

Giving Perfections, Receiving Perfections

The Essential Divine Attributes in Aquinas's Trinitarian Theology

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Through much of the twentieth century, St. Thomas Aquinas was accused of rendering the essential divine attributes—God's omniscience and omnipotence, God's actuality and existence, God's life and God's joy, and so on—in isolation from the Trinity. More recent scholarship has debunked the crasser versions of this charge. Yet no study has delved directly into the deep and sweeping and manifold ways in which the Trinity enters into, enriches, and intrinsically informs Thomas's account of the essential attributes. This thesis will do just that. Specifically, it will highlight ways in which Thomas continues to develop his account of the essential attributes *within* his Trinitarian theology, as the Revelation of the Trinity opens up depths within those attributes that could not otherwise be sounded.

More specifically still, Chapter One will show that the inner logic of the attributes—and especially of intellect, will, and simplicity, as presented within Thomas's Trinitarian theology, and as illumined by Revelation—requires that none of the essential attributes could exist *at all* were they not shared by three Persons. Chapter Two will survey the interpersonal underpinnings of Thomas's "psychological" framework, and will plumb both the Son's perfect *reception* of all perfection from the Father, and the Father's fully *giving* all fullness to the Son. And Chapter Three will show that the essential attributes—which are numerically one in the divine Persons—are inwardly shaped by and shot through with this intra-divine interpersonal giving and receiving: Thomas explicitly teaches that the essential attributes exist *as giving* in the Father, *as receiving* in the Son, and *as receiving* in the Holy Spirit; and principles basic to his Trinitarian thought demand that *all* of those attributes *must* exist as thus giving and receiving, and in no other way, or they could exist at all. And a Conclusion will briefly consider what it might mean for faith and reason that natural reason *cannot* discover the Trinity, even as the inner meanings of the attributes—which natural reason *can* discover—demand that those attributes be given and received by, and exist as giving and as receiving in, distinct divine Persons.