Macchia lecture, Week 3, pt.2:

The “processions” describes God in God’s eternal, inner life. The “missions” then describes the work of the triune God in history. The former (processions) is called the “immanent” Trinity and the latter (missions), the “economic” Trinity. There is a correspondence between the two. After all, there is only one Trinity!

Key to understanding the processions in God’s inner life is John 5:26: “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (Jn. 5:26). The Son possesses the life of God eternally and fully “in himself” just as the Father does, and this is described by Jesus as “granted” by the Father! Thus, the Son must have come forth (proceeded) from the Father in a way that allowed him to eternally share fully in the Father’s deity! The same may be said of the Spirit, who Jesus said came forth (proceeded) from the Father as well (John 15:26), perhaps, “through the Son.”

When we talk about the “processions” we are not talking about something that had a beginning or a process in time. These processions had no beginning and doesn’t develop because they are *eternally perfect*. Again, God’s life or essence (shared from the Father fully by the Son and the Spirit) is eternal. So, if one could imagine a fountain that always flowed fully and perfectly from all eternity (without a beginning), with the Father as the source, the Son as the mediator, and the Spirit as the overflow, one can then imagine the processions.

The processions are indicated by the missions of the Triune God in time. Notice that the Father sends the Son and the Spirit into the world, but the Father is never sent! This is because the Father is eternally the source of deity (granting that the Son and the Spirit have divine life in themselves as the Father does). Notice that in time the Son mediates the Father’s love by mediating the Spirit, and the Spirit “overflows” the Son’s life and presence to mediate these to us as well. So, the missions reveal the processions in time: The Father is the source, the Son is the mediator, and the Spirit is the “perfecter” who perfects in us the presence and victory of the Son (and the presence and victory of the Father’s love).

Importantly, the processions explain both the one essence (unity) and the three persons (plurality) of God. Since there is only one source of deity (the Father), there can only be one God. The Son and the Spirit share fully in the *Father’s* deity. Thus, there is only one God. BUT, the Son and the Spirit proceeded eternally (without beginning) from the Father *differently*. The Son was eternally “begotten” (or generated) from the Father. The Son thus came forth as a Son, with a “Son-like” (filial) relationship with the Father. The Son is thus eternally “beloved” of the Father (John 17:24). But the Spirit did not proceed from the Father in this way (begotten). The Spirit proceeded through a kind of breathing forth (spiration), not literally, but something like this. So, the Spirit does not behave as a Son but rather as a mighty wind or river that encircles eternally the shared love of the Father and the Son, enriching their love, representing its delight, and overflowing it so as to be poured forth into us. So, the processions reveal at the same time both the oneness of God (the Son and the Spirit sharing fully in the *one essence* of the Father) and the threeness (the Son and the Spirit sharing in this one deity *differently*).

The doctrine of “appropriation” thus indicates what is uniquely stressed by each of the divine persons: The Father as eternal source (who loves and sends), the “begotten” Son as mediator (who is beloved on our behalf and is sent to redeem), and the “breathed forth” Spirit (who is the gift of divine love, sent to renew or perfect redemption in us). AND the persons, though different, are indivisible (distinct but not separable). And all three divine persons are involved in all that each does, even though each has a distinct emphasis. So, when the Son was incarnated, the Father and the Spirit were not on vacation! The Father was sending him into flesh and the Spirit was conceiving that flesh as the fitting vehicle of incarnation. And when the Spirit was poured forth (or overflowing), the Father was pouring him forth and the Son was participating fully in that pouring forth, mediating it in such a way that the Spirit ends up bringing with him the very presence and characteristics of the Son! Though there is distinctiveness to each person and his work, all three exist eternally and act in time as one indivisible God.

Lastly, all three persons commune in perfect love and incorporate us into that communion. This is why God does not need creation to love or be fulfilled, for God knows and is perfect love eternally (though God delighted in creating and loving creation). The Triune God opens up this communion to us in time. The inner communion of the three persons is infinitely deep, to the point where they fully “interpenetrate” one another. This is called the doctrine of “perichoresis.” Jesus said that the Father was “in him” and he was “in the Father” (John 17:21). The Spirit interpenetrates them both in a way that celebrates it and turns it into an eternal “dance!” (I think!)