas Bonino, a key theme is the consideration of the economic missions of the Son and Spirit as revelatory of the immanent and eternal Trinity but non-constitutive of the eternal life of God. It is one thing to document the prevalence of the contrary idea in much of modern Trinitarian theology and raise questions about its problematic nature. It is another thing to propose a constructive counter-alternative that considers how the Incarnation, the actions and sufferings of Jesus, his crucifixion and death, and his resurrection all reveal the inner life of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the principal undertaking of this final section of the book.¹⁷

including *ST I*, q. 1, a. 9 (citing Dionysius, bk. 1 of *Celestial Hierarchy*); q. 13, a. 3. See also *I*, q. 13, a. 6.

¹⁷ See in particular *Trinity*, 33, 34 (in ch. 32).

Here the notion of genuine dyothelitism, in which the two natures and operations of Christ are distinguished, is contrasted with a modern problem of inverted monophysitism. The latter form of thought consists in the idea that the human actions and sufferings reveal in a quasi-univocal way the inner attributes of the life of God the Son or of the divine nature in its kenotic mode of being (found in distinct ways in Barth, Moltmann, Bulgakov, etc.). I suggest that this latter modern mode of thinking takes something from the medieval tendency of nominalism to claim the divine nature is unknowable and from the medieval tendency of Franciscan theology to claim that human nature can reveal Trinitarian processions quasi-univocally.¹⁸ Thomism offers an alternative vision in which the human nature of Christ is analogous to and revelatory of, but also dissimilar to, the transcendent divine nature of Christ, in virtue of which he is one with the Father and the Spirit. The treatment of the action, sufferings, Passion, and resurrection in this section is meant to suggest how this dyothelitist perspective might be articulated economically.¹⁹ As Fr. Bonino notes, this is a relatively innovative exploration within the context of precedent and contemporary Thomism, but it is arguably undertaken in profound continuity with classical principles of Thomistic Christology.

At the center of this approach is a reaffirmed employment of the traditional usage of the communication of idioms, the attribution of both divine and human properties to the one personal subject of the eternal Son of God, who is the man Jesus Christ. Aquinas notes three classical principles that apply in the practice of the communication of idioms. First, all divine and human properties are attributed to only one personal subject, the eternal Son of God, who is the person of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.²⁰ Jesus as God (in virtue of his divine nature) is born of the Father from all eternity and Jesus as man (in virtue of his human nature) is born of the Virgin Mary in time and place. Second, the attributes of the two natures are not predicated of one another. The eternal deity of God is not temporalized, and the historical suffering and death of Christ's humanity are not predicated of his divinity.²¹ Third, one can rightly emphasize the union of the two natures in one person by indicating the one concrete subject of Christ by way of abstract terms drawn from either nature.²² So, for example, one may say that "this man created the cosmos," indicating in the man Jesus the eternal person

¹⁸ This argument is presented in *Trinity*, 396–408 (in ch. 21); 547–59 (in ch. 31).

¹⁹ See especially in this regard ch. 33 of *Trinity*.

²⁰ See *ST* III, q. 16, aa. 1 and 8.

²¹ *ST* III, q. 16, a. 5.

²² See *ST* III, q. 16, aa. 3, 4, and 7.

of the Word, through whom all things were made. Or, similarly, one can say of Jesus, "The Lord suffered," or even "God died on the Cross," or "God was buried." In these latter cases, the words "Lord" and "God" denote one who is divine or who possesses the divine nature, who is also human. He suffers and dies as one who is human, in virtue of his human nature, but the one who dies is also true God and is Lord, even as he experiences human death.

The twentieth-century turn in the usage of the communication of idioms, pioneered principally by Karl Barth in the fourth volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, upends all three of these standard uses of the communication of idioms practiced by both Greek and Latin Fathers alike.²³ In his maturity, Barth frequently ascribes attributes of the humanity and divinity respectively to two distinct subjects: the eternal divine agent (or God in his eternal mode of being as Son), and the man Jesus Christ.²⁴

²³ Barth is aware of a more traditional practice of the communication of idioms in the Reformed Scholastic tradition, which he cites but also takes his departure from. See his observations regarding Amandus Polanus, cited by Barth in *Church Dogmatics* [CD], ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. IV/2, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 2* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1967), 75–76, from *Syntagma theologiae christianae* (1609) VI, 16, col. 2440f.: "Proprietates utriusque naturae Christi personae ipsi communicantur. Quae enim naturis singulis sunt propria, ea personae Christi sunt communia." Barth introduces his own distinct notions, for example, in CD, IV/2:84–85, 108–15. Barth is also critical of Gottlieb Thomasius's Lutheran kenoticism in which the Godhead surrenders divine properties for the duration of the historical life of Jesus in his Incarnation, in (CD, vol. IV/1, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 1* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961], 180–84). Instead, Barth argues, quite originally, that the Incarnation implies the decision of God to be God only with humanity and as himself human. This decision touches not only upon the unity of the humanity of Christ with the deity in the person of the Son. It also, in some real sense, implies a free self-determination on God's part to be God with humanity in his very deity (CD, IV/2:84: "We must begin with the fact that what takes place in this address is also and primarily a determination of divine essence: not an alteration, but a determination. God does not first elect and determine man but Himself. In His eternal counsel, and then in its execution in time He determines to address Himself to man, and to do so in such a way that He Himself becomes man. God elects and determines Himself to be the God of man. And this undoubtedly means . . . that He elects and determines Himself for humiliation"). "Innovation" is the word Barth himself employs, with some ambivalence, in (CD, vol. II/2, *The Doctrine of God, Part 2* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957], 156). It is worth nothing that Barth's approach to this issue is in striking discontinuity with the theology of John Calvin, who on this point is quite close in his Christology to the teaching of Aquinas just mentioned; see *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.14.1–2, and 4.17.30 (trans. F. L. Battles, 2 vols. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960]).

²⁴ In CD, IV/2:70, Barth claims quite explicitly that the natures may never be treated as concrete subjects and that it is only ever the Son who acts as God and as man. In practice, however, he frequently transgresses this rule in very interesting ways (CD,

Second, Barth also ascribes human attributes directly to the divine nature, in virtue of the Incarnation. For him, it is not the case that the eternal deity of God kenotically disavows its intrinsic properties or that the human properties are taken up into the deity in new ways. Rather, the human nature of Jesus reveals what was already always present in God's filial mode of being as Son, which is the eternal precondition for the Incarnation. Thus, if the Son obeys and suffers, it is because there is already always some analogous preconditional attribute of the divine nature that is like human obedience and self-surrender, found in God himself.²⁵ The humanity of God becomes thus a quasi-univocal cipher that unveils to us the inner life of God in its essence.

Third, then, the union of God and man in Christ, for Barth, is located not so much in the person of the Word, by a hypostatic union of deity and

IV/2:85: "It is indeed a part of the divine essence to be free for this decree [to be partake of the human essence] and its execution, *to be able to elect and determine itself to this form*" [emphasis mine]). See likewise CD, IV/2:106–11, esp. 106–7: "It is in the actual occurrence of this history that we have seen that which particularly interests us in the present context—its movement from below to above, the exaltation of the Son of Man who in his identity with the Son of God comes to God as the barer of our human essence, . . . the act of God in which the Son of God becomes identical with the man Jesus of Nazareth." The language here is ambiguous, but it seems to me unsuccessful in conveying the sense of a genuine, single-subject Christology. The metaphysical overtones are inadvertently Nestorian in tendency.

- ²⁵ See CD, IV/1:195: "In this happening we have to do with a divine commission and its divine execution, with a divine order and *divine obedience*. What takes place is the divine fulfillment of a divine decree. . . . But it is clear that once again, and this time in all seriousness, we are confronted with the mystery of *the deity of Christ*." See also: "We have not only not to deny but actually to affirm and understand as essential to the being of God the offensive fact that there is in God Himself an above and a below, a *prius* and a *posterius*, a superiority and a subordination. And our present concern is with what is apparently the most offensive fact of all, that there is a below, a *posterius*, a subordination, that it belongs to the inner life of God that there should take place within it obedience" (CD, IV/1:200–201); "The One who in this obedience is the perfect image of the ruling God is Himself—as distinct from every human and creaturely kind—God by nature, God in His relationship to Himself, that is, God in His mode of being as the Son in relation to God in His mode of being as the Father, One with the Father and of one essence. *In His mode of being as the Son He fulfils the divine subordination*, just as the Father in His mode of being as the Father fulfils the divine superiority. *In humility as the Son who complies, He is the same as is the Father in majesty as the Father who disposes. He is the same in consequence (and obedience) as the Son as is the Father in origin.* He is the same as the Son, that is, as the self-positing God, . . . as is the Father as the self-positing God. . . . The Father as the origin is never apart from Him as the consequence, *the obedient One*. The self-positing of God is never apart from Him as the One who is posited as God by God. *The One who eternally begets is never apart from the One who is eternally begotten*" (CD, IV/1:209; emphasis mine).

humanity, but in a shared history of humanity and deity enacted in the ongoing enhypostatic event of the Son of God who becomes manifest in the man Jesus of Nazareth.²⁶ In this case, it becomes difficult to say that “one of the Trinity was crucified,” as the Second Council of Constantinople affirmed, because the union of the two natures is not signified principally by a terminology of hypostatic union, but by an economic narrative of relations (Barth’s *analogia relationis*) in which the deity has effects upon the humanity of Christ in his kenosis and exaltation, and this in turn reveals to us the eternal relation of the Son to humanity that is characteristic of the Son’s very identity in the Trinity (God as Son being always already “for” incarnation).²⁷ This non-traditional rearticulation of the communication of idioms has had a major influence upon modern German-speaking theology, both Protestant and Catholic, and it is one I am respectfully querying, in favor of the more traditional perspectives of Gregory of Nazianzus, Leo the Great, the Council of Chalcedon, John Damascene, Thomas Aquinas, and a host of others.

The Ecclesial Normativity of Credal Faith and the Unity and Diversity of Schools of Theology

Since the purpose of this symposium is to engage with the challenging notion of Thomism, both in the Catholic tradition and as a resource for ecumenism, we should consider in this context of Trinitarian discussion what genuine Catholic ecumenism is and is not. According to Catholic doctrinal understanding, Christian ecumenism is not only a positive good but also a moral imperative.²⁸ It is fitting and necessary for baptized Chris-

²⁶ See, e.g., *CD*, IV/2:105–16.

²⁷ See *CD*, IV/2:84–86, esp. 85–86: “If we . . . try to think of the Godhead of God in biblical rather than pagan terms, we shall have to reckon, not with a mutability of God, but with the kind of immutability which does not prevent Him from humbling Himself and therefore doing what He willed to do and actually did do in Jesus Christ, i.e., electing and determining in Jesus Christ to exist in divine and human essence in the one Son of God and Son of Man, and therefore to address His divine essence to His human, to direct it to it. . . . What, then, is the divine essence? It is the free love . . . of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . . . The Father, He Himself, gives Himself up. This offering is, therefore, elected and determined by His own majesty—the majesty of the divine Subject.”

²⁸ See the normative declarations on these matters by the Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, and the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, and the magisterial teaching of Pope John Paul II in the 1995 encyclical *Ut Unim Sint*. For a theological consideration of *Unitatis Redintegratio* as enunciating principles of Catholic ecclesiology and pastoral practice that develop organically from antecedent Catholic dogmas, see Reinhard Hütter, “Catholic

tians to seek ecclesial forms of unity, in genuinely unified creedal confessions of faith and potentially in sacramental communion.²⁹ This is more readily feasible in Churches that commonly maintain episcopal apostolic succession, such as in the Orthodox, Oriental Eastern, and Coptic Churches of the East.³⁰ The former of course also share with the Catholic Church a common

Ecumenical Doctrine and Commitment—Irrevocable and Persistent: *Unitatis Redintegratio* as a Case of an Authentic Development of Doctrine,” in *Dogma and Ecumenism. Vatican II and Karl Barth’s Ad Limina Apostolorum*, ed. Matthew Levering, Bruce L. McCormack, and Thomas Joseph White (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 268–311.

²⁹ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §3: “Even in the beginnings of this one and only Church of God there arose certain rifts, which the Apostle strongly condemned. But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions made their appearance and quite large communities came to be separated from full communion with the Catholic Church—for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame. The children who are born into these Communities and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers, with respect and affection. For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect. The differences that exist in varying degrees between them and the Catholic Church—whether in doctrine and sometimes in discipline, or concerning the structure of the Church—do indeed create many obstacles, sometimes serious ones, to full ecclesiastical communion. The ecumenical movement is striving to overcome these obstacles. But even in spite of them it remains true that all who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ’s body, and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church. Moreover, some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too. All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ.”

³⁰ See the reflections of *Unitatis Redintegratio* §§14–18 (ch. 3, pt. 1) and *Lumen Gentium* §15: “For there are many who honour Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and of action, and who show a true religious zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, Son of God and Saviour. They are consecrated by Baptism, through which they are united with Christ. They also recognize and receive other sacraments within their own Churches or Ecclesial Communities. Many of them rejoice in the episcopate, celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and cultivate devotion towards the Virgin Mother of God. They also share with us in prayer and other spiritual benefits. Likewise, we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them also he gives his gifts and graces, and is thereby operative among them with his sanctifying power. Some indeed he has strengthened to the extent of the shedding of their blood. In all of Christ’s disciples the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully united, in the manner determined by Christ, as one flock under one shepherd.”

confession of the first seven ecumenical councils. Ecumenism thus entails a great attentiveness to consensus regarding the truth of divine revelation, and a common dogmatic and ethical patrimony, one expressed by diverse ecclesial traditions and liturgical expressions. It also entails attentiveness to a common understanding and practice of the sacraments that the Catholic Church maintains, along with various Eastern Churches, are instituted of divine right.³¹ Finally, it also must inevitably confront the question of episcopal authority, intercollegial relations of bishops (conciliarism and synodality), and diverse interpretations of papal primacy.³² In dialogue with ecclesial communities issued from the Reformation, the Church maintains ongoing dialogues in regard to the content of the teaching in Sacred Scripture, the potential reference of creeds, doctrines, and ethical teachings of the ancient and modern Church for the interpretation of Scripture, and the importance of a shared belief in the sacrament of baptism, as well as diverse but potentially convergent understandings of the Lord's Supper, of Church ministry, and of the eschatological importance of Christian witness.³³

What genuine ecumenism does not entail is a necessary commitment to

³¹ See the numerous accords on the nature and structure of the sacramental life in the Churches issued by common ecumenical statements of bilateral commissions of the Catholic Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and the Orthodox and Eastern Oriental Churches, respectively, available at www.christianunity.va.

³² See, most recently, the June 2023 Alessandria statement of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium and Today*, available from the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (www.christianunity.va).

³³ See *Unitatis Redintegratio* §§19–23 (ch. 3, pt. 2), esp. §23: “The daily Christian life of these brethren is nourished by their faith in Christ and strengthened by the grace of Baptism and by hearing the word of God. This shows itself in their private prayer, their meditation on the Bible, in their Christian family life, and in the worship of a community gathered together to praise God. Moreover, their form of worship sometimes displays notable features of the liturgy which they shared with us of old. Their faith in Christ bears fruit in praise and thanksgiving for the blessings received from the hands of God. Among them, too, is a strong sense of justice and a true charity toward their neighbor. This active faith has been responsible for many organizations for the relief of spiritual and material distress, the furtherance of the education of youth, the improvement of the social conditions of life, and the promotion of peace throughout the world. While it is true that many Christians understand the moral teaching of the Gospel differently from Catholics, and do not accept the same solutions to the more difficult problems of modern society, nevertheless they share our desire to stand by the words of Christ as the source of Christian virtue, and to obey the command of the Apostle: ‘And whatever you do, in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him’ (Col. 3:17). For that reason an

any one school of theology present in the Catholic Church, as if the Church were to claim that ecclesial unity is possible only on the condition that all non-Catholic Christians accept, for example, the theological perspectives of Blessed John Duns Scotus, or Karl Rahner, or Hans Urs von Balthasar, or even more plausibly, those of St. Thomas Aquinas. As far as I am aware, no Catholic theologian has ever claimed that one must be an intellectual disciple of Thomas Aquinas in order to be in full communion in the Catholic Church, nor has this been the case at any time in the past eight hundred years of the life of the Church. Certainly, no Catholic magisterial document has ever proposed such a teaching.³⁴

We might ask, then, why should a person even be concerned to propose a Thomistic approach to and interpretation of the “doctrine” of the Trinity in the Catholic tradition? Here we should begin with a set of hierarchical distinctions regarding the communication of sacred truth as understood within the Catholic theological tradition.

1. First, and upmost, there is divine revelation itself. God reveals himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through the medium of ancient prophetic and apostolic testimony, and especially through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This activity of the self-revelation of God is alive and present in the Church, in her sacred tradition, her liturgy, her preaching, her sacramental life, her saints, and her witness to the Gospel.
2. Second, this revelation is formulated in dogmatic and doctrinal statements of the magisterium, much of which is held in common by the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. Such teachings of the Catholic magisterium, we believe, participate in the infallible (truthful, non-erroneous) revelation of God that God makes of himself. The dogmatic definitions of the Church are partial and they develop, but they do so organically and unerringly, in what John Henry Newman termed “logical continuity” with one another.³⁵

ecumenical dialogue might start with discussion of the application of the Gospel to moral conduct.”

³⁴ Certain features of Aquinas’s thought have entered into the magisterium of the Catholic Church, in particular something like his teaching on transubstantiation, but this is true for other theologians as well, as in the case of Cyril of Alexandria’s understanding of the hypostatic union.

³⁵ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909), pt. 2, sect. 8 (“Application on Its Fourth Note: Its Logical Sequence”).

3. Third, there are theological schools, such as those of Thomism or Scotism or Suarezianism, which have functioned in the Catholic Church as traditions of inquiry and reflection meant to explore and convey the truth of the Christian faith in greater theological sophistication and with extensive reference to philosophy and other sciences of natural thought. We might add to this list schools from Eastern Catholic and Orthodox traditions, such as those reflective of the thought of Gregory of Palamas, or Maximus the Confessor, conveyed by modern theologians in a variety of ways. Modern Catholic schools include Lonerganianism, Rahnerianism, and the collective work of the *Communio* school, whenever each of these takes responsibility for the full doctrinal content of the Catholic magisterium.

Here we can think of school traditions at three levels:

- a. In their basic principles, they all consent to a common doctrinal patrimony and seek to find ways to articulate that patrimony. For example, Bonaventure and Aquinas both confess the doctrine of the Church in regard to the Holy Trinity and seek to articulate a theology of the Trinity in two distinct ways, which in turn has given rise to two distinct schools. Nevertheless, the common commitment to the dogma is primary in each school.
 - b. Generically, many schools share a commitment to common renderings of the Catholic theological tradition. For example, many schools affirm a version of hylomorphism in regard to the soul-body composite of the human person, or have a commitment to the dogmatic teaching of the Church in regard to “transubstantiation.” However, these two teachings are in turn understood differently by followers of Albert, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Francisco Suarez, Matthias Scheeben, and so on.
 - c. Specifically, each school has a *distinctive* way to maintain and promote the common teaching of the Church and even the more generic points they hold in common: as Aquinas understands divine persons as “subsistent relations” in a way that differs from Bonaventure, and more so from Scotus, and even more so from von Balthasar. But each of these figures is committed in some way to 3.a in the sense I have just described.
4. At a fourth level, we can think of theological ideas that do not stem from “within a school,” but that are proposed by individual thinkers

who take less inspiration from any particular tradition of thought. One can think here for example of theologians like Louis Bouyer or Blaise Pascal, or, in an ecumenical light, of Kierkegaard. Insights from these thinkers may complement those of the above-mentioned category, but need not supersede or oppose the reception of “school” theology.

In light of these distinctions, one can ask anew why it might be helpful to present a theologically coherent presentation of Trinitarian theology in a Thomistic light. There are many reasons of course. The first is that living Trinitarian faith must be received in an intellectual and human culture, which in turn implies the systematic conceptual reflection on the mystery in question, along with a coordinated integration of human philosophical, historical, and scientific forms of knowledge. Secondly, this form of knowledge (pace the misreading by Professor Pledsted of my book on this point) is *subordinated* to the pursuit of mystical wisdom and spiritual union with the Trinity (as the book states unequivocally), but also plays a stabilizing and regulatory role in the Church in regard to the pursuit of mystical union with God, as those who are more attuned to the order of spiritual wisdom are not always perfectly attuned to dogmatic fidelity and sometimes risk being misled or misleading others by “charismatically” misrepresenting the Church’s doctrinal or ethical teaching. In other words, good theology serves and steadies the healthy mystical aspirations of the Church. Third, formulations of theological schools also serve to advance general knowledge of the principles of theology, namely the belief in creedal and doctrinal traditions (referring to both levels 2 and 3a above). Fourth, theological reflections of a given school help transmit theological knowledge down through time in consistent and ever-expanding ways, through dialogue and dialectical engagement with new ideas, often assimilated or understood in light of past acquisitions. This practice includes engagement with new developments in the sciences or philosophy, which are not produced by mere liturgical celebration or repetition of the catechetical elements of the faith. Finally, this form of tradition-based theological inquiry facilitates (rather than impedes) profound theological conversation both within the Church (across various nationalities and religious cultures) and ecumenically, as well as in inter-religious dialogue. These conversations are possible only if there is a systematic pursuit of sophisticated theological and philosophical reflection on Scripture and Tradition down through time that takes place in organically coherent and common ways.

It is not surprising to observe in this light that, within Christian communities, it is virtually inevitable that schools of theological reflection emerge.

The Catholic Church has various “doctors” and family traditions of theological schools, but the reference to Aquinas as a “common doctor” can, I take it, signify that he is helpful not only as a sound guide in specific matters (3c) but also as a mentor for all those who would wish to gain a general introduction to the principles of theology as such (2 and 3a) and to generic claims common to many of the classical teachers of both the Scholastic East and West (3b). In other words, the Catholic Church’s privileging of Aquinas for recommended study (which is undeniable at the historical level) need not be read as an endorsement of his specific views on each point, but can be understood as a pedagogic proposal to safeguard a sound initiative for students into a more general theological viewpoint that accords with Scripture, Tradition, and the magisterium, as well as the general approach of the schools. This all being said, it is definitely not a recommendation of Aquinas as a substitute for the teaching of Scripture and the Tradition of the Church as such, nor can it be.

I take it that the Orthodox tradition has schools similar to the kind I am designating, which generally draw inspiration from figures like the Cappadocians, Maximus, John of Damascus, and Gregory Palamas, as well as a host of modern figures who interpret these others in a contemporary context. Orthodox theologians who converse with their Catholic counterparts on points of doctrine share a common commitment to level 1 mentioned above (divine revelation of the Holy Trinity) and inevitably accept some shared participation with them in level 2 (dogmas and sacramental and liturgical practices and traditions). They also share a fair amount of levels 3a and 3b (if, for example, we compare figures like John of Damascus and Thomas Aquinas, and their disciples).

Protestant theology is more complex, to be sure, if we seek to consider it in light of the traditional schema presented above. Here we do find a less formal but real adherence to dogmatic interpretations of Scripture, such as the Nicene understanding of the Trinity or the Chalcedonian understanding of Christ as a divine person subsisting in two natures, but there is an equivocal recognition of the permanency and viability of these definitions, which is meant to augment a recognition of the unique primacy and formal sufficiency of Scripture. There is no doubt that there are also traditions and schools of thought (as exemplified in various Lutheran and Reformed confessions of faith and traditional schools of theology), but the principles in question (justification by faith alone, the recognition of two sacraments alone, the formal sufficiency of Scripture, etc.) differ formally from the teachings held in common by Catholic and Orthodox Christians. Figures like Barth can function for Protestant theology as proponents of

the classical Nicene and Chalcedonian and Reformed principles, received and interpreted anew in light of modern philosophical concerns and the counter-proposals of modern liberal Protestantism. This is not synonymous with a creed-based form of theological inquiry, but it does have some genuine compatibility with it, and those who make use of figures like Barth (Wolfhart Pannenberg, Eberhard Jüngel, Moltmann, von Balthasar) to interpret his “tradition” do so in a way that is loosely convergent with, though not identical in method, with the above-mentioned approach.

Having made these observations, I can respond to the concern that classical Orthodox Trinitarian theology is not especially taken into consideration in this book. First, as Isidoros Katsos points out, the aim of the book is to explore the treating of the mystery of God as conducted within an especially important school of thinking, that of Thomism. This is not meant to exclude the viability or ecclesial permissibility of other approaches. Nor is it meant to suggest that conversations between various ecclesial traditions of theology is fruitless, including for Thomists, who stand to learn a great deal from engagements with other thinkers, as I hope the tenor of my book itself makes clear. As Katsos rightly notes, I do think that Aquinas often provides one with a preferable way of going about things, but the book is meant to test or manifest this thesis, and not to oblige others to hold to Thomistic principles as a condition of possibility for participation in the life of the living Church, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.³⁶

Second, the presumption behind my silence regarding the Orthodox tradition is that there is no substantial problem with Orthodox belief about the Trinity. I do defend a robust Catholic account of the *Filioque* and will mention the *Filioque* controversy in the next section. But aside from this, I do not see any great difficulties in the agreements of Catholics and Orthodox on the mystery of God, and it seems to me that Aquinas is a fairly good representative of one approach in the West that finds important points of contact with, and analogy to, approaches to theologies in the East, as Marcus Plested notes rightly and as Giulio Maspero underscores vividly in his extraordinary essay in this symposium. Prof. Plested is surely right to note that the theology of Gregory Palamas bears significant resemblances (amidst differences) to the work of Aquinas, and I agree with him that the perspectives of my book would be enriched by a more sustained treatment of the relationship and points of convergence and distinction between the two great figures. One

³⁶ One might argue maximally that Thomism is *only* the most important school of theological tradition in the history of Christianity, but it is *nothing more* than that. It is not the divine revelation itself, nor is it co-extensive with the Church of Christ in her complex and variegated intellectual life down through time.

can also speak here of the historical role of the Cappadocians, Maximus, and John of Damascus. Indeed, there is a missed opportunity here perhaps, one reflective of my own training in largely Catholic and Protestant (rather than also Eastern Orthodox) theologies. But it is a missed opportunity rooted in the sense that the concerns I raise in part IV of the book—concerns regarding modern Protestant and Catholic Trinitarian theologies—are not in fact concerns that implicate the Orthodox theological world.

Fundamentally, however, while there are ecumenical opportunities noted in the book in passing, the aim of the work is not to undertake ecumenical dialogue as such, however noble and necessary such an aim might be. The point is rather to invite people to a mature Catholic theological judgment of the issues, which has a role in the life of the Church. Catholics should be allowed to be Catholic after all, doctrinally and philosophically, and they must be so if they are going to represent themselves honestly and conduct themselves well in dialogue with other non-Catholic Christians—from which generous dialogue I have benefited and, as is clear from this symposium, will continue to benefit in ways that both include and go beyond the present book.

The *Filioque*

All this being said, the question of the *Filioque* remains an outstanding point of controversy in conversations between Orthodox and Catholics. This Western addition to the Creed and the long-standing theological tradition in the Western Church that accompanies it raise at least two questions. One is concerned with the formal content of Trinitarian faith, and the mystery of God in himself (the truth of the doctrine). The other has to do with its promulgation and continued promotion by the magisterium of the Catholic Church (the nature of Petrine authority, councils and synods, and episcopal fraternity as it touches upon the unity of the Churches).

With regard to the first issue, the truth of the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit, the Western Church has, it seems to me, four distinct options to consider in ecumenical conversation with the Orthodox Churches.

The first is a kind of minimalism alluded to by Fr. Katsos. Eastern-rite Catholic and Orthodox Churches may forgo mention of the *Filioque* in liturgical and theological life, while Western Catholic Churches continue to confess the doctrine. The presupposition here is that there are distinct approaches to the mystery of the Trinity and that it is feasible for Eastern Christians to accept the Western teaching as one possible approach that is not considered heretical or erroneous without feeling themselves pressured

or compelled to prescribe this theory universally. Of course, not all Orthodox theologians accept such a proposal, but many are open to the idea in principle.

A second possibility is for Western Catholic theologians to abandon any theory of the *Filioque* that departs from one or more classical Eastern understandings of the Spirit proceeding from the Father through the Son, or upon the Son, so as to underscore the unique principality of the Father. This approach, popular with Western theologians deeply sympathetic to Eastern traditions, has a distinct disadvantage, in that it accords poorly with Catholic teachings from the key Western Fathers, Scholastics, the Council of Florence, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which maintain the notion of a procession from the Father and the Son as from one principle, even if the Son receives his principality eternally from the Father, so that the Father is understood as the eternal origin of all Trinitarian life.

A third possibility is that the Catholic Church simply insist that Eastern Catholics understand and accept the *Filioque* in the terms expressed by such typically Western theologians as Anselm, and in line with the Council of Florence or other classical expressions of the tradition. This proposal accords less perfectly with the ecumenical spirit of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which grants value to both Eastern and Western modes of expression in regard to the procession of the Holy Spirit. It also is likely only to incite perpetually a defensive reaction of anti-*Filioquism* in Eastern theological circles.

The fourth option, and the best one it seems to me, is found in the advocacy of what I would term a “theological polyphony of *Filioques*.” This is a proposal already advocated for some decades by scholars of Maximus the Confessor, such as Jean Miguel Garrigues.³⁷ It is now being developed further in a helpful way by Fr. Maspero, as one can see in the essay he produced for this symposium, and in his recent book on the topic.³⁸ Plested has suggested analogous approaches undertaken from the study of other Eastern resources, including the theology of Palamas. Let us note these various ideas briefly.

Garrigues has shown how Maximus the Confessor studied Augustine’s speculations in regard to the procession of the Holy Spirit and was able to

³⁷ See, for example, Jean Miguel Garrigues, *L’Esprit qui dit ‘Père!’: L’Esprit-Saint dans la vie trinitaire et le problème du filioque* (Paris: Tequi, 1981); Garrigues, *Le Saint-Esprit, sceau de la Trinité: Le filioque et l’originalité trinitaire de l’Esprit dans sa personne et sa mission* (Paris: Cerf, 2011); Garrigues, *Deux martyrs de l’Église indivise: Saint Maxime le Confesseur et le pape saint Martin* (Paris: Cerf, 2011).

³⁸ Guilio Maspero, *Rethinking the Filioque with the Greek Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2023).

formulate an alternative but complementary teaching on the topic, in part due to an appeal to *perichoresis*, or mutual indwelling of the persons of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ If the Father is eternally the source of the Holy Spirit (even the unique source we might say), and is also eternally the Father of the Son whom he begets, then the begotten Son is always already (eternally) in the Father and from the Father who is source of the Spirit. Thus, the Spirit must proceed in some way from the Father and the Son or from the Father through the Son, just insofar as he proceeds from the Father of the Son who is ever one in essence with the Son.⁴⁰ On this model of understanding of the mystery, the relation of the Spirit to the Son of the Father remains more opaque and apophatically numinous, but it cannot be said not to exist.

Maspero has, it seems to me, offered us the possibility of a major advance in the discussion by manifesting clearly the presence in the various Cappadocian Fathers of a “psychological analogy” for the Trinity in which the Spirit is eternally related to the Logos of the Father as the Spirit of the Logos, and is mutually possessed by the Father and the Logos.⁴¹ This follows from a very explicit affirmation of a *Filioque* doctrine in Gregory of Nyssa, who claims that the Spirit eternally relates to the only-begotten Son by way of a relation of origin.⁴² As Maspero notes in his essay of this symposium,

³⁹ See especially Garrigues, *L'Esprit qui dit Père!*.

⁴⁰ I explore this idea further in ch. 27 of *Trinity*.

⁴¹ In addition to his essay in this symposium, see Maspero, *Rethinking the Filioque*, ch. 7: (“Another Surprise: Greek Psychological Analogies”).

⁴² See for example Gregory of Nyssa, *De oratione dominica*: “The Father’s *proprium* is to not exist from a cause, but this is not the *proprium* in the case of the Son and the Spirit, because according to scripture the Son comes from the Father (cf. John 16:28) and ‘the Spirit is from God’ (1 Cor. 2:12) and ‘proceeds from the Father’ (John 15:26). But as being without a cause, which is exclusive to the Father, cannot be applied to the Son and to the Spirit, in the same way the inverse, to be from a cause, which is properly to the Son and the Spirit, is not naturally attributed to the Father. And since it is common to the Son and the Spirit to be not without generation (‘unbegotten’), so that a certain confusion not be maintained regarding the subject, it is necessary to find another distinction that does not generate confusion in their properties, so that that which is common be kept safe, and that which is proper not be not confused. For the Sacred Scripture says that the only begotten Son comes from the Father, and this affirmation defines the property. But it is also said that the Holy Spirit is from the Father, *as it is also attested that He is from the Son*. . . . Therefore the Spirit who is from the Father is also the Spirit of Christ. On the other hand, the Son, who is also from God, is not said to be ‘of the Spirit’; and this relational sequence is not reversed so as to make it possible to invert the discourse in the same analysis and use the expression ‘Christ of the Spirit,’ just as one says ‘Spirit of Christ’” (*Sources Chrétiennes* 596:422.1–424.9; cited and trans. in Maspero, *Rethinking the Filioque*, 155–57; emphasis added). The logic of this passage stems from the idea that one distinguishes the persons in God by relations of origin,

John of Damascus understands creation generally and the human person specifically who is made in the Trinitarian image to come forth from this uncreated Trinitarian life, modeled after its uncreated pattern of being. As he also notes, the purely relational notion of the Trinitarian persons in the Cappadocian Fathers, reproduced by John of Damascus in terms of three hypostatic modes of being, implies logically that there is some form of eternal relationality of the Son to the Spirit and of the Spirit to the Son. Aquinas reproduces a similar strategy, albeit within a medieval Aristotelian context. In so doing, Aquinas re-reads the *Augustinian* psychological analogy in ways that accord quite closely to the Cappadocian approach to the mystery of the personal distinctions in God, wherein personal distinction arises from relations of origin most formally.⁴³

I believe more could be said in favor of this rapprochement of Cappadocian and Thomistic theology, including by way of a deeper consideration of the divine names for the essence of God in the Cappadocians, where we can observe a mixture of apophatic and kataphatic claims regarding the nature of the one God, not wholly dissimilar to that of Aquinas's treatment of the divine nature in the *De Deo ut uno* treatise in his Trinitarian theology. This can all be said while acknowledging Plested's claim regarding an alternative model of divine simplicity in Gregory of Nyssa, who speculates on the distinction between essence and energies (effects) in God in ways that differ from Aquinas. However, there have always been many different theories of divine simplicity in the classical theological tradition, and such disagreements need not be considered as Church-dividing. They relate to what I have termed above a "difference of schools."⁴⁴

I believe this idea of a polyphonic reception of the notion of an eternal relation of the Son to the Spirit can be expanded to include the notion Plested underscores, from Palamas, concerning the Spirit of the Father who comes forth from the Father through the Son, and in some versions of this theology, "upon" the Son. However, an alternative understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit from and through the Son is also of great importance in the Alexandrian tradition, in Athanasius and Cyril of

and from this starting point shows why it is important to say that the Spirit proceeds from the Father in a primary way and from the Son in a secondary but real sense. This is very similar logically to the position of Thomas Aquinas on the matter.

⁴³ On Aquinas's "relationalist" reading of Trinitarian personhood, see Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Theology*.

⁴⁴ I have explored this idea further in "Divine Simplicity," St. Andrew's Encyclopedia of Theology online, saet.ac.uk/Christianity/DivineSimplicity.

Alexandria, as well as in Syriac traditions.⁴⁵ How might both Orthodox and Catholic Christians pursue a more profound understanding of this line of thinking as well, in view of a convergence of vision that takes account of modern Coptic traditions, or the heritage of the Syriac Oriental Churches?

What I am suggesting at base is that the thing that we think divides us is sometimes the occasion to establish a deeper conversation regarding the mystery that binds and unites us. The Holy Trinity is the mystery that unites all Christians together in a common baptism and a common Nicene-creedal structure of faith. The *Filioque* stands out for many as an offense to that unity, but it might also be an occasion to stimulate conversation about the inner life of the Trinity and about our convergent and unified traditions of inquiry and contemplation of the one God. The conclusion of such conversations need not—and may not, in fact—simply be the idea of an “Augustinian superiority” when thinking of the procession of the Spirit from the Son. Something distinct might emerge, wherein the Churches agree that there are various traditional approaches to the contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity which are similar and convergent, despite their real differences. I think Aquinas’s theology on this front is deeply Western, but also bears striking similarities to certain Eastern authors. It therefore can contribute to the conversation about how this common ecumenical accord might look.

Similar things may be said about Petrine primacy as connected with the *Filioque*. What may initially seem like a mere offense in the assertion of unilateral Western autonomy can also become the occasion to think in creative and progressive fashion about how the primacy of the Roman pontiff (accepted in some fashion by all as a feature of the first millennium Church) might function in new and unexpected ways in a third-millennium context. Unity may not look like it did in the second millennium of the Church’s life, but it might emerge nevertheless with some new and dynamic relation to the Roman See, in a way that is symphonic in character, not monotone. Ecumenical crisis can be interpreted positively insofar as it presents us with the opportunity to seek deeper ecclesiological insight and

⁴⁵ On early Syriac theology and the procession of the Spirit from and through the Son, see ch. 6 in Maspero, *Rethinking the Filioque*. Maspero argues that one cannot safely appeal to Cyril of Alexandria’s pneumatology in order to generate a historical claim in Greek-speaking theology for the procession of the Spirit from the Son (271–75). I will not treat this issue here, but it seems to me that a much stronger and more traditional claim can and should be made regarding the relations of origin in the Trinity in Cyril, one that suggests greater parallels between him and Nyssa than Maspero acknowledges, precisely in regard to the Spirit being eternally the Spirit of the Son, originally from the Father through the Son.

accord.⁴⁶ Aquinas's theology is not presented in my book as a way to simply impose a monolithic conceptual framework onto such conversations, and the book was not conceived of *primarily* with ecumenical questions in mind. But good knowledge of Aquinas's theology as a common doctor in the Western tradition does help facilitate a much deeper and more stable form of ecumenical conversation, for the good of all and with the prospect of a deeper unity in the Catholic Church and among the Churches of East and West.

Conclusion

I wish to conclude by signaling a note of great thanks to all the participants in this symposium, originally organized in Rome by the University of Notre Dame Tantar Ecumenical Institute and the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, through the common initiative of Fr. Khaled Anatolios and Fr. Maspero. I continue to believe that there is a profound intrinsic connection between the intensive exploration of doctrinal theological reflection in diverse Christian confessional traditions and the deepening of mutual

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* §94: "With the power and the authority without which such an office would be illusory, the Bishop of Rome must ensure the communion of all the Churches. For this reason, he is the first servant of unity. This primacy is exercised on various levels, including vigilance over the handing down of the Word, the celebration of the Liturgy and the Sacraments, the Church's mission, discipline and the Christian life. It is the responsibility of the Successor of Peter to recall the requirements of the common good of the Church, should anyone be tempted to overlook it in the pursuit of personal interests. He has the duty to admonish, to caution and to declare at times that this or that opinion being circulated is irreconcilable with the unity of faith. When circumstances require it, he speaks in the name of all the Pastors in communion with him. He can also—under very specific conditions clearly laid down by the First Vatican Council—declare *ex cathedra* that a certain doctrine belongs to the deposit of faith. By thus bearing witness to the truth, he serves unity. All this however must always be done in communion. When the Catholic Church affirms that the office of the Bishop of Rome corresponds to the will of Christ, she does not separate this office from the mission entrusted to the whole body of Bishops, who are also vicars and ambassadors of Christ. The Bishop of Rome is a member of the 'College,' and the Bishops are his brothers in the ministry. Whatever relates to the unity of all Christian communities clearly forms part of the concerns of the primacy. As Bishop of Rome I am fully aware, as I have reaffirmed in the present Encyclical Letter, that Christ ardently desires the full and visible communion of all those Communities in which, by virtue of God's faithfulness, his Spirit dwells. I am convinced that I have a particular responsibility in this regard, above all in acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian Communities and in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation."

understanding in ties between all baptized Christians. In short, doctrinally rich and theologically developed reflection, when rightly understood, is a necessary condition for the possibility of sustained ecumenical engagement, not its adversary. Likewise, the search for common Christian unity is a search for common mutual understanding and joint confessions of faith. In this sense, I hope the symposium contained in these pages, which exhibits theological excellence by all my generous interlocutors, functions to illuminate and further advance the cause of Christian unity. N.V.