

essences of really existing things in their certain and unchanging truth, is neither medieval nor proper to any particular nation; it transcends time and space, and is no less valid for all humanity in our day” (*Letter to Aniceto Fernández, Master General of the Order of Preachers*: March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1964. In: AAS 56, 1964, 304).

This valuable Handbook, and similar publications, are certainly important contributions to ensuring Aquinas’ validity within the contemporary context.

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**EMERY, Gilles. *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*. Tr. Matthew Levering. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011, xvi+219p. ISBN: 978-0-8132-1864-9**

Anyone who is acquainted with recent developments in Trinitarian theology could scarcely pass over Fr. Gilles Emery, O.P. Beginning with his *La Trinité Créatrice* (Paris: Vrin, 1995), the Author has produced a series of first-rate works on Aquinas’ Trinitarian theology. Amongst others, there is his *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti: Sapientia, 2003), or more recently *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: University Press, 2007). There are also his brilliant articles in *The Thomist* including *Essentialism or Personalism in the Treatise on God in Saint Thomas Aquinas* (64 (2000): 521-563); *The Personal Mode of Trinitarian Action in Saint Thomas Aquinas* (69 (2005): 31-77), and *Theologia and Dispensatio: The Centrality of the Divine Missions in St. Thomas’ Trinitarian Theology* (74 (2010): 515-561).

But with this *Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, Emery evidently surpasses himself, going beyond the extensive confines of the Aquinate’s

works to the sources of Catholic doctrine on the Trinity. And in doing so, he does a very notable service to Catholic theologians in general, and Thomists in particular, by — perhaps without meaning to do so — bringing superbly into evidence the profound wealth of the sources that St. Thomas used and the acute knowledge that he had of them.

The twentieth century study of Trinitarian theology has been literally plagued by the myth that Theology in the West had neglected (or even ignored) the rich speculation of the East (particularly the Cappadocians): St. Augustine’s so-called “essentialism”, we were told, lacked the profound “personalism” of the great St. Basil and his contemporary St. Gregory Nazianzen. Ever since Theodore de Régnon’s pioneer *Études de théologie positive sur la sainte Trinité* (Paris: Retaux, 1892-1898), we have been increasingly led to believe — perhaps more by those who cited him than

by Régnon himself — that the Aquinate would seemingly have developed St. Augustine’s “essentialism” to a paroxysm, and that this was then swallowed gullibly by centuries of theologians, in detriment to the Greek, and biblical, understanding of the Trinity.

This critique of the Latin theological vein, centered undoubtedly on the Aquinate, although also encompassing several others, would lead to startling affirmations, such as Karl Rahner’s notorious sweeping diatribe against the “Augustinian-Western conception of the Trinity” (*The Trinity*, translated by Joseph Donceel. New York: Crossroad, 2003, p. 15-21). It is needless to state that the so-called twentieth-century revival in Trinitarian theology looked for alternative ways to express the mystery of the Triune God, ways that would avoid the “pit-falls” of St. Thomas’ theology.

In this scenario, Emery’s unimpeachable scholarship is certainly welcome — for he easily blends exhaustive comprehension of St. Thomas with rich documentation from the Scriptures, the Fathers (the Eastern ones are very visible here), Papal and Conciliar documents, etc. (thus going beyond his own *Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* mentioned earlier). The result is at once profound and accessible to beginners (we are reminded on page xv that the book is an *Introduction*: “the principal accent of this introductory work bears on doctrinal foundations”); though even

the proficient will find the book useful, whether they be theologians, exegetes, or even historians or liturgists. Bringing together the lucidity in doctrine proper to the Dominican charism with the unmistakable charm of the language of Bossuet, Emery’s *Trinité: Introduction théologique à la doctrine catholique sur Dieu Trinité* (Paris: Cerf, 2009) puts the experience of years of lecturing at the Faculty of Theology at Fribourg University at the service of all those who wish to comprehend the foundations of Trinitarian reflection in a logical and concise narrative that is nonetheless sensitive to the historical development of Catholic doctrine. And Matthew Levering’s intelligent translation renders it accessible to the English-speaking scholar in this *Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*.

Divided into six chapters (and with a very practical glossary at the end), the book first draws the reader into the Trinitarian faith by exposing the liturgical praxis of the Church (at Baptism and the Eucharist, the doxologies, early Christian literature etc.) and the biblical foundations for the Church’s faith. Then, in the second chapter, the book examines the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit individually as they are revealed to us in the biblical narrative, whereby the unity of the Three and their relations are manifest. Here Emery follows the path he had earlier outlined in the article *Theologia and Dispensatio: the Centrality of the Divine Missions in*

*St. Thomas' Trinitarian Theology* (mentioned above), wherein the divine missions provide the key for understanding the revelation of the Trinity. Confessions of the Trinitarian faith occupy the third chapter: moving from the New Testament itself onto the early professions of the Faith, and then passing by the challenge posed by heresy to the final elaboration of the Creed at Nicaea and Constantinople.

With the fourth chapter, the book moves into another dimension, examining the theological intuitions of the Fathers. The comprehension of Three 'Persons' or 'hypostases' is brought forth with particular emphasis on the writings of the Cappadocians. The reader is skillfully led, amidst numerous original citations, from St. Basil's genius in face of Eunomius' impiety, to the development on St. Basil's intuitions on the divine relations by the two St. Gregorys, and finally to the fixing of Catholic Doctrine at the Council of Florence (taking into account St. Augustine's enhancements, and above all the Aquinate's brilliance) with the formula: "everything is one where the opposition of a relation does not prevent this." The same chapter also dwells on the perfect simplicity of God, due to which human language can only predicate in analogical terms of the Divinity, and gives extensive treatment to the concept of 'person', right from Boethius' classical definition to St. Thom-

as' elucidation of the same with reference to the divine reality in order to define 'Person' in God as a 'subsisting relation'.

The most extensive part of the book is the fifth chapter, dedicated to a doctrinal exposition on each of the Three divine Persons. This includes the properties of the Persons and consequently their proper names; but also goes into detail on the "order of the Persons" whereby the doctrine of the *Filioque* is straightforwardly presented, in the understanding of the Latin and the Eastern tradition and in contrast with the 'Orthodox' view. In the final chapter, Emery returns to the "economy" of the Trinity in Creation and human salvation so as to tie together the "theology" with this "economy".

Some high-points of the book are worth mention. Amongst these is the account of the "proper mode of action of the Persons" in the "economy" (cf. chapter 5, p. 161-168), which is a synthetic exposition of what Emery had already worked with in *La Trinité Créatrice* and in *The Personal Mode of Trinitarian Action*. This would be an eye-opener for those who believe that St. Thomas advocates "monism" when considering the *ad-extra* activity of the Trinity. Likewise, of interest will be the exposition on the two aspects contained in the divine relations — and which constitutes a discovery by St. Thomas of the summit of theological reflection that offers, even today, the best resource for pursuing Christian

reflection on the human being and on the Triune God (cf. chapter 4, p. 107-110).

Then there is a critique of Rahner's much-touted "fundamental axiom": it could lead one to "conflate the eternity of God and the time of the economy" since the economy of salvation does not give to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit their distinct personality but only manifests this to us; it could lead one to imagine some 'necessity' in the "absolutely free, gratuitous, and not-necessary" economic manifestation of the Trinity; it could lead to confusions between the "transcendent mystery" of the Trinity with the "human knowledge and experience that we can have of the Trinity" that is proportionate to our limited condition as creatures; and above all, it obscures the fact that human understanding of the Trinity will reach its fulfillment only beyond history and therefore our present condition maintains "a certain 'distance'". In short, Emery observes that "God reveals himself and communicates himself as Trinity, because he is in himself Trinity and he acts as he is; however, the reception of the revelation of God and of the gift that God makes of himself in the economy does not exhaust the mystery of the Trinity in itself" (p. 177). And so, he concludes that when the doctrine of the Trinity is posed in terms of Rahner's axiom, "it leads at times to presenting Trinitarian faith in a dialectical and even wooden manner." For which reason he deftly proposes a return to the "other ways of accounting for the truth of the Trinitarian revelation

and of manifesting the gift that the Trinity makes of itself in the economy" that the theological tradition offers us, namely the doctrine of the 'missions' of the divine Persons (cf. chapter 4, p. 176-177).

The book ends, therefore, with a substantial exposition on the missions — just as the Aquinate had ended his exposition on the Triune God in the *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 43) — showing that "the missions bear in themselves the eternal mystery of the divine persons" (p. 193) since, as Aquinas notes, the temporal procession of a divine Person "is not essentially different from the eternal procession, but only adds a reference to a temporal effect" (cf. *I Sent.* d. 16, q. 1, a. 1). To use Emery's terms: "the revelation of the Trinity and the gift of salvation consist in the missions of the divine Persons" (p. 193). Consequently, an exposition on the missions not only safeguards the transcendence of God in relation to the effects of His action, but also "invites one to contemplate Christ, in his action of salvation, in his relations to the Father and to the Holy Spirit," thus tying together the reflection on the Triune God with Christology, and also linking the study of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit. Because of this essential 'unified approach' to theology offered by the missions, that is at once 'Christo-centric' and also 'Theo-centric', Emery concludes that "the mission of the divine Persons thus offers a light capable of guiding all Christian theology" (p. 194).

While Emery does not enter into many details about contemporary reflection on

the Trinity, it is evident that his minutiae on the diverse subjects take into consideration several of these, particularly where ignorance of the Aquinate had prompted a rummage for unfortunate alternatives. He could, however, have at least indicated secondary literature where some key-issues are addressed by others in order to offer a pathway for those who are really introduced to the Trinitarian theology in his *Introduction*. Besides, there exist, in contemporary theological reflection, profound works dedicated to shedding light on caricatured Western and Eastern theological perspectives, as also to debunking dominant myths on certain subjects that Emery also addresses — these could have been made more evident as well.

A substantial bibliography at the end — missing in the French original — provides the English reader with a clear idea

that Emery knows what he is talking about, especially where the patristic sources of Trinitarian doctrine are concerned. Though I personally would have preferred to have the footnotes, as far as possible, in perfect harmony with the original French edition (several notes with only French references, for which English substitutes could not be found, have been simply suppressed), one really cannot complain since Matthew Levering assures us that Emery “revised and updated the text” (p. viii).

In short, a very appealing *Introduction* to the Trinity, a must for any library and an excellent read for all, beginners or not.

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