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POCZĘCI MOCĄ DUCHA ŚWIĘTEGO: O WSPÓLDZIAŁANIU SYNA I DUCHA ŚWIĘTEGO WE WCIELENIU

CONCEIVED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: ON THE SON AND HOLY SPIRIT'S COWORKING OF THE INCARNATION

Abstract

Antonio Lopez ponders the form of God's self-revelation in „Conceived by the Power of the Holy Spirit: On the Son and Holy Spirit's Coworking of the Incarnation” Christ's mission to communicate the Father's love through the hypostatic union is bound up with and dependent on the Spirit's own mediatorial task. „The mediation of the Spirit of the Father, which ensures that Christ obeys humanly, is part of his growth into human perfection, that is, into the total, ever-new, clarifying, and liberating dependence on the Father, who superabundantly affirms the goodness of man's finite being and thus illumines its real meaning” According to Lopez, this „coworking” between Son and Spirit in the economy is pervasively shaped by and so reveals in its very structure the event of fruitful love that is the eternal life of the Trinity.

Keywords: Mediation, Holy Spirit, Incarnation, Theology, God, theology,

Streszczenie

W pracy „Poczęci z mocy Ducha Świętego: o współdziałaniu Syna i Ducha Świętego we Wcieleniu” Antonio Lopez zastanawia się nad formą samo-objawienia się Boga. Misja Chrystusa polegająca na przekazywaniu

miłości Ojca poprzez unię hipostatyczną jest związana i zależna od zadania pośrednictwa Ducha. „Pośrednictwo Ducha Ojca, które zapewnia posłuszeństwo Chrystusa po ludzku, jest częścią Jego wzrastania do ludzkiej doskonałości, to znaczy do całkowitej, zawsze nowej, wyjaśniającej i wyzwalającej zależności od Ojca, który w nadmiarze potwierdza dobroć skończonego bytu człowieka, a tym samym oświeca jego prawdziwe znaczenie” Według Lopeza ta „współpraca” między Synem i Duchem w ekonomii jest wszechstronnie kształtowana i w ten sposób objawia w swojej strukturze wydarzenie owocnej miłości, jaką jest życie wieczne Trójcy Świętej.

Słowa kluczowe: Pośrednictwo, Duch Święty, Wcielenie, teologia, Bóg

„This reciprocal working of Son and Spirit through each other in fulfillment of the Father’s sending is the way in which the triune God concretely opens himself up to Mary and, even more astonishingly, with Mary, so that through her the human being may finally be what he was created to be”

At the heart of the Christian faith lies the event of the Incarnation: the unforeseeable, ineffable, and inexhaustible mystery of the union of God and man. In his very person (1 Tm 2:5), Christ mediates the new covenant (Heb 9:15), irrevocably bringing the triune God and man to one another and enabling all who accept the Father’s love to be one with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Jn 17:11, 22-24). Yet the Son of Mary unites the human and divine natures in his person only as the one sent by the Father, who hands him over to us in the Spirit (Lk 1:35; Jn 1:14; Rom 8:32). The event of the Incarnation, in this sense, is a coworking of the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are both sent by the Father. To understand Christ’s mediation and the union that God seeks and establishes with us, it is thus necessary to reflect not only on the relation between Christ and the Father but also on the Holy Spirit’s role in the event of the Incarnation, which extends from Christ’s conception in Mary to his Resurrection and return to the Father. This essay therefore seeks to elucidate the meaning of the participation of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation.

After pondering the Son and Spirit's coworking of the Incarnation in light of Scripture (section 1), we will trace two theological shifts that shape how we now ask and answer the question of this cooperation (section 2). Thus, building on the rich tradition of the Church, we will examine Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological account of the „soteriological trinitarian inversion” (sections 3 and 4). Our study of his profound and subtle proposal will allow us to argue, in conclusion, that throughout the event of the Incarnation the Holy Spirit has a mediatorial role indispensable for Christ's being the one Mediator between God and man and the universal revealer of the Father (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). As we will see, the Spirit's coworking of the Incarnation is grounded in and expressive of his twofold personal property: he is both the personlove in whom divine love is eternally fulfilled and enjoyed and the reciprocal love of Father and Son. Reflecting on the Spirit's presence in the event of Christ therefore requires us to see how the missions of the Son and Spirit express their eternal processions, and thereby God's fruitfulness, without emptying or altering them.

1. A scriptural polarity

The New Testament presents the endless richness of the Incarnation through two different but complementary perspectives on the economic relation between the eternal Son of the Father and the Holy Spirit. The first, more prevalent in the Pauline and Johannine writings, centers on the preexistent Logos (Jn 1:1-4) who, sent by the Father, „became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14; cf. Gal 4:4-5)¹. The Incarnation is a deed of the Son, who, out of love, obediently lives out the Father's commandment (Phil 2:6 – 11) to give his life for the world (Jn 10:18) and to speak what the Father tells him (Jn 12:49)².

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSVCE).

² According to Mateos and Barreto, the Greek term ἐντολή means „mission” and „request” more than it does „commandment” Yet the latter sense is preferred in order to highlight the opposition to the commandments of the Old Testament. John, however, does not use the term ἐντολή to name the commandments of the

The Son's Incarnation is the gift of himself to the end lived in utter poverty and humility. In time, it will be revealed as expressive of God's omnipotence and ever-new fruitfulness. Because the Spirit is in Christ, he will give it to the Church (Jn 19:30, 20:22-23). When the Spirit comes, he will remind the disciples of the truth that Christ revealed, that is, the eternal love between him and the Father (Jn 16:12-15). The Spirit is the „Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19), „Spirit of [the] Son” (Gal 4:6), and „Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:17, 15:26, 16:13). The second perspective, more present in the synoptics, accounts for the Incarnation as the fruit of the operation of the Holy Spirit: Mary „was found to be with child of [SK] the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:18-20; cf. Lk 1:35). The Holy Spirit overshadows Mary so that she, full of grace, can virginally conceive (Lk 1:35a) and give a holy birth to the Son (Lk 1:35b)³. Thus, the Incarnation and Jesus' divinity are explained through the mission of the Spirit, rather than in terms of the preexistence and sending of the Logos. Born of the Spirit, Jesus is anointed by the Spirit of the Father and hence will be called Christ (Mk 1:10-11; Lk 4:18; Jn 1:33; Acts 10:38). He will thus be able to preach the good news to the poor and fulfill the covenant and promises of old (Is 61:1-2; Lk 4:18-19). Throughout his mission, Jesus Christ will be guided by the Spirit; perform miracles in his power (Mk 1:12; Mt 12:28; Lk 4:14, 4:18); cast out demons „by the finger of God” (Lk 11:20); praise and rejoice „in the Spirit” (Lk 10:21); offer himself to the Father on the Cross „through the eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14); be raised by the power of the Spirit (Rom 1:4, 8:11); and, once his humanity has been perfected, become a „life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor 15:45).

It would be inaccurate to draw stark distinctions between these two scriptural perspectives. It remains true, however, that the first

Old Covenant. See Juan Mateos and Juan Barreto, *Vocabulario teológico del evangelio de Juan* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1980), 188-93. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. See also *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, 5th ed. (1973), s.v. „ἐντέλλομαι, ἐντολή”

³ For Mary's virginity *in partu* see Ignace de La Potterie, „Il parto verginale del Verbo Incarnato: 'Non ex sanguinibus . . . , sed ex Deo natus est' (Gv 1,13)”, *Marianum* 45, no. 130 (1983): 127-74, at 163-71; Rene Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on The Virgin Mary*, trans. Charles Neumann (Washington, NJ: AMI Press, 1991), 324-34.

one, at the root of what has been called Logos Christology, highlights the uniqueness and centrality of Christ and of his salvific work, which the Holy Spirit renders present to everyone throughout all history. The second perspective, in contrast, at the root of what has been called Spirit Christology, presents the Incarnation of the Son as an event that encompasses all of Christ's existence and in which what is at stake is the fulfillment of Christ's human nature taken from Mary. These two approaches should be neither severed nor opposed⁴. Spirit Christology corrects the christomonistic tendencies of Western Logos Christology – according to which pneumatology would be absorbed in Christology – and prevents limiting the account of the mystery of the Incarnation to reflections on the hypostatic union⁵. Indeed, what is at stake in this mystery is not only the action of the Logos (for which the vertical axis of preexistence and mission would suffice) but also the Incarnate Son's being a man whose human nature is brought to the fulfillment that encompasses creation and the covenantal promises⁶. Logos Christology, in turn, allows Spirit Christol-

⁴ The two approaches reflect the unfathomable richness of the revelation of the triune mystery in Jesus Christ. See, among others, Marcello Bordoni, *La cristologia nell'orizzonte dello Spirito* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1995), 177 – 200; Olegario Gonzalez de Cardedal, *Cristologia* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2000), 321 – 49; Yves Congar, „Pour une christologie pneumatologique: Note bibliographique”, *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Theologiques* 63, no. 3 (1979): 435 – 42; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 3: *The Spirit of Truth*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 25 – 60 (hereafter cited as *TL3*); Robert P. Imbelli, „The New Adam and Life-Giving Spirit: The Paschal Pattern of Spirit Christology”, *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 233 – 52; Walter Kasper, „Spirito – Cristo – Chiesa”, trans. Orazio Bonassi, in *L'esperienza dello Spirito: In onore di Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Paul Brand (Brescia: Queriniana, 1974), 58 – 81; Heribert Muhlen, „Das Christusereignis als Tat des Heiligen Geistes”, in *Mysterium Salutis: Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*, ed. Johannes Feiner and Magnus Lohrer, vol. 3: *Das Christusereignis*, pt. 2 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1969), 513 – 44; Bernard Sesboüé, *L'Esprit sans visage et sans voix: Brève histoire de la théologie du Saint-Esprit*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2009); Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: Love and Gift in the Trinity and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

⁵ Yves Congar, „Pneumatologie ou 'christomonisme' dans la tradition latine?”, *Ephemerides Theologiae Lovanienses* 45 (1969): 394 – 416.

⁶ Gonzalez, *Cristologia*, 430 – 32.

ogy – followed more closely by Orthodox theology – to correct the adoptionistic interpretation of Christ’s divinity, to safeguard Christ’s uniqueness and universal singularity, and to maintain the Spirit’s inseparability from Christ.

Mindful of the advantages each perspective offers and the risks of upholding an unbalanced relationship between Logos Christology and Spirit Christology, we may now ask: What does it mean to say that it is the Logos who becomes flesh *and* that he is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit? How is one to avoid simply juxtaposing these two perspectives or ascribing to them a simplistic chronological order? What is their intrinsic principle of unity? To address these questions properly we first note a twofold methodological clarification that will guide our reflection.

First, the organic relationship between these two christological approaches comes to light only when we keep in mind that the complementarity of the missions of the Son and Spirit is adequately grasped only within their full trinitarian context. With this, we do not simply mean that all three divine persons are involved in the Incarnation. Rather, we wish to suggest that, precisely because the God who creates and saves us is one in being triune, we must avoid thinking of the Incarnation in terms of juxtaposed binary relations, as though it were mainly an interaction between two persons for whose relationship the third person remained secondary⁷ Instead, it is truer to divine revelation to articulate the relations between the divine persons, both in God and in history, in trinitarian terms, that is, to acknowledge that each person requires the ordered involvement of the other two. It is thus fundamental to see that the key to elucidating the mystery of the Incarnation is always and thoroughly trinitarian. Sent by the Father to reveal his love, the Son is never without the Spirit, and the Spirit never fails to bring us to the beloved Son of the Father. There is no metaphysical union of the two natures in the person of the Logos without the historical fulfillment of his humanity

⁷ To think in this way would be to understand the Incarnation as a relation either between the Father and the Son (relegating the Spirit to the time of the Church) or between the Father and the Spirit (exposing oneself to an adoptionistic Christology).

carried out in the Spirit – and vice versa. In this sense, to separate these two approaches is to surrender the possibility of properly elucidating the unity that the Trinity established with man.

Second, the unity of the missions of the Son and Spirit requires us to recognize that the mystery of the Incarnation is one perichoretic action: in it, the three divine persons act – to use Chalcedonian terminology – unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably. *Perichoresis*, however, does not mean that the Incarnation is an action in which the hypostases cooperate (similar to a collaboration in which each member performs its role simultaneously but independently of the others) or act in sequence (as on an assembly line where one thing is dealt with after another). Nor does it indicate an apersonal operation, as if the actor were the one divine essence in abstraction from the persons. In the event of the Incarnation, each of the three persons acts according to his own properties and does so only together with and for the other two according to the order that constitutes them as persons. While God remains greater than what we can understand or say, his perichoretic, free, and gratuitous action in history reveals the eternal, ordered unity of the triune mystery⁸.

⁸ Today, the terms „origin” and „procession” are looked upon with suspicion since, so the claim goes, they connote time and development where there is only eternity and fullness. Furthermore, they are considered to be incompatible with the eternal, ontological equality of the divine persons. To address these issues, some prefer to understand God’s unity in terms of a *perichoresis* in which the persons determine themselves and in which their equality is not jeopardized by the anarchic character of the Father. See, among others, Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 148 – 78; Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 123 – 54; Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 243 – 317. Sergius Bulgakov, instead, attempts to correct the chronological understanding implicit in the terms „origin” and „procession” by elucidating the trinitarian distinction of persons in terms of revelation. See his *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). Following a different and interesting path, Heribert Muhlen was one of the first proponents of a personological understanding of the triune mystery, according to which one speaks of the uniqueness of each trinitarian person not starting from the category of nature but from the scriptural use of the personal pronouns. See his *Der Heilige Geist als Person: In der Trinitat, bei der Inkarnation, und im Gnadenbund; ICH-DU-WIR* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1963), 26-82.

God's historical action through the missions of the Son and Spirit manifests both their reciprocal relation and the Father's fontal property. The Father is the one who sends the other two divine persons and the one to whom everything returns. He therefore has a notional priority – not an ontological or chronological one – over the other two. From this point of view, the goal of the Incarnation, as Maximus stated, could be described as „making manifest in all its splendor, if it is lawful to say so, the very inmost ground of the paternal goodness”⁹. The reciprocal relation between the Son and the Holy Spirit is more difficult to articulate, given the scarcity of pneumatological references in the New Testament and the complexity of the relationship between the missions and the divine processions. Whereas some christological accounts give priority to the Son's role and disregard or downplay that of the Spirit, others do the opposite. Yet Scripture holds both in tension: The Holy Spirit is *Dominum et vivificantem*, Lord and giver of life, who reposes upon (Mt 3:16), leads, and glorifies Jesus (Jn 16:14). Christ, in turn, is the Incarnate eternal Son who, after being led by the Spirit, sends with the Father the Spirit of truth so that he may witness to him (Jn 16:7b-11). If the first methodological remark indicates that the key to the event of the Incarnation is to see it as a trinitarian deed, the second allows us to realize that, because the trinitarian act is one perichoretic action, everything Jesus Christ does is carried out in the Holy Spirit, just as everything the Holy Spirit does in the economy is incarnational. Now, having seen the scriptural polarity of the Son and Holy Spirit's coworking, we can revisit two major moments in the theological account of their relation that shape our contemporary perception and thinking.

2. Two theological shifts

Theological reflection has, thanks to at least two critical moments, tended to disregard the mediatorial role of the Holy Spirit at the Incarnation, instead accounting for this mystery as an ex-

⁹ Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60 (CCSG 22, 72-83, at 75).

clusive deed of the Son. One such moment was the early conceptual transfer of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit from his baptism at the Jordan (Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21; Jn 1:32-34) to the moment of his conception (Lk 1:35). On this basis, it would eventually be argued that the Incarnate Son had the fullness of the Spirit from the beginning. Just as the Spirit's overshadowing of Mary had to do with her faith and the virginal conception and birth (both of which highlight Christ's divinity), so Christ's baptismal anointing had to do mainly with who he already was and what he would bring to the Church.

Such an account, however, was conditioned by the christological controversies and departs from both Scripture and the reflections of some early Church Fathers. It is true that both the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Mary and his descent on Jesus at his baptism speak of Jesus' divine filial identity and justify his bestowal of the Holy Spirit after the Resurrection. Christ can give the Spirit because he is God and has within himself the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22). Given the christological controversies regarding Jesus' divine identity, we can also understand why theological reflection often approximated Jesus' baptismal anointing to the Incarnation. The Fathers of the Church were faced with various unorthodox positions in need of correction: the unfounded adoptionist claim that because Christ was just a human being he needed to receive divine dignity at his baptism; the false Arian explanation that because Jesus needed the Spirit he was not fully God; and the erroneous Antiochian claim that the Holy Spirit was needed for the man Jesus to be united with the divine person of the Logos. The Fathers were thus brought to defend Jesus' divinity by placing his anointing – that is, Christ's possession of the fullness of divinity – at his Incarnation¹⁰. Scripture and the work of other Church Fathers, however, compels us to preserve a distinction between these two descents of the Holy Spirit. The first descent was required to prepare the human nature Christ assumes. It has to do, then, not only with Mary's faith and virginal mother-

¹⁰ Gregory Nazianzen, *Orationes theologicae* 30.21 and 30.2 (hereafter cited as *Or.*); Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15.26.46; *Enchiridion* 36, 37, 40. For the Antiochian Christology, see Theodore of Mopsuestia, *De Incarnatione* (PG 66, 980); Cyril of Alexandria, *Adversus Nestorium* (PG 77, 176).

hood but also with the creation of Christ's human nature. The second descent of the Spirit at the Jordan is the anointing that Jesus needed to receive in his human nature in order to begin carrying out his prophetic mission (Lk 4:18; Acts 4:27, 10:38)¹¹.

As fundamental as it was to emphasize that it is the Logos who becomes flesh and what this means for both human and divine natures, the theological merging of anointing with Incarnation brought three undesired consequences worth mentioning here. First, Jesus' anointing was understood simply as an apersonal action of divinity upon humanity. The Spirit thus gradually came to be seen as the divinity that gratuitously unites itself to the humanity. Second, this abstract mode of reflecting on the anointing occasioned the exclusion of the Holy Spirit from the theological account of the Incarnation. After all, it is the Logos who assumes the created human nature and who, as Scripture suggests, has a certain priority over the Spirit within the eternal trinitarian *taxis* (*filioque, dia*). Third, the forgetfulness of the Spirit brought with it the evacuation of the Incarnation's historical dimension in favor of a more static metaphysical rendition of the hypostatic union.

¹¹ Besides the three passages just mentioned, the only other passage that speaks of Christ's anointing refers not to his baptism but to his ascension and indicates his sitting at the right of the Father (Heb 1:9). Jesus did not need to be anointed as God, nor did he need the anointing as a sinner does, since his humanity was similar to ours in everything except sin (Heb 4:15). Christ was anointed in his humanity to carry out his mission of preaching the good news of the arrival of the Kingdom of God and to perform all the other works that this mission entailed. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.9.3, 3.12.7, 3.17.1 – 3 (hereafter cited as *Adv. haer.*); Origen, *Homiliae in Numeros* 6.3; Basil of Caesarea, *De Spiritu Sancto* 16 and 19; Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 1.46 – 48; Hilary, *De Trinitate* 11.18 – 19; Ignace de La Potterie, „L'onction du Christ: Etudes de theologie biblique”, *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 80 (1958): 225 – 52; Antonio Orbe, *Estudios valentinianos*, vol. 3: *La unción del Verbo*, *Analecta Gregoriana* 113 (Rome: Libreria Editrice dell'Universita Gregoriana, 1961), 501–41; Luis F. Ladaria, *Jesús y el Espíritu: La Unción*, (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2013), 13–86; Raniero Cantalamessa, „The Incarnation and the Mystery of the Anointing: Christology and Pneumatology in the Early Centuries of the Church”, in *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, ed. Myk Habets (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 175 – 92; John O'Donnell, „In Him and Over Him: The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus”, *Gregorianum* 70, no. 1 (1989): 25-45.

Especially according to this third consequence, theological reflection has considered Christ's actions after his birth to be simply revelatory of what he already is – true God and true man – rather than as belonging to the historical fulfillment of his humanity¹². The unfolding of Christ's mission is thus detached from this gradual fulfillment, and the Holy Spirit's equal, albeit distinct, role in realizing the hypostatic union falls from view¹³. In light of these negative consequences, we have to acknowledge that the rightful defense of Christ's full divinity from his conception should preserve the chronological, and to a certain extent semantic, distinction between the Spirit's overshadowing of Mary at the Incarnation and his descent over Jesus at the Jordan. Doing so will not only correct the abstract account of the relationship between God and man but also help us keep in view the trinitarian dimension of the Incarnation and avoid the theological loss of the Spirit's creative role.

A second theological shift that bears on our understanding of the Son and Spirit's coworking of the Incarnation concerns the centuries-long debate on the relationship between the „grace of union” and the „habitual grace” of Christ¹⁴. It was characteristic of medieval theology to approach the dogma of Christ's Incarna-

¹² De La Potterie has cogently argued that with the merging of anointing and Incarnation, Christ's anointing loses its scriptural meaning of being an „action” that enables the beginning of Christ's prophetic mission and is instead taken to indicate mainly the human „nature” of Jesus. In other terms, differently from what Scripture suggests, the theological shift is grounded on the assumption that anointing has to do mainly with who Christ is – true God and true man – and not with what he does. De La Potterie, „L'onction du Christ”, 251-52.

¹³ Naturally, if the anointing has to do with Jesus' human nature, the three scriptural passages that speak of his anointing (Lk 4:18; Acts 4:27, 10:38) must be interpreted as referring to the hypostatic union. Such interpretations, however, fail to come to terms with the fact, presented in Scripture, that whereas the baptismal anointing of his human nature constitutes him as prophet, the kingly and priestly dimensions of the anointing only come to be in time.

¹⁴ It is not necessary here to trace the long process that, after the christological controversies, has led more recent authors, such as Matthias Scheeben, to claim that the anointing is the Logos itself. See Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert (St. Louis: Herder, 1946), 332. See also *Divinum illud munus* (DS 3327); *Mystici corporis* (AAS 35:206-07): „At the first moment of the Incarnation the Son of the Eternal Father adorned the human nature which was substantially united to Him with the fullness of the Holy

tion from the perspective of grace, that is, of the unmerited and gratuitous communication of God to man by which man is made pleasing to God and able to enter into a union with him¹⁵. The way in which one understands the relation between the graces of Christ implies, however, a corresponding relation between the Son and the Holy Spirit as regards the Incarnation. The debate was therefore instrumental in bringing about the forgetfulness of the Spirit's role at the Incarnation and hence of the specific perichoretic unity of God's action.

We may take, for example, Aquinas's reflection on the relationship between the Son and the Spirit in terms of grace. His account is trinitarian while at the same time placing the action of the Holy Spirit outside the realization of the hypostatic union. For Aquinas, the Incarnation is an event in which the three persons are involved, although it is only the Son who assumes human nature¹⁶. The person of Christ, he contended, was endowed with three graces: the grace of union, „the personal being that is given gratis from above to the human nature in the Person of the Word, and is the term of the assumption”¹⁷; habitual grace, which as his spiritual holiness is „an effect following the union”¹⁸; and the grace of being the head, „in virtue of which grace flows from Christ to others”¹⁹. For Aquinas, the grace of union and habitual grace are simultaneous. Yet the former has a certain priority

Spirit [Sicut igitur primo incarnationis momento, Aeterni Patris Filius humanam naturam sibi substantialiter unitam Sancti Spiritus plenitudine ornavit]” (31).

¹⁵ While „grace” is an abstract term, it can be argued that for Aquinas grace regards the person of the Holy Spirit. See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 43, a. 7 ad 6 (hereafter cited as *ST*); *Super epistolam ad Romanos lectura* caput 1, lectio 4 (“Persona autem spiritus sancti expresse non ponitur, quia intelligitur in donis eius, quae sunt gratia et pax”); *De veritate*, q. 29, a. 3 sc. 1 (hereafter cited as *De ver.*); *Expositio in Ioannem* 3, lect. 6, §543 (hereafter cited as *In Ioa.*): „Both as God and as man, Christ has the Holy Spirit beyond measureBut Christ as man did not receive a certain amount of grace; and so he did not receive the Holy Spirit in any limited degree”

¹⁶ See, e.g., *ST* III, q. 32, a. 1 ad 1.

¹⁷ *ST* III, q. 6, a. 6; *In Ioa.* 3, lect. 6, §544.

¹⁸ *ST* III, q. 6, a. 6. Christ, Aquinas claims, needed an additional, created grace so that his soul could enjoy union with God „through its operation, that it may see God by His essence and, seeing Him, rejoice” (*De ver.*, q. 29, a. 1).

¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* 214.

in nature and in thought. Habitual grace thus follows the grace of union.²⁰ This naturally means that the Holy Spirit's involvement in the Incarnation is consequent to the hypostatic union. The grounding reason for this priority, according to Aquinas, is the trinitarian order: the person of the Son, who in his mission is the principle of the hypostatic union, is the one with whom the Father breathes the Holy Spirit, whose mission is to be the principle of Christ's habitual grace. Thus, just as the Spirit proceeds from the Son, and love from wisdom, so habitual grace follows upon the grace of union.²¹

The ensuing reflection – mostly responding to Scotus's work but also determined by some outstanding ambiguities in Aquinas's account of the Incarnation – separated habitual grace from the grace of union and relinquished Aquinas's trinitarian perspective²². In time, theology ascribed a substantial role to the grace of union, to the detriment of habitual grace, and spoke mainly of Christ's holiness without reference to the Holy Spirit. Francisco Suarez famously stated that „the humanity of Christ, or Christ as

²⁰ Ibid.; *ST III*, q. 34, a. 1.

²¹ *ST III*, q. 7, a. 13; *ST I*, q. 43, a. 5 ad 3.

²² A well-known instance of the ambiguities St. Thomas allowed to remain is found in *ST III*, q. 7, a. 1: „It is *necessary* to suppose [*necesse est*] habitual grace in Christ for three reasons. First, on account of the union of His soul with the Word of God. For the nearer any recipient is to an inflowing cause, the more does it partake of its influence. Now the influx of grace is from God, according to Psalm 83:12: ‘The Lord will give grace and glory.’ And hence *it was most fitting* [*maxime fuit conveniens*] that His soul should receive the influx of Divine grace. Secondly, on account of the dignity of this soul, whose operations were to attain so closely to God by knowledge and love, to which it is necessary for human nature to be raised by grace. Thirdly, on account of the relation of Christ to the human race. For Christ, as man, is the ‘Mediator of God and men,’ as is written, 1 Timothy 2:5; and hence it behooved Him to have grace which would overflow upon others, according to John 1:16: ‘And of His fulness we have all received, and grace for grace.’” Here we have added the emphases to the text of the first reason Aquinas presents to highlight the unresolved tension between the „necessity” and, as he says in conclusion, the „fittingness” of Christ's having habitual grace (Holy Spirit). Dominic Legge seeks to resolve some of the ambiguities that remain in Aquinas's thought (such as the one just shown) by indicating the trinitarian dimension of his Christology. See Dominic Legge, *OP, The Trinitarian Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For a synthetic presentation of the historical debate see Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology*, 131 – 71.

man, formally, by virtue of the grace of union itself, was absolutely and simply holy and pleasing to God”²³ The logical consequence of this conception of the grace of union is that of making habitual grace unnecessary. The Holy Spirit’s mission to Christ cannot but come after the hypostatic union has been constituted. With this further theological shift, the trinitarian dimension of the Incarnation fell out of view, and the descent of the Holy Spirit over Jesus at the Jordan was interpreted ecclesio- logically rather than christologically²⁴. It is not surprising, then, that this unbalanced perception of God’s perichoretic action at the Incarnation – which seems to be governed by the sequential model of *perichoresis* alluded to earlier – renders it very difficult, or even impossible, to offer an elucidation of God’s triune love that reveals itself as triune precisely in the union of human and divine natures in the person of the Logos.

3. Balthasar’s retrieval of the spirit’s mission

Deepening the tradition while correcting some of the impasses we have mentioned, Hans Urs von Balthasar offers what is arguably the most profound contemporary trinitarian account of the Incarnation. His reflection retrieves the mediatorial and creative character of the Holy Spirit’s mission and opens an avenue toward rapprochement between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. With this, he restores reflection on the Incarnation to a trinitarian perspective and explains the Incarnation as an event in which the Son’s filial identity is revealed through the Father’s sending of the Logos in the Spirit. While not replacing the Son’s task, the Holy Spirit’s work is indispensable for the coming to be of the hypostatic union itself. Limiting our account to what is important for

²³ Francisco Suarez, *Commentaria ac disputationes in tertiam partem d. Thomae*, q. 7, a. 1, disputatio 18, sec. 1, no. 5, as cited in Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology*, 139.

²⁴ *ST* III, q. 7, a. 12 ad 3; q. 7, a. 2; q. 46, a. 3. See Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 193 – 204.

our present reflection, we will now consider the main elements of Balthasar's pneumatological proposal²⁵.

Like many of his predecessors, Balthasar reads the conception of Christ by the Holy Spirit together with the Spirit's descent at the baptism of Jesus²⁶. Rather than collapse the anointing into the Incarnation, however, he draws attention to the twofold presence of the Spirit to Christ – over him and in him – and corrects the unilateral emphasis on Christ's „grace of union” For Balthasar, it is essential to realize that the relationship between the missions of the Son and Spirit finds its proper equilibrium not only when the trinitarian context and perichoretic action are kept in view, but also when the full soteriological scope of the Incarnation is taken into account. This soteriological dimension regards Christ's assumption of a body in order to offer himself on the Cross. For Balthasar, however, Christ's redemption of man from his state of alienation from the Father also includes the very Incarnation of the Son in which he, through the Spirit, unites human nature to himself.

Balthasar's account of the Holy Spirit's mediatorial role in the Incarnation is based on his understanding of the Son's mission in terms of filial obedience. Christ's mission, for whose accomplishment the Spirit is sent, is to obey the Father's commandment to take the place of fallen man and utter a thankful and unreserved human „yes” to the Father's love by giving his life on the Cross. As is well known, Balthasar contends that Christ's mission, unlike that of any other prophet, is coextensive with his person –

²⁵ To my knowledge, there are three books dedicated to Balthasar's pneumatology: Kossi J. Tossou, *Streben nach Vollendung: Zur Pneumatologie im Werk Hans Urs von Balthasars* (Freiburg: Herder, 1983); John Randall Sachs, „Spirit and Life: The Pneumatology and Christian Spirituality of Hans Urs von Balthasar” (Ph.D. dissertation, Eberhard-Karls-Universität zu Tübingen, 1984); Jean-Noel Dol, *L'Esprit de Verite et d'Amour: La pneumatologie de H. U. von Balthasar; Esprit subjectif – Esprit objectif – Esprit absolu?* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2016). Although some of its conclusions are questionable, the latter work aided our efforts to ponder and present in this article Balthasar's theological proposal.

²⁶ TL3, 184. For Balthasar, however, to approximate the anointing to the conception does not entail neglecting Christ's development throughout the event of his Incarnation.

as Christ's self-consciousness of his own mission witnesses²⁷. However, he claims that this coextensiveness and the radicality of Christ's surrender to the Father is adequately grasped only if one sees that the Son's obedience begins at his Incarnation, not afterward²⁸. The Son's Incarnation is the beginning of his obedience because in it „he entrusts himself to the activity of the Spirit in accord with the Father's will”²⁹. The Spirit mediates the divine decision to the Son not only throughout Christ's historical existence but also at his Incarnation – although in the latter case he does so in the form of bringing the eternal Son, with his consent, to Mary.

The perspective of filial obedience also informs Balthasar's account of the priority of the Holy Spirit over the Son in their perichoretic, economic action. Along with Aquinas, Balthasar affirms that „the constitution of a subject logically and ontically must precede the act whereby this subject is endowed with grace”³⁰. Yet, for Balthasar, this logical and ontic priority – to which one normally adds the intratrinitarian *taxis* (*filioque*) – should not bring one to deduce that the Spirit's action begins only after the Incarnation has taken place³¹. The economic authenticity of the Son's kenotic obedience requires, during what Balthasar calls Christ's state of humiliation (from his birth to the Cross), the Holy Spirit to have a creative and sanctifying priority over the Son. This priority of the Spirit is not in opposition to the relative

²⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 149-229 (hereafter cited as *TD3*).

²⁸ *TD3*, 184; *TL3*, 184.

²⁹ *TD3*, 186.

³⁰ *TD3*, 186.

³¹ Criticizing approaches that have recourse to the double action described earlier, according to which it is the Logos who unites himself with human nature (*gratia unionis*) and then the Holy Spirit who equips the human nature with the accidental graces he needs to carry out his mission (*gratia habitualis*), Balthasar writes, „Why is it necessary to take this way out [to speak of the Spirit in terms of 'accidental holiness,' as Muhlen does], which does not really correspond to the Lucan account of the Incarnation? Because of the strict refusal to make room for any kind of inversion in the transition from immanent to economic Trinity. The priority of the Son's action (at least at the logical level) must be upheld vis-a-vis that of the Spirit for reasons of trinitarian *taxis*” (*TL3*, 183).

priority of the Son. As we will see, it is not the Holy Spirit who unites the human nature to the divine nature, nor is he solely responsible for the Incarnation. For Balthasar, there is no priority of the Son that relegates the Spirit's role to that of giving Jesus the additional graces he needs to carry out his mission. Nor is there a priority of the Holy Spirit that renders the Son's active role unnecessary. The perichoretic action that realizes the mystery of the Incarnation requires the involvement of both persons all the time. Yet, it is precisely because the Spirit's activity – which remains simultaneous with that of the Son – has a relative priority that Christ's a priori obedience can be coextensive with his mission and thus have a universal salvific significance³². To Balthasar, this is exactly what Scripture means by the Spirit's overshadowing of Mary. It is also the reason for Scripture's use of the verbal passive tense to describe the Incarnation: just as at the Incarnation the Son lets himself be sent by the Father, so he lets himself be conceived by the Spirit³³.

Besides playing an indispensable role in the Son's enfleshment, the Holy Spirit, as Spirit of the Father, leads Christ and presents to him the unanimous, divine decision that the Son should take flesh and give his life – a decision that Christ perceives as a commandment to love³⁴. Of course, for Balthasar, the Spirit's mediatorial role does not prevent the Incarnate Son from receiving his mission directly from the Father. Such a claim would be tantamount to saying that throughout the state of humiliation, the Son would cease to be God. His kenosis, however, requires that

³² „The *goal* of this identity [in Christ, the one sent, between the perfectly free, spontaneous embrace of his mission and the execution of it] implies that he has full authority to identify himself with the *status* of sinners, and ultimately with the sin of all sinners, so that his spontaneity (cf. Heb 10:7) must accept the form of hard obedience, learned through temptation (Heb 5:8)” (TD3, 517 – 18, emphasis original). Balthasar's thought rests on passages of the Fathers such as Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* 19.49, and Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.*, 31.29.

³³ TD3, 183-84.

³⁴ “But at the point of distinction between the Father's purpose and the Son's obedience, we discern an essential poise, an essential communication between Father and Son, which can only be the operation of the Holy Spirit” (TD3, 183). One would be grateful had Balthasar justified why in his account the „ἐντολή” passages in John ground the mediatorial role of the Holy Spirit in Christ's obedience. As written, this claim is simply asserted.

his access to the Father be at times more immediate and at other times more veiled³⁵. While not interrupting the direct relation between the Father and Son, the Spirit's mediation enables the Incarnate Son to obey the Father's will in the way his human nature required, that is, freely and spontaneously³⁶.

Balthasar thus contends that only by accepting what he calls a „trinitarian and soteriological inversion” of the immanent Trinity on the economic plane is one able to account for the Spirit's creative role at the Incarnation *and* avoid making sanctifying grace unnecessary, as we saw resulted from some earlier theological accounts³⁷. Using a spatial image, we can say that the trinitarian inversion suggests that, whereas in the economy the Holy

³⁵ See, Hans Urs von Balthasar, „*Fides Christi: An Essay on the Consciousness of Christ*”, in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 2: *Spouse of the Word*, trans. A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 43-79 (hereafter cited as *ET2*); Paolo Prosperi, „Believing and Seeing”, *Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (2017): 905-29.

³⁶ “If he is to be obedient to the Father, he must allow the Father's Spirit to take an active, leading role, while at the same time letting the Spirit who proceeds from him, the Son, be in complete harmony with the Father's will. The latter is essential if his obedience as Yahweh's ‘Suffering Servant’ is to be always spontaneous, filial obedience... The Son's availability is such that it leaves the Father complete freedom to take any direction he wishes and is ready to accept it as the direct, the newest expression of his will” (*TD3*, 521 – 22).

³⁷ *TD3*, 189. For Balthasar's account of the trinitarian inversion, see above all *TD3*, 183-91, 505-23; *TL3*, 35-36, 48-51, 171-84; and Hans Urs von Balthasar, „Spirit and Institution”, in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 4: *Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 230-37. For critical appraisals of this theological proposal, besides the three studies already mentioned, see Silouane Ponga, „*La dramatique trinitaire de la révélation et du salut chez H.U. von Balthasar*”, *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 124, no. 4 (2002): 549-64; Guy Vandeveld-Dailliere, „L'‘inversion trinitaire’ chez H.U. von Balthasar”, *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 120, no. 3 (1998): 370-83; Matthew Lewis Sutton, „A Compelling Trinitarian Taxonomy: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of the Trinitarian Inversion and Reversion”, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 2 (2012): 161-76; Jean-Noel Dol, „L'inversion trinitaire chez Hans Urs von Balthasar”, *Revue Thomiste* 100, no. 2 (2000): 205-38; Michael Schulz, *Sein und Trinitat: Systematische Erörterungen zur Religionsphilosophie G. W. F. Hegels im ontologiegeschichtlichen Rückblick auf J. Duns Scotus und I. Kant und die Hegel-Rezeption in der Seinsauslegung und Trinitatstheologie bei W. Pannenberg, E. Jungel, K. Rahner und H.U. v. Balthasar* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1997), 798-803; Luis F. Ladaria, *La Trinidad, misterio de comunión* (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2013), 189-201.

Spirit occupies a middle place between the Father and the Son, in the theology it is the Son who is the middle person. While emphasizing often that the inversion ends at the Resurrection, Balthasar explains that the Spirit's mediatorial role in the economy ensures the genuine revelation of God's triune love and man's salvation. To better understand and assess Balthasar's novel proposal of the Spirit's mission and position in the economy and the theology, we will now indicate how, in his view, the missions of the Son and Spirit reveal the trinitarian order of God's love³⁸.

Starting at the Incarnation, Christ's perfect human obedience reveals that he is the eternally begotten Son of the Father and that also in history he is loved by the Father and reciprocates his love fully and unconditionally (Jn 14:31). Balthasar also contends that the Son, as man, can discern and receive the Father's will through the Holy Spirit because he eternally receives himself from the Father and with his begetting is given to breathe the Holy Spirit with the Father. Christ's obedience to the Father's commandment as mediated through the Spirit thus expresses in the economy the receptive dimension of the Son's eternal generation, which comprises not only his eternal procession from the Father but also his being granted participation in the Father's breathing and sending of the Spirit (*filioque*)³⁹.

In this way, Christ's obedience also discloses, albeit discreetly, the Holy Spirit's role. Balthasar claims that the Holy Spirit's eternal procession from both the Father and Son as other from them is revealed in two ways: on the one hand, through the Spirit's economic task to remind Christ – in the guise of a „rule” that he needs to obey – that the Father's commandment is what the triune God has determined from all eternity; on the other hand,

³⁸ As is known, Balthasar moves from the economy to the Trinity, as did many in the tradition that preceded him. It should also be noted that he is very conscious of the scriptural and doctrinal difficulties involved in this passage and thus resists drawing quick, simplistic lines tying the missions to the processions.

³⁹ The Son's economic breathing of the Spirit with the Father after the Resurrection is the temporal expression of the Spirit's eternal procession from the Son and the Father (*TD3*, 190 – 91). Balthasar's distinction between the possibility of co-spirating and the actual co-breathing of the Holy Spirit is merely conceptual. Yet, it has the advantage of grounding in the Trinity the economic relation of the second and third persons.

through the perfect unity of the Father's command with the Son's obedience.⁴⁰ As the third person who proceeds *principaliter* from the Father, the Spirit brings the Father's Son to Mary's womb, rests „upon” Jesus, and freely guides the obedient, Incarnate Son throughout his historical existence. As proceeding from the Father and the Son, the Spirit is „in” the Son. Christ can therefore perform miracles, remain in unity with the Father at the Cross, and give the Spirit to the Apostles after the Resurrection⁴¹.

So far, then, we have seen that, for Balthasar, the economic inversion of the immanent Trinity allows us to appreciate the Spirit's mediatorial and creative role at the Incarnation. This role, furthermore, is essential if the economy, and especially the event of the Incarnation, is to reveal to man that God is ordered, triune love. To further appreciate how the inversion allows us to understand God's historical action as the revelation of trinitarian love, we will now elucidate two essential elements of Balthasar's theology. The first regards the personal property of the Holy Spirit, that is, his procession from the Father and the Son. The second deals with the implications that Balthasar's perception of the Trinity as a mystery of love has for the relations between the persons in both the theology and the economy.

The Holy Spirit's personal property consists in his proceeding from both Father and Son as the third hypostasis, which, in Balthasar's account, possesses a twofold character as both „objective” and „subjective” Spirit⁴². The former, objective spirit, is the Holy Spirit as the third person distinct from the Father and the

⁴⁰ The „absolute, free consent between himself [the Incarnate Son] and the Father is the economic form of their common spiration of the Spirit” (*TD3*, 188). To speak of the Holy Spirit as „rule” is an insight that Balthasar borrowed from Adrienne von Speyr. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *First Glimpse at Adrienne von Speyr*, trans. Antje Lawry and Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 60.

⁴¹ *TD3*, 520-21.

⁴² Balthasar follows a personological account of the trinitarian relations rather than the Augustinian *imago Trinitatis in mente* as it was admirably unfolded by Aquinas, for whom the Son is *Verbum spirans amorem* (“Word that breathes forth love” [*ST I*, q. 43, a. 5 ad 2]) and the Spirit is love proceeding. Balthasar's teaching that „the Spirit has a twofold face from all eternity” (*TD3*, 187) borrows Hegelian terminology but gives it a new meaning. For clarification in this regard, see *TL3*, 40-47, 307-10.

Son, whereas the latter, subjective spirit, is the Holy Spirit as the common love of Father and Son. As „objective”, the Holy Spirit is the „fruit” of the Father and Son’s love and the „witness” to that love⁴³. He is personally distinct from the Father and Son as coming from them, and in this difference he both represents their common love (“fruit”) and actively witnesses to the tripersonal ever-greatness of God’s love⁴⁴. It is according to this active role in God’s triune love that the „objective” Spirit works in the economy in a way revelatory of his proceeding principally from the Father, as we saw above: he plays a creative role at the Incarnation, rests „on” Jesus, and guides him throughout his earthly mission. As „subjective”, the Holy Spirit is the „bond” of love that eternally unites and distinguishes the Father and Son while withdrawing in this very mediation.⁴⁵ The „subjective” character therefore regards the Spirit’s consubstantiality with the other persons, but it does so such that his consubstantiality is seen as the communion, or reciprocal love, of Father and Son. If God’s being-love is always already trihypostatic, then the Spirit’s divine equality with the other two persons is not considered simply in

⁴³ Balthasar’s account of the procession of the Holy Spirit hinges upon his understanding of the Father’s eternal gratuity (*Umsonst*) that begets the Son from all eternity and before time. Nothing can get behind or explicate this unfathomable gratuity. Further, the reciprocity of love between the Father and the Son „is so inconceivable that its fruitfulness gives rise to the Holy Spirit, for whose hypostasis we can find no adequate term except, once again, ‘love’: he is at once the objectivized fruit and the most intimate flame, the supreme objectivity and the highest subjectivity, of the triune love, which is identical with the divine essence” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 2: *Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004], 140 [hereafter cited as *TL2*]). For more on the procession of the Holy Spirit, see *TL2*, 157 – 65 and *TL3*, 157 – 64.

⁴⁴ As is known, Balthasar uses the analogy of the family to express this aspect (*TL3*, 160). For a similar use of the analogy of the child to elucidate the properties of the person of the Holy Spirit, see Muhlen, *Der Heilige Geist*, 76 – 77. Muhlen also uses the analogy of marriage’s causality in bringing forth offspring and of marriage’s bond to elucidate the meaning of active spiration in Thomistic theology (*duo spirantes* and *unus spirator*; *ibid.*, 148 – 56).

⁴⁵ Needless to say, the Holy Spirit also has other names in Balthasar’s rich pneumatology. As objective Spirit: gift, freedom, testimony, fruit (*TL3*, 225 – 49); as subjective: between, interior, we, middle, mediation, measure, unifier, excess, exuberance of love.

terms of the one divine *esse* – as if with the term „subjective” one were only saying: the Holy Spirit is God just as the Son and the Father are God. Rather, his consubstantiality is understood in terms of the one divine *esse* as it is hypostatized by the Father and Son inasmuch as they are one. Hence, in being their communion, the Spirit’s equality with them is also his otherness from them. As subjective Spirit, the Holy Spirit is „in” Christ. In this role, the Spirit preserves Christ’s unity-in-difference with the Father throughout his historical existence all the way to the experience of forsakenness and the descent into hell. It is also as subjective that the Spirit can be given by the risen Lord⁴⁶. Balthasar’s consideration of the objective and subjective dimensions in their unity is one of his fundamental pneumatological contributions, for it adequately addresses the complex question of the unity and distinction between personal and essential love in God. In fact, he claims that „within the Trinity... both aspects of the Holy Spirit (that is, union and distinction, love and testimony) are simply identical”⁴⁷. It is only the soteriological mission of the Son that

⁴⁶ An aspect we cannot develop here is the mediating and uniting role of the Holy Spirit throughout Christ’s Paschal mystery and in particular his experience of the Father’s abandonment on Good Friday. See Thomas R. Krenski, *Passio caritatis: Trinitarische Passiologie im Werk Hans Urs von Balthasars* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1990); Marcello Bordoni, „Cristologia e pneumatologia: L’evento pasquale come atto del Cristo e dello Spirito”, *Lateranum*

⁴⁷ no. 2 (1981): 432-92.

⁴⁷ *TL3*, 308. Similarly, „Here [in the very mysteries of generation and spiration within the Trinity] indeed the person is not distinguished from the life flow in which the Father is active generation, the Son passive generation, where being Son and being Word of the Father are not distinguishable, and *breathing forth and being breathed forth are identical as one event*, though they involve the eternal relative opposition of the Spirit to Father and Son, whose identical love is the Spirit” (*ET2*, 189-90, emphasis added). Balthasar does not speak of the procession of the Holy Spirit in terms of active and passive spiration. The category of being-gift, as explicated through the analogies of fruitfulness and the family, renders that vocabulary unnecessary while correcting its reduction of the persons to sheer relationality. Furthermore, as Dol accurately suggests, the advantage of viewing the Spirit’s objective and subjective aspects together is that it enables one to offer a cogent proposal in front of the difficulties found in the category of „notional act” with regard to the question of the *filioque* (Dol, *LEsprit de Verite et d’Amour*, 135-38). Balthasar’s understanding of person helps him to rethink the three kinds of acts commonly identified in medieval trinitarian

brings to the fore, so to say, the conceptual distinction of these two facets of the Spirit and highlights the predominance of the objective over the subjective.

The second element crucial to Balthasar's pneumatology derives from his perception of the Trinity as a whole. Balthasar sees the divine triune mystery as an eternal event of gratuitous love in which the three persons eternally hypostatize the one divine being. God's being is always „concomitantly determined by the unrepeatably unique participation” of the persons through each one's gift of self to the other two without either remainder or loss of self⁴⁸. Such an eternal triune life not only requires us to

theology: essential acts (those that regard the divine essence or nature and do not imply relation of opposition; as such, they are common to the three persons and precede consideration of God as triune); notional acts (those by which one knows what characterizes one person, or two persons, since they refer to the relations of origin that distinguish the persons); and personal acts (those which are proper and exclusive to one of the trinitarian persons and which always presuppose a relation of opposition). One could speak of divine love in terms of these three kinds of acts as follows: the essential act is indicated by the expression „God is love”, and each of the persons is love from the point of view of the divine essence; the notional act is the common active spiration of the Holy Spirit by the Father and Son, where they are seen not in their relation of opposition but as one common principle; the personal act is the Holy Spirit as person-love, person-gift. Instead of following this schema, Balthasar considers the personal acts as including the divine essence, since the three divine persons are not simply coextensive but codetermining with regard to the divine being (TL2, 136-37). The category of person as being-gift allows Balthasar to avoid the confusion between person and essence when thinking of the Father and Son's cobreathing of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son as the love that unites and binds them (subjective spirit – active spiration) and represents the hypostatization of the superabundant character of divine love (objective spirit – passive spiration). Note, too, that the emphasis of the former belongs with the third person and not so much with the source of his procession.

⁴⁸ TL2, 128 – 49, at 137. It is important to recall that Balthasar's use of the term „kenosis” when speaking of gift of self to the end belongs properly to the economy and that its use in the theology is analogical. See his letter to Krenski: „Personlicher Brief vom 19.2.1987 an den Autor: ‘Auf den Kenosen in der Trinitat nicht herumzureiten. Fur uns ist das *analogatum princeps* Phil 2 und I Kor 1, 17!! Die Innergottlichen gehoren in Gansefupchen” (Personal letter dated February 19, 1987 to the author: „Do not belabor the kenoses in the Trinity. For us the *analogatum princeps* is Phil 2 and 1 Cor 1:17!! The inner-divine ones belong in quotes”) (Krenski, *Passio caritatis*, 363n4). Integral to this is Balthasar's contention that there is no kenosis of the Holy Spirit either in the

think of the relation between divine person and being in terms of a giver, a receiver, and a gift⁴⁹. It also asks us to ponder the three dimensions proper to the gift as pertaining to each person: giving, receiving, and reciprocating. Within this view of divine being as an event of love, giving and reciprocating are considered to be act in a double sense: first, inasmuch as they are the one eternal being, and, second, inasmuch as the persons give and reciprocate. Receiving is also an act, but one more precisely described as „passive-active” In this expression, „active” reminds us that the persons are always the one divine being, and „passive” indicates the receptivity proper to the divine act that does not entail a dissolution of divine simplicity. For Balthasar, this „passive” dimension does not indicate creaturely change or becoming. Rather, as is also the case for Aquinas, „passive” regards the personal reception of the gift in its twofold dimension: a reception of the divine being, and the personal reciprocity that exists between the eternally constituted persons⁵⁰. Applying Balthasar’s theology of

economy or in God. To uphold this, he argues, would jeopardize God’s intrinsic goodness and thereby his being (*TL3*, 300). Hence, one should not simply identify gift with kenosis. Such identification would render self-love impossible for the divine persons and, contrary to what Balthasar claims, would require one to locate love’s fullness only at the end, as if divine fullness were obtained thanks to the third hypostasis instead of belonging most properly at the beginning with the Father. See, e.g., Pascal Ide, *Une Theo-logique du don: Le don dans la Trilogie de Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013). Nor should one identify Bulgakov’s account of kenosis with that of Balthasar as Gilles Emery does in „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, OP (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 27-76, at 48-49. One should also avoid erroneously interpreting the subjective face of the Spirit – with its dimension of withdrawing proper to the Spirit’s mediating role – in kenotic terms, as Dol does in his otherwise profound and insightful analysis of Balthasar’s pneumatology (Dol, *L’Esprit de Verite et d’Amour*, 155-63).

⁴⁹ Thinking in this way, the first procession could characterize the Father as giver, the Son as receiver, and the being/unity as gift whose overabundance is hypostatized by the Spirit; the second procession could characterize the Father and Son as givers, the Holy Spirit as receiver/gift, and the being of all as gift. The Father is both giver and receiver of the Son’s and Spirit’s personal responses.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., *TD3*, 186: „As we have often stressed, this handing-over of himself is no mere passivity but a form of action, which – humanly speaking – demands of the subject more self-possession and initiative than the pursuance

divine gift to his treatment of the economy, one could thus argue that when he writes that „the Son is already obedient, insofar as he entrusts himself to the activity of the Spirit in accord with the Father’s will”, he seems to be speaking of the Son’s „obedience” at the Incarnation in terms of the „passive” character of the gift that the second divine person is⁵¹. Balthasar is arguing, then, that at the Incarnation, precisely because the Son lets himself be sent

of self-imposed precepts and goals”. As is known, in light of the doctrine of creation, Aquinas argues that the Aristotelian ontology of substance is insufficient to account for being (and thus the *actus essendi* is *aliud* from *id quod est*). Hence, in a mysterious and real sense, form, without becoming matter, is the receptacle of the act of existing and mediates it to the matter it informs. See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.54.5 – 6; *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2 ad 9, and q. 3, a. 4 (hereafter cited as *De pot.*); *De ver.*, q. 27, a. 1 ad 8. If, in order to account for the ontological structure of singular beings, the doctrine of creation invites us to think of a potentiality of the form that is not that of the matter, since it is the potentiality of an act, so, *mutatis mutandis* and considering the triune God, one should be able to speak of a receptivity and reciprocation of the divine being that does not transform *ipsum esse subsistens* into creaturely being.

According to Thomas’s concept of person as subsisting relation, hypostasis is both relation and the term eternally posited by the procession. Balthasar is aware of this twofold sense and emphasizes the latter meaning. *De pot.*, q. 10, a. 3; *TL2*, 128 – 34. If persons are understood in terms of being-gift, then any account of their receptivity must include both aspects: On the one hand, receptivity regards the reception of one’s own being from another – what Richard of St. Victor defined as „existence” (*De Trinitate* 4.12 – 13). On the other hand, receptivity also indicates the exchange proper to love and hence emphasizes not so much the processions as the eternal fruitfulness and creativity of divine life. With this, of course, we do not mean that in divine life the persons „are” something that exceeds what they „do” (or vice versa). Rather, we mean that if there is no divine *esse* that is not always already trihypostatic, we cannot simply reduce the persons to the affirmation of their one divine being, nor confine fatherhood, sonship, and procession to our understanding of relations of origin and opposition. We do not know all that the divine relations are – if we abide by the principle that God is greater than what our speech utters – and, given the trinitarian *perichoresis*, we cannot simply determine „where” one person „ends” and the other „begins” Yet, while being ever-greater, God’s eternal life always exists as one tripersonal, perichoretic communion where there is no confusion of persons. Divine *perichoresis* does not blur personal distinction or ignore that the unoriginated character of the Father is what guarantees divine communion. Nor does *perichoresis* require that the divine persons be undetermined in order for God to be *summa caritas*.

⁵¹ *TD3*, 186.

by the Father and conceived by the Holy Spirit, he is fully expressing his filial identity. In this regard, „obedience” can be taken in an analogical, not univocal, sense that corrects the apparent confusion between the economy and the theology⁵². The mystery of the Incarnation, therefore, is not simply something God does to creation but the revelation of triune love and the one triune will through the union of the two natures in the person of the Son and through Christ’s perfect human obedience to the Father’s will as it is mediated to him by the Spirit. In this way, Balthasar seeks to keep together what we described earlier as Logos Christology and Spirit Christology.

Balthasar’s work invites us to bring these two elements of his theology – namely, the fundamental features of the Holy Spirit as both objective and subjective Spirit, and the active and passive dimensions of each divine person required by the Trinity’s being-gift – together with his inclusion of Jesus’ conception within his salvific and unconditional „obedience”, where this obedien-

⁵² *TL3*, 184. Balthasar’s Ignatian understanding of obedience and *indiferencia* brings him at times to emphasize the passive dimension of Christ’s obedience to such an extent that some ambiguities, above all if read out of context, overburden his endlessly rich theological reflection. Even when one realizes that passivity is a form of action in which the gift’s receptive dimension is highlighted, it remains the case that the term „obedience” is inadequate for speaking of the Son’s letting himself be sent by the Father and conceived by the Spirit before the actual Incarnation takes place. If taken univocally, this term would confuse eternal procession with the historical missions and would either turn history into a moment of a divine self-constitutive process or introduce an ontological distinction between the Son and the other persons. Further, „obedience” is unsuitable not only because it presupposes distinctions of will – which is not the case in the Trinity – but also because at the Incarnation, unlike at Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit comes to Mary, not Jesus. More important than this exegetical point, however, is the pneumatological observation that, since the Spirit’s creative function – which highlights the active dimension proper to the third hypostasis – regards Jesus’ human nature, his action only partially explains the event of the Incarnation. One thus needs to supplement the active role of the Spirit with that of the Son. Yet, in order to avoid drawing hasty conclusions about Balthasar’s account of the economy-theology relationship and of the divine persons’ unity with regard to the issue of distinctions of will, it is good to recall that he upholds the unity of the Trinity and its design for man: „Here [regarding the unanimous salvific decision of the Trinity] we may not speak of priorities: . . . *The Son’s self-offering is equally original* in this work; so is the self-offering of the Spirit” (*TD3*, 187 – 88, emphasis original). See also *TD3*, 519.

ce is understood as the historical expression of the Son's eternal begetting that, together with the Father, is fruitful in the Spirit. Drawing these points together, we can suggest that, for Balthasar, the coworking of the Son and the Spirit at the Incarnation consists in the Son's passive-active embrace of his being sent by the Father and conceived in Mary by the Spirit. At the conception, the creative and sanctifying Spirit enacts the divine will, which he mediates to the Incarnate Son as he leads him throughout the event of his existence. Thanks to the Spirit of love, the Son remains united to the Father all along this historical path.

4. Creator spirit: further clarifications

Having seen the trinitarian presuppositions that Balthasar draws from the missions of the Son and the Spirit, we can now address two outstanding issues regarding the relation between the Holy Spirit's mediatorial role in the economy and the order of the processions. The first concerns Balthasar's understanding of the Spirit's creative role at the Incarnation, particularly in its relation to the passive-active dimension of the Son's mission. Is the Spirit's production of Christ's human nature consistent with the trinitarian *taxis* entailed by the *filioque*? The second issue regards whether or not Balthasar's „inversion” implies a change in the order of the processions. Here, we suggest interpretations of Balthasar's proposal in hopes of clarifying his position with regard to both questions.

In approaching the first issue, we recall that Balthasar affirms the *filioque* and states often that it must be upheld in order to remain faithful to Christ's revelation of God as triune love. Yet he also contends that at the Incarnation, when the Son surrenders himself to the Spirit, he „becomes in one respect a product of the Spirit [*Produkt des Geistes*]”, analogously to the Spirit's being in God „the product of the united spiration [*Produkt der gemeinsamen Hauchung*] of Father and Son”⁵³. Of course, Balthasar is

⁵³ TD3, 186. „[I]n thus surrendering himself, the Son, the incarnate One, becomes in one respect a product of the Spirit who brings him forth *ex Maria Virgine*, although within the Trinity itself the Spirit is the product of the united spiration of Father and Son” (TD3, 186).

fully aware that, at the Incarnation, the human nature is hypostatized in the person of the Son, not the Spirit⁵⁴, just as he also has a profound understanding of the problems with the theological accounts (ancient and modern) that appear unable to justify the objective dimension of the creative Spirit⁵⁵. It is true that in the cited ambiguous passage Balthasar does not clarify whether „product” refers to Christ’s human nature or to the Incarnation itself. However, in light of his understanding of the hypostatic union of the natures in the person of the Son, it is fitting to suggest that the qualification „in one respect” invites us to realize that by „product” he intends the human nature and not the Incarnation itself.⁵⁶ The ambiguous identification of the Incarnate Son as a product of the Spirit’s activity is not a denial of the Son’s proper activity at the Incarnation or a proof of the inadequacy of the language of passive/active, subjective/ objective, gift/being. Even if it places an unbalanced emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit, Balthasar’s proposal derives from the real and pressing need to offer a cogent and profound account of the Spirit’s active, mediatorial role at the Incarnation, and to do so in light of the Son’s obedience.

We can also say – anticipating the second issue of whether Balthasar’s proposal implies a change in the trinitarian *taxis* – that his calling the Son a „product” of the Holy Spirit does not mean that during Christ’s historical existence the eternal Son proceeds from the Father and the Spirit. Were this the case, Balthasar would have to admit that the Spirit has an active role at the Incarnation because he is involved in the Son’s generation – which he is not – or that he plays that role only for the duration of the event of the Incarnation, which would represent a change in the third

⁵⁴ Balthasar says that „the Spirit is sent to incarnate the Son [*um den Sohn zu inkarnieren*]” (TL3, 182), but he soon clarifies this ambiguous assertion by stating: „We must avoid saying that, in descending upon Mary, the Spirit ‘created’ [*geschaffen*] the union of the two natures of the Logos” (TL3, 183).

⁵⁵ TL3, 33-60.

⁵⁶ In a similar passage, Balthasar claims that Christ has the Spirit within him – and thus he proceeds also from the Son – “*insofar* as Jesus is the fruit [*Frucht*] of the Spirit’s overshadowing of the Virgin” (TD3, 520, emphasis added).

hypostasis⁵⁷. Rather, the mediatorial role of the Spirit enables him to act on Christ's human nature by creating it⁵⁸.

To better understand the Spirit's active role in the Incarnation and its relation to the Son's mission, we must recognize that the „passive-active” dimension of the latter is inseparable from its „active-active” dimension: the passivity of the Son's „being sent” and „being conceived”, along with his availability to do the Father's will after being made flesh, is simultaneous with the activity of his assumption of human nature. Thus, it is fitting to say that the relative priority of the Holy Spirit is conceptual and not chronological, because Jesus' existence only takes place with the Son's assumption of the human nature created by the Spirit.⁵⁹ Yet, as we mentioned, this clarification does not mean that we are placing the Spirit's action at a later moment, following the Son's assumption of human nature. On the contrary, we have seen that one strength of Balthasar's argument is his attempt to avoid excluding the third hypostasis from the actual event of the Incarnation. We can also grasp the unity of the Son's and Spirit's respective activities at the Incarnation in light of two further points. First, we recall that for Balthasar the Son's letting himself be sent

⁵⁷ TL3, 55 – 59, 161 – 62. It is important to recall that the trinitarian order is fully revealed only at the Resurrection. There we learn that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Son because the Son sends him. While Scripture does say that the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son and the Father because they both send him, it does not say that the Holy Spirit sends the Father or the Son. One must therefore conclude that the Father and Son do not proceed from the Spirit but he from them. Hence, it is illegitimate to account for the trinitarian *taxis* by first transposing into God the Lucan passage regarding the Annunciation (Lk 1:35) or the Pauline statement that the Spirit is the „spirit of sonship” (Rom 8:15) and then contending that, because in the economy the Son is conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary, he is eternally generated in the Spirit of the Father. Theological proposals suggesting that the Son proceeds *spirituque* or that the Spirit is the generation itself (Francois-Xavier Durrwell) lack scriptural grounds.

⁵⁸ TL3, 157 – 64, 207 – 49. Admittedly, even if this clarification is adequate, it remains the case that Balthasar's necessary emphasis on the Spirit's active role at the Incarnation would have been strengthened by a more explicit distinction between Christ's two natures and the relation of the Holy Spirit to both – doing this without, however, losing the perichoretic unity of the event of the Incarnation.

⁵⁹ Otherwise, one would be upholding an adoptionistic Christology, which Balthasar does not do. See TL3, 38.

and conceived reveals in history the „passive” dimension of his eternal filial identity according to which he receives his being and his mission from the Father⁶⁰. It is not expressive of a historical, human obedient surrender. The passive dimension is, as we saw, inseparable from the eternal act that God is. Second, we suggest that to affirm the coexistence of the passive and active dimensions of the person of the Son at the Incarnation requires a concept of obedience according to which the „letting be”, or passive dimension, also retains the scriptural optative mood of the verb. To „let be” expresses the active „desire” to do God’s will. The receptive „letting be”, according to Scripture, is also the loving willingness that allows God’s design to be unfolded through oneself. Accepting not to be the origin or destiny of one’s own action takes place within the preceding loving design of the Father in whose fulfillment lies one’s own. Mary’s „yes” at the Incarnation is precisely a „letting be” that expresses her joyful, active desire to embrace the good news (Lk 1:38). *Mutatis mutandis*, we can also say that the Son’s „passive” allowing himself to be sent is coextensive with the active, eternal willingness to become flesh that is reflected in his historical assumption of the human nature created by the Spirit⁶¹. In this sense, the active-passive polarity of the

⁶⁰ In this regard, it is good to remember that Balthasar too emphasizes the priority of filiality. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unless You Become like This Child*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 64.

⁶¹ “And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word’ [εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου]” (Lk 1:38). As de La Potterie argues, γένοιτό is the optative aorist of γίνομαι, and as „optative” expresses a desire, a wish. See Ignace de La Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, trans. Bertrand Buby (New York: Alba House, 1992), 34-35. Needless to say, Ignatian *indiferencia* could also be explained as the loving, totalizing response to Christ’s preceding love, a response that wants only what God wants and thus neither predetermines God’s requests nor sets conditions of any kind. Balthasar’s constant stress on self-surrender and on appropriation as expropriation intends to correct man’s penchant for egoism. The invitation to recall the use of the optative mood to express obediential „letting be” is, then, one of emphasis, but it does have profound implications. A further point in this regard needs to be made. Although commentators on Balthasar tend to highlight the internal difficulties his soteriology may present relative to more traditional accounts of Christ’s self-sacrifice, Balthasar’s cultural and historical context and his understanding of the theological mission he was given shed much light on his theological proposal. In fact, it is fitting to say that

Son's mission at the Incarnation is explicitly ordered by Christ's willingness to return to be with the Father (Jn 16:28) and to bring everything to him in a love whose infinite measure is represented by the Spirit of the Father and Son (Jn 3:34-35).

These considerations enable us to address the second issue regarding the order of the processions. Balthasar writes that „the ‘economic’ inversion changes nothing with regard to the *taxis* of the Divine Persons” Yet shortly after he also says, „At the same time one would have to renounce the idea of an exact correspondence of the immanent and economic *taxis*”⁶². Hence, the question naturally follows: does the mediatorial role of the Holy Spirit at the Incarnation represent a change in the trinitarian order of the processions, even if only during the limited time of Christ's *status exinanitionis* – Balthasar's claims to the contrary notwithstanding? There are strong reasons for maintaining that the Spirit's economic mediation does not necessitate a reordering of the trinitarian persons. As Aquinas and others have already noted, when the Holy Spirit is seen as the mutual love of the Father and the Son rather than according to his origin, he appears as the middle

Balthasar and von Speyr's attempt to respond to Luther's theology of the Cross was one of the main elements leading Balthasar, in his account of his own charismatic experience of Christianity (that of St. Ignatius), to emphasize the negation and surrender involved in the gift of self. See, among other places, *TL2*, 317-61. If this is the case, then Balthasar's needed answer would be helped by a more robust integration of the positive element deriving from the Resurrection and the historical experience of the hundredfold (Mt 19:29), both of which require the explicit retrieval of the anthropological dimension of eros proper to agape.

⁶² *TL3*, 182-83. Regarding passages like this one and that found in *TD3*, 191 (“What we have termed ‘inversion’ is ultimately *only the projection* of the immanent Trinity onto the ‘economic’ plane, whereby the Son's ‘correspondence’ to the Father is articulated as obedience”, emphasis added), Ladaria wonders whether Balthasar preserves the right order between the economy and the theology (Ladaria, *La Trinidad, misterio de comunión*, 195 – 96). Dol, a careful reader of Balthasar's work, also questions whether Balthasar upholds the second part of Rahner's axiom but, contrary to what is common, opposes the first (Dol, „L'inversion trinitaire”, 223). Dol also thinks that Balthasar's proposal of the trinitarian inversion may be better understood as a „pneumatological” inversion according to which, in the economy, the objective Spirit has a priority over the subjective Spirit. This would invert the relative priority that, in Dol's interpretation, Balthasar grants to the subjective Spirit in God as a necessary condition for affirming the divine being and unity (Dol, *LEsprit de Verite et d'Amour*, 250–51).

person between the other two⁶³. In the economy, then, the Spirit unites the Father and the Incarnate Son in one love because doing so is one of his personal properties in the theology. Otherwise, the Spirit would either become a different person or constitute himself as the divine person he is in the economy.

The claim that the trinitarian *taxis* is not changed by the „soteriological inversion” is also supported by the fact, which Balthasar indicates, that all the dimensions of each divine person remain simultaneously in effect throughout Christ’s historical existence, even if one prevails over the other⁶⁴. As we saw, the inversion is built on what Balthasar perceives as the economic, temporal predominance (from birth to Resurrection) of the Spirit’s objective-active dimension and the Incarnate Son’s passive-receptive dimension, which is manifested as obedience. Yet, given that the other dimensions of each person (the active giving of himself of the Incarnate Son and the passive letting himself be given of the Spirit) remain throughout the event of the Incarnation, by using the term „inversion” Balthasar is encouraging us to see the Spirit’s mission to Christ at the Incarnation from the point of view of the objective dimension of his eternal person. He thus considers the Spirit as having come from the Father and the Son eternally as the third hypostasis, the fruit who hypostatizes the unity of God’s love. Correspondingly, he presents the Spirit’s active role in the economy, where he prepares the body that the Logos assumes and unites the Incarnate Son with the Father. In other words, Balthasar’s inversion leads us to see the person of the Spirit as the term of the relation from which he eternally proceeds and not so much as the relation of procession itself – which

⁶³ *ST I*, q. 37, a. 1 ad 3. For a helpful and careful account of the Holy Spirit as the mutual love of Father and Son, see Francois Bourassa, *Questions de theologie trinitaire* (Rome: Presses de l’Universite Gregorienne, 1970), 59 – 123.

⁶⁴ Doubtless, if Balthasar highlights different aspects of the trinitarian persons in order to articulate an account of our faith in the Incarnation, at bottom there is no difference, nor can there be, between the order of the processions in the economy and the theology. One sees that this is the case when Balthasar talks about issues such as the sexual difference, the male priesthood, Christ’s relationship with the Church, or the nuptial character of the Eucharist. When dealing with these themes, Balthasar emphasizes the active rather than the passive dimension of Christ.

is not lost – since from the latter it is more difficult to account for the active role of the Spirit that Scripture indicates. In this sense, inversion is not synonymous with a change in the trinitarian order but represents the defense of the Spirit's active role, without which one cannot give an adequate account of the concrete way God carried out our salvation. The so-called soteriological trinitarian inversion, then, is the historical revelation of the depth of the trinitarian mystery, in which the action of each divine person illuminates the unfathomable tripersonal unity of God's being-love. Thus, the lack of „an exact correspondence of the immanent and economic *taxis*” does not entail an alteration of the *filioque* or a disregard for the trinitarian *taxis*. Rather, it is an indication, admittedly an ambiguous one, that the communion of love that the triune God is cannot be reduced to his economic action. The unity of the objective and subjective aspects of the person of the Spirit („unity and distinction, love and witness”), as well as the active and passive dimensions of the Son, prevent us from thinking that the economy either exhausts or constitutes the Trinity as such. Positively stated, they help us to see that God's eternal event of love remains ever-greater, not because he is other than the ordered communion of love he revealed himself to be, but because the eternal love of the Father for the Son in the Spirit is always the same and always new.

In sum, Balthasar's immensely rich theological proposal seeks to offer a justification of the trinitarian grounds of the mystery of the Incarnation. His account of the Holy Spirit as the creator and sanctifier who actively participates in the Incarnation retrieves a crucial albeit long-neglected aspect of Christian intelligence of both the trinitarian dogma and the mystery of the Incarnation. Benefitting from Balthasar's proposal and from the foregoing elucidation of the advantages and difficulties it presents, we can now offer a synthetic proposal regarding the coworking of the Son and Holy Spirit at the Incarnation.

5. The Holy Spirit, communion with christ⁶⁵

Balthasar's account of the Holy Spirit in terms of his objective and subjective dimensions follows Scripture very closely. In fact, the gospels present, as Balthasar does, a progression from the predominance of the objective-active dimension throughout Christ's earthly life to the appearance of the subjective dimension at the Resurrection and Ascension. As we have seen, the objective dimension reveals the Spirit as the Spirit of the Father. As such, he descends upon Jesus at the baptism, rests on him, and leads him in his mission. Christ obeys the Father in the Spirit, as Balthasar also acutely remarked; in the Spirit, Christ offers the sacrifice of his own life to the Father. Once this task is completed, Jesus Christ is „designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:4)⁶⁶. It is at the Resurrection that Christ's humanity is fulfilled, that is, glorified, and that his divinity as the true Son of God is finally revealed. The Father, too, is fully revealed at the Resurrection as the giver of life, confirming what was revealed to Abraham (Rom 4:17). Furthermore, the Spirit's own personhood is more deeply revealed when the risen and glorified Christ sends the Spirit with the Father after his Ascension. In thus being sent, he appears as the Spirit of both the Father and of the Son – that is, as „subjective Spirit” The Spirit can be said to be of the Son, and hence in a way to proceed from him, because Christ sends him. It is only then that the Church can realize that Christ „was full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14) and understand why he could not give the Spirit until his sacrifice was complete (Jn 7:39).

In addition to confirming the objective and subjective dimensions of the Spirit and the order in which they are revealed, Scripture emphasizes yet another crucial aspect: throughout Christ's life and the achievement of his destiny, the Holy Spirit is at the service of the humanization of the Son made flesh. The Spirit, as Spirit of the Father, is sent to him so that the eternal Son may

⁶⁵ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3.24.1.

⁶⁶ This is also the case with regard to the promises to send the Spirit. When Jesus sends the Spirit, he sends him from the Father, from whom the Spirit proceeds (Jn 15:26). The Father himself will send the Spirit either at the request of Jesus (Jn 14:16) or in Jesus' name (Jn 14:26).

become son of Mary, and, going through the Cross, become the perfect man when he is raised and glorified. It thus seems best to understand the perichoretic coworking of the Spirit at the conception of Christ within this „anthropological” framework and to read Balthasar’s soteriological proposal in the same light. The Holy Spirit’s indispensable creative role is that of making it possible for the Son to become man and for men to become themselves in the Son. The „yes” that man is called to give and that constitutes his holiness is indeed an obedient one, but this „yes” is also creative, glorifying, worshiping, fruitful, joyful, and sacrificing. The mediation of the Spirit of the Father, which ensures that Christ obeys humanly, is part of his growth into human perfection, that is, into the total, ever-new, clarifying, and liberating dependence on the Father, who superabundantly affirms the goodness of man’s finite being and thus illumines its real meaning (Heb 5:8). If this humanization is the main mediatorial work of the Holy Spirit and the goal of Christ’s existence, it is appropriate to say that the Son and Spirit’s coworking at the Incarnation consists in the Spirit’s making the human nature available to the Son as and because the Son assumes it⁶⁷ The simultaneity of both actions – creation and assumption – requires us to abandon the idea of an abstract human nature that is first created and only at a second moment „obediently” hypostatized by the Son. Moreover, to affirm this simultaneity is not to disregard the Spirit’s relative priority at the Incarnation. Indeed, that priority accords with the trinitarian order discussed above in terms of passivity and activity: the Son receives human nature from the Spirit of the Father because he is the eternally begotten Son who receives from the Father both himself and the capacity to co-breathe the Spirit. This very receptivity, however, preserves the active dimension of the Son’s person. His conception, as operated by the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35), is his very hypostatization of the human nature to which he wanted to unite himself from all eternity. This reciprocal working of Son and Spirit through each other in fulfillment of the Father’s sending is the way in which the triune God concretely opens himself up to Mary

⁶⁷ This proposal builds on Augustine’s formula „ipsa assumptione creatur” (he was created in the very act of being assumed) (Augustine, *Contra sermonem Arianorum* 6.8).

and, even more astonishingly, with Mary, so that through her the human being may finally be what he was created to be.

In order to deepen our understanding of this humanization – of Christ and of the redeemed – and to grasp better the necessity of the Spirit's active role at the Incarnation, we would like to mention a further reason for the actual form of this beautiful mystery. The Spirit, rather than laboring to eliminate the flesh, is the one who ensures the fulfillment of the body's meaning. It is the objective, creator Spirit who gives Christ human nature – that is, the body and spirit – that the eternal Son assumes at the very moment it is created. In this way, Christ lives his divine and human sonship in a specific time and place. The great news is thus uttered through his very bodily existence: God is present with us; he is among us. At the same time, once the risen, glorified Christ sends the Spirit with the Father, the Spirit, as Lord and giver of life, ensures that the body of Christ is expanded to include within it, so to speak, all those whom the Father has called (Rom 8:30). Man's salvation is an incorporation into Christ's glorious body so that he may enjoy, in the Spirit, the love of the Father in adoptive sonship (Jn 1:12). The Spirit does not universalize Christ's salvation by eliminating his or our bodiliness but through the very redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23). In this way, the objective and subjective eternal Spirit is the Spirit of sonship (Rom 8:15). His action in the economy thus reveals that lived filiation is the meaning of the created body and serves to make such filiation possible.

Furthermore, as we see in Mary, the human person, having been made a son in the Son by the Holy Spirit, reciprocates this gift of participation in God's life not only through a grateful and filial „yes” but also through virginal motherhood and nuptiality. If filiality emphasizes the gift of participating in the divine nature, inasmuch as that is possible for man, and of responding to the giver, virginal motherhood and nuptiality indicate the kind of fruitful union with him that God wants to grant to those who become, in adoptive sonship, one body in Christ (1 Cor 16:17). In this sense, the Holy Spirit is the one who brings the bride, the Church, to Christ and makes them one in Christ's risen body. The Church and her members thus become one spirit with Christ (“He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” [1 Cor

6:17])⁶⁸. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, the Spirit – he who is most intimate in God – reaches out, so to speak, to what is most distant from him, man’s bodiliness, and makes it yield the fruit that expresses the human person: the filial response that gives itself nuptially and participates in the begetting of the Son, that is, in the response of the glorified and risen Christ to the Father’s merciful love. It is this love that transfigures in ever-new ways the human person

who lets himself be grasped by God, that is, who accepts God’s fatherhood toward him. Thanks to the perichoretic involvement of each of the three divine persons in the Incarnation, we also realize that the astonishing profundity of this mystery in its complete form includes the risen Christ’s incorporation of human nature into his co-breathing of the Spirit. In this way, the saints can receive the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, the Incarnate eternal Son of the eternal Father. Thus, they not only participate in his filiality by grace but also, in an incomprehensible way, gratuitously enjoy in him the co-breathing of the Spirit.

⁶⁸ In his multivolume work of sacramental theology, Giorgio Mazzanti interprets the sacraments in a nuptial key according to the analogy between the mysteries of the Eucharist and Incarnation. Mazzanti proposes reading the event of the Incarnation of the Logos as a nuptial union. Contrary to some traditional accounts, however, he cogently criticizes interpretations that apply the nuptial analogy to the union of the two natures in the person of the Logos. Nuptiality, he clarifies, is not a relation between two natures but is the free union of two embodied persons. In this regard, he claims that it is possible to speak of the Incarnation in nuptial terms if the union is that of the Virgin Mary’s human „yes” with the Son’s divine „yes” to the Incarnation – a union made possible by the Holy Spirit. „Here the nuptial mystery of the two becoming one flesh is fulfilled: they are the two personal subjects who say yes to each other by saying their common yes to God in the common act of love of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who animates and sustains the personal and the communal yes” (Giorgio Mazzanti, *Teologia sponsale e sacramento delle nozze: Simbolo e simbolismo nuziale* [Bologna: EDB, 2002], 52). While offering a very rich array of insights, Mazzanti’s nuptial account of the Incarnation fails to address the fact that, according to Scripture, Mary’s identity as bride is most properly realized at the foot of the Cross. At the Annunciation, it is her virginal motherhood rather than her bridal identity that informs her relationship to the Son. Further, human spouses offer their „yes” primarily to each other – even if it can be argued that in doing so they also say „yes” to God. This nuptial consent does not take place in the same way at the Annunciation, because Mary utters her „yes” not directly to the second person of the Trinity but to God through his angel.

In light of the Spirit's role in creating Christ's human nature, body and spirit, and incorporating man into it, we come to understand more profoundly the necessity of his coworking in the Incarnation as a soteriological mystery. Along with the Father's sending and the Son's descent, the Spirit's creative, sanctifying, and glorifying action are needed in order for Christ to be a human being, circumscribed by his bodily existence to a specific time and place. The Holy Spirit's action is needed, likewise, for Christ's salvific action to acquire its universal significance and for every man to receive, as man, the Father's love. The work of the Spirit is therefore necessary for the kenotic Incarnation of the Logos to have both its concrete historical singularity and its universal significance, which is offered through the redemption of the body and the final incorporation of men and women into the glorified body of Christ.

To conclude, we cast a final glance toward the God who has revealed himself in Christ and called man to such a destiny. As we have seen, Balthasar's reflection on the triune God, with its profoundly rich pneumatology, offers an adequate basis on which to account for the mediatorial role of the Holy Spirit. Balthasar elucidates how the unity of the Spirit's subjective and objective properties (unity and distinction, love and fruit) renders it impossible to think of the Father and the Son – or of the fatherhood and filiality that constitute them as divine persons – without the Holy Spirit. At the same time, this „twofold face” of the Spirit secures his distinction as person-love from the Trinity's essential love⁶⁹ If the third hypostasis is other from the Father and the Son as both their mutual love and the fruit of this love, then we can say that this same love takes place as the spiration of the Spirit and finds its fulfillment in him. To be sure, such fulfillment does not entail the Hegelian priority of the Spirit over an always already empty Father. Rather, it means the confirmation of the Father's original gift of self to the Son in the Spirit, a gift in which he does not lose himself⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ TD3, 187. The elucidation of this key theme must be postponed to another occasion.

⁷⁰ „Without the mutual love that is the Holy Spirit”, writes Ladaria, „the Father and the Son cannot be united and, we may add, if they are not united,

This unity of fruit and reciprocal love, of objective and subjective Spirit, is the trinitarian ground that illuminates the paradoxical form of the Holy Spirit's mission. In giving the Son the human nature he assumes, in uniting the Incarnate Son's will with the Father's throughout the complete arc of the event of the Incarnation, and in uniting the bride to the bridegroom, the Holy Spirit „lets be”, and to do so he withdraws, so to speak. The Spirit's coworking in the mystery of the Son's Incarnation is one of mediating in withdrawing. The Spirit, as Balthasar often emphasized, is the „seeing eye”, the light that lets one see because it hides itself in this allowing⁷¹. Precisely because he is the love of the Father and the Son as their fruit and their unity-in-difference, he is the love that unites and retreats in that unity, so to speak. In other words, because he, as person, is what the Father and the Son are together (spirit, love, holy, being), to „see him” is to see the other two persons⁷². Inver-

they cannot be. The classical doctrine of the Spirit as love of the Father and the Son offers, I believe, a very significant basis for responding to the legitimate concern not to relegate the Holy Spirit to a second place” (*La Trinidad, misterio de comunión*, 230). Earlier, Ladaria cites Schmidbaur's remarkable account of the relation between essential and personal love in Aquinas, and, given its pertinence to our reflections, it is worthwhile to cite it here: „The Father and the Son love each other by means of their being-love, but this being-love, inasmuch as it is fulfilled by subjects who are in relation, always already unites itself with the relation of active spiration, and thus it receives a notional character. The act of interpersonal love happens in God ‘from the beginning’ as the spiration of the Holy Spirit, and thus it is consummated only *in* the proceeding of the Holy Spirit. These two aspects are so intimately united that one must say: their reciprocal love is the procession of the Holy Spirit, and vice versa. Every divine love, including the love that each person has for himself and for creatures (*ST I*, q. 37, a. 2 ad. 3) happens in the Holy Spirit and thanks to him. Indeed, one could even say: it fulfills itself *as* the procession of the Holy Spirit” (Hans Christian Schmidbaur, *Personarum Trinitas: Die trinitarische Gotteslehre des heiligen Thomas von Aquin* [St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1995], 639).

⁷¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, „The Unknown Lying beyond the Word”, in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 3: *Creator Spirit*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 105 – 16, at 111; Emmanuel Tourpe, „Esprit, nature et médiation: Un questionnement philosophique de ‘la Théologie III’ de H. U. von Balthasar”, *Communio: Revue Catholique Internationale* 23, no. 1-2 (1998): 182-98.

⁷² One can also read in this sense Muhlen's famous account of the Holy Spirit as „one person in two persons. Perhaps this shows most clearly the personal peculiarity of the Holy Spirit. He binds the Father and the Son in such

sely, because he is the love of the Father for the Son and of the Son for the Father, and because in this personal love they are one, they are not themselves without the Spirit. He can thus be a nonobstructive medium in the economy. The gift of the Spirit by the Father and the risen Christ is one of communion with Christ, the eternal Son of the Father and Son of Mary. The Holy Spirit can be this gift because he is the person-communion who coworks with the Son the mystery of the hypostatic union. The Holy Spirit, as we explained earlier, unites us with Christ, the Incarnate Son of the Father, and makes us one with him in mutual love (Gal 4:4-6). By withdrawing in this unity, he allows the beauty of the truth disclosed through the Son's Incarnation to be seen:

The Icon of the Mother of God with Child, the Logos and the creature receiving Him, filled with the Holy Spirit, in unity and its indivisibility, is *the full image* of humankind. The Godman and the Pneumatophore, the Son and the Mother, displaying the revelation of the Father through the Second and Third hypostases, also display the fullness of the Divine image in humankind, or, to put it another way, of the human image in God⁷³.

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a way that he – insofar as he is a person – is numerically one and the same person in the other two persons” (Muhlen, *Der Heilige Geist*, 164).

⁷³ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 82 (emphasis original).

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