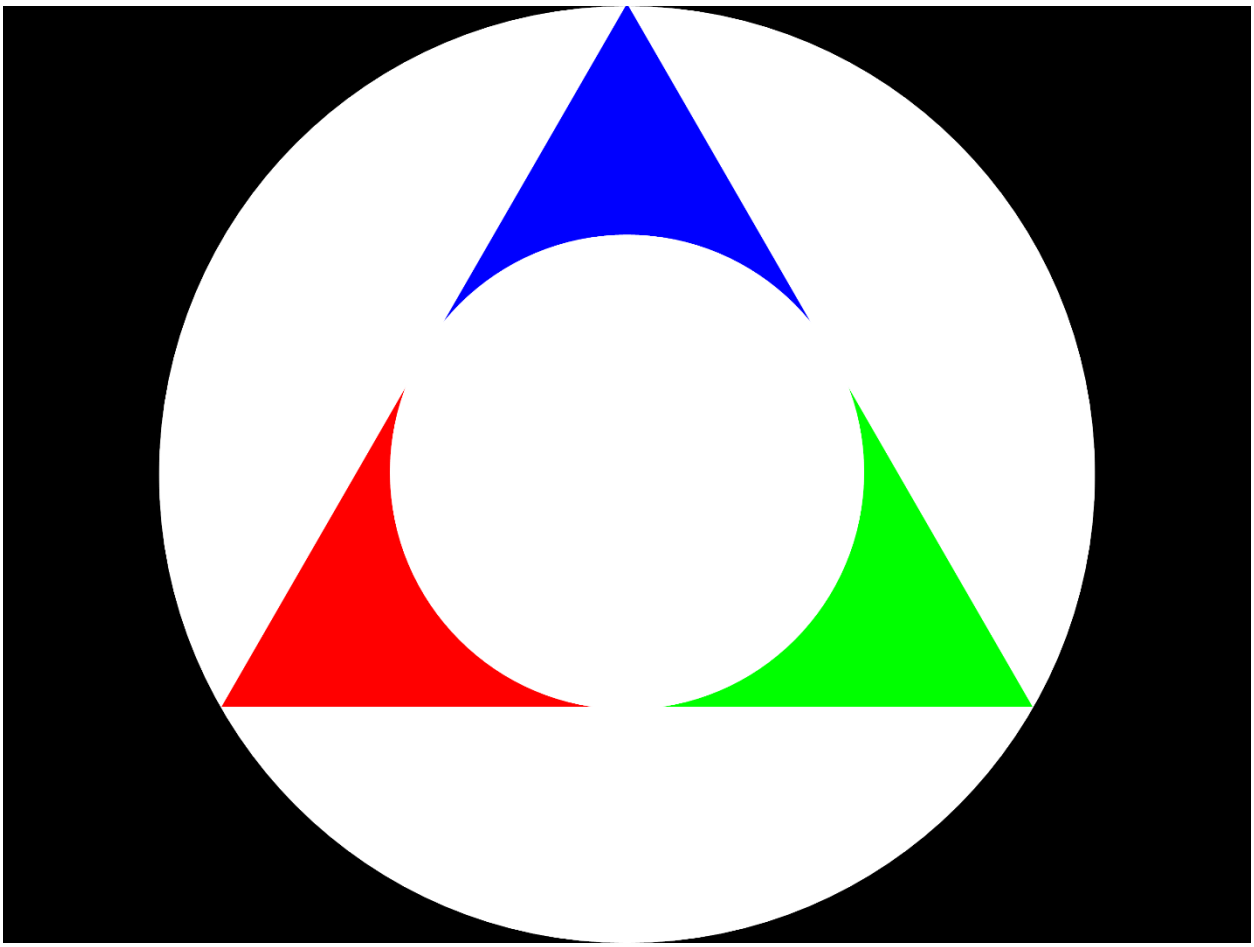

Introduction to the Trinitarian Image

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Revised 19 November 2026

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Abstract

Catholics are taught GOD is none other than a Trinity, humans were created in the image of GOD, and creation reflects the Creator. Yet the Trinity is considered an incomprehensible mystery. But does not Christ, the Logos, reveal, according to our capacity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Drawing upon scripture, Catholic teaching, and tradition for foundational principles, the document endeavors to define a Trinitarian image and discern such within the human soul and universally reflected in creation. Encountering three Trinitarian images (a natural, a baptismal, and a universal), each is contemplated seeking understanding of - and right relationship with - the Most Holy TRINITY. The doctrine of incomprehensibility is also addressed.

Keywords

GOD, TRINITY, Trinitarian image, human image of GOD, Jesus Christ, positive theology, creation as revelation, being, truth, love.

"The first Principle created this perceptible world as a means of self-revelation so that, like a mirror of God or a divine footprint, it might lead man to love and praise his Creator… the universe is like a book reflecting, representing, and describing its Maker, the Trinity" (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* 2,11,2; 2,12,1).

1. Introduction

Being finite, we shall ever be incapable of encompassing the Infinite, but what loss suffers the Infinite in filling the finite? We shall never fully comprehend the mystery of the TRINITY, but what prevents us from ever savoring the heavenly sweetness of contemplating the Three-in-ONE? The LORD longs to be known,[1] but, since the TRINITY is a mystery "hidden in God",[2] how may we gain some vantage of the splendor of GOD's Triune glory? Thanks be to GOD for revelation - for it provides foundational principles from whence our deductions may commence. And so, calling upon the Holy Spirit for aid, let us consult tradition and Scripture and confer with those doctors who have preceded to benefit from their insights.

2. Foundational Principles

The Catholic faith reveals:

- ¤ GOD is Being.[3]
- ¤ GOD is Spirit.[4]
- ¤ GOD is TRINITY - one Substance, three Persons.[5]
- ¤ The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the three Persons of the TRINITY.[6]

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[1] Cf. John 17:3 (New American Bible - used throughout unless otherwise noted); The Holy See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997) par. 1 (hereafter cited in text as *Catechism*).

[2] *Catechism*, 237.

[3] Cf. Exod 3:14 (King James Version, hereafter cited as KJV); *Catechism,* 213; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948) 1, q. 4, a. 2 (hereafter cited as *ST*).

[4] John 4:24; Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash, eds., *Heinrich Denzinger. Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012) 3001 (hereafter cited in text as *Denzinger*).

[5] *Denzinger,* 1330.

[6] Ibid.

- The Son is eternally begotten from the Father; from the Father and the Son proceeds the Holy Spirit.[7]
- The Father is Principle of the Godhead.[8]
- The Son is properly named Logos/Word.[9]
- The Word is Truth.[10]
- The Holy Ghost is properly named Agape/Love/Gift.[11]
- GOD created man and the universe.[12]
- Creation reflects the Creator.[13]
- Humans were made in the image GOD.[14]
- Jesus Christ is the Word incarnate. [15]

3. Distinguishing Features of a Trinitarian Image

Moses proclaimed GOD is.[16] Jesus Christ reveals GOD is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[17] Thus Christ makes known GOD is a Trinity. Moreover, Jesus makes possible

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[7] Ibid.; *Catechism,* Nicene Creed.

[8] Cf. Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Washington: Georgetown, 1990) Fourth Lateran Council, Cons. 1; *ST*, 1, q. 33, a. 1; Aquinas defines principle as "that whence another proceeds"; *Catechism,* 2789.

[9] Cf. John 1:1; *Catechism,* 65; *ST* 1, q. 34, a. 2; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004) p. 26 (hereafter cited as *ItC*); Edmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity*. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985) pp. 24-25.

[10] Cf. John 1:17, 14:6; *Catechism,* 2465-66.

[11] *ST* 1, q. 37, a. 1; 1, q. 38, a. 2; Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* (Paterson: St. Anthony Guild, 1963) pt. 1, ch. 3, par. 9 (hereafter cited as *Brev*); John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, (May 18, 1986) 10; 1 John 4:8.

[12] Gen 1; *Catechism*, Nicene Creed.

[13] Cf. Wis 13:1; Rom 1:19-20; *Catechism,* 1147.

[14] Gen 1:26-27; *Catechism,* 1701-1709.

[15] John 1:14-18.

[16] Exod 3:4-15.

[17] Cf. John 3:11-21, 14:15-18, 14:26, 15:26; Matt 28:19.

knowledge and vision of GOD: "we worship what we understand" (John 4:22).[18] Thus if we are made in the image of GOD and GOD is a Trinity, it seems if we seek, we should hope to find, within human nature, a Trinitarian image – an image of the invisible GOD, the Most Holy TRINITY. But what is a Trinitarian image? What are its distinguishing features? Using the above principles, I look for it to reflect/reproduce the following relationships:

- triune: one entity, three subsistences[19]
- one subsistence is principle of the other two and in some way resembles, symbolizes, or suggests the Father
- one subsistence is "begotten" by the principle subsistence and in some way resembles, symbolizes, or suggests the Son[20]
- one subsistence proceeds from the principle subsistence and the "begotten" subsistence and in some way resembles, symbolizes, or suggests the Holy Spirit

A Trintarian image is an image of the Creator reflected by means of creation or revelation and serves as a sign and "signature" by which we may distinguish and contemplate the mystery of the Most Holy TRINITY. From the image we may gain fundamental and practical insight proportionate to understanding.[21]

4. The Image Within

[18] See also John 14:6-9, 17:1-3; Matt 11:25-27.

[19] By subsistence I mean something that subsists within the singularity.

[20] By "begotten" I mean a subsistence which springs directly from the principle subsistence and is its direct image.

[21] Cf. Bonaventure, *Journey of the Mind to GOD* (Paterson: St. Anthony Guild, 1960) ch. 1, par. 2, 9 (hereafter cited as *JMG*); *Brev* 2,11,2; 2,12,1.

Now, GOD is Being and Spirit. GOD is everlasting to everlasting.[22] GOD is the I AM.[23] It follows, then, GOD is incorporeal and eternal Consciousness. Let us, therefore, focus our attention on the conscious, immaterial soul of man, the "I am", which, in human nature, most closely resembles the living GOD, in order there to seek the divine image in which we were created. In ourselves, we see awareness is the principle of the conscious soul; from and with awareness spring forth memories and words, which image the perceptions of the awareness and by which the soul is able to recall, consider, and communicate perceived truth (thus, we may say awareness begets reason/cognition); and from the awareness and cognition proceeds will (for volition requires both consciousness and knowledge). Thus in the conscious, immaterial, human soul we seem to find a Trinitarian image:

awareness, intellect, will[24]

Does the image fit the above stated criteria?

- ✓ triune: the conscious human soul is awareness, intellect, will.
- ✓ awareness directly resembles I AM and is principle of both intellect and will (for we can neither think nor will without awareness).[25]
- ✓ memories, words and perceived truth reside in the intellect but have their origin from the awareness and image its perceptions. Language itself and Truth reside in the Logos. Truth is the image of Being, the Son is the image of the Father.[26]

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[22] Ps 90:2 KJV.

[23] Exod 3:14.

[24] I am quite aware St. Augustine proposes memory, understanding, and will as the Trinitarian image found in the mind (Augustine, *The Trinity* [New York: New City, 1991] bk. 14, par. 11). I contend Consciousness is inherent in I AM (the image of GOD revealed by Moses) and consciousness (awareness) is the starting point, the principle from which springs the Trinitarian image in man. Memory seems the receptacle of truth (truth as in a correspondent and communicable image of being recorded through the lens of the awareness) and inextricably linked to cognition/intellect.

[25] "there are two processions in GOD, one by way of the intellect, which is the procession of the Word, and another by way of the will, which is the procession of Love" (*ST* 1, q. 37, a. 1).

[26] Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4; John 14:9.

- ✓ will proceeds from both awareness and cognition and resembles the Divine Will: Love.[27]

It does.

5. The Universal Image

Yet behold, human awareness, intellect, and will reside within and are oriented toward a larger, universal triad:

being, truth, love[28]

in which the whole of creation seems to reside – for as far as my perception extends it seems all that is has being and all that is resides in truth (for truth is the image of being)[29] and all that is is held together and sustained by love (for every entity is a unity and unity springs from agape).[30] Thus, it would seem, being, truth, and love point directly to the Creator and Sustainer and indicate GOD is:

Being, Truth, Love[31]

Does this triad fit the Trinitarian criteria?[32]

- ✓ Triune: GOD is Being, Truth, Love.

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[27] Matt 22:36-40; John 15:12. Do not the ordinances of Christ reveal the Will of GOD?

[28] Awareness is and observes being; intellect seeks, considers, retains and builds upon perceived truth; will pursues what it desires (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* [London: Oxford University Press, 1925] Bk. 1, 1-2).

[29] As a word is an image of what it signifies, so truth is a true and communicable image (reflection) of being.

[30] Consider how many molecules and living cells unite together to form a single living being. Is not the Holy Spirit (Agape) that which enables such miraculous cohesion, cooperation, and unity? Look to the universe itself: it resides not in chaos but is a single ordered system. Cf. Rom 8:28.

[31] See also *Catechism,* 214-221.

[32] Revelation, creation/nature, and logic enable simple understanding and analysis of absolute terms but by no means fullness of comprehension.

- ✓ HE WHO IS is Being and Being is the principle of both Truth and Love (for without Being there can be neither Truth nor Love).
- ✓ The Son is the Word and the Word is Truth. Truth springs from Being and is its Image.[33]
- ✓ Love cannot exist without Being; and Love not proceeding from Truth would seemingly be blind, for Truth is Light, but Providence is not blind. Also, agape is an act of volition, but volition requires knowledge in order to know what it wills – thus by extension it would seem Truth informs Love. Moreover, Christ, the Logos, shows us the Way, and the Way is agape/love; thus Love proceeds from Truth. Again, in Scripture, the Son/Word/Logos/Truth sends the Holy Spirit/Love and the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Truth, thus it appears confirmed Love proceeds from Truth.[34]

Yes.

6. Contemplation of the Natural Image

We see then three Trinitarian images. I'll call one natural, one baptismal, one universal.[35] The natural is the divine image found within:

awareness, intellect, will.

I term it natural because it resides at the very core of our nature and presents an image of GOD: a reflection of the Creator. Now how is it possible for us to become children of GOD, brothers and sisters of Christ, sharers in the Divine Nature, if we are incapable of knowing or understanding GOD, if there is no congruity? Yet we must know what GOD is if we are to become what we are called to be, and we are

[33] Truth is the begotten image of Being. Cf. Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4; John 14:9; *Catechism,* 242.

[34] Cf. John 1:1-5, 14:6-7, 15-26, 15:12, 26, 16:7. If Love proceeds from Truth, then Love/Agape must accomplish what accords with Truth.

[35] The traditional Trinitarian names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit invoked in the rite of baptism form a Trinitarian image.

called to be GOD's children.[36] Thus, it would seem, GOD too has awareness, intellect, and will but since GOD so immeasurably surpasses us, since GOD is that than which nothing greater can be conceived,[37] let us strive for a more suitable rendering. Is not GOD unbounded and eternal?[38] Is not understanding in the intellect and is not perfect understanding wisdom? Is not perfect will love? - for no fault can be found in love.[39] Do we not proclaim "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord GOD almighty" (Rev 4:8)? Thus from the above we may infer the Lord our GOD is:

> Holy, Infinite, Eternal Consciousness; Holy, Infinite, Eternal Wisdom; Holy, Infinite, Eternal Love.

Further, it would seem as necessary consequences: the universe GOD created and sustains is, in the eternal scheme of things, the best of all possible worlds;[40] GOD brings good out of evil,[41] and for those who love GOD all things work together for good.[42] In addition, study of the divine image within - of the workings of the soul, of the relationship between soul and body, of the process of creating – would seem to provide insight into the operations of GOD and the relationship between GOD and the world.[43] For example: the universe is a single, ordered system, so too the human body; the soul is the unitive and animating principle of the body, so too GOD the principle of order, harmony, and movement in the universe. The body is much like a complex machine - the vast majority of functions operate automatically, freeing the mind from slavery to it; thus it would seem GOD too remains free while yet maintaining and directing the vast universe. A further reflection: to the microorganisms living in the human body, the world must seem regular, ordered, bountiful - and they would be right in inferring the existence of an encompassing and directing intelligence of a higher order.

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[36] Cf. John 1:12; Eph 1:5; 1 John 3:2; 2 Pet 1:3-11; *Catechism,* 51-52, 1691-92.

[37] Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* (Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1974) Ch 2. Cf. Isa 55:8-9.

[38] *Catechism,* 202. Cf. Pss 90:2, 139:7-12, 145:3; 1 Kgs 8:27; Rev 1:8.

[39] Love as defined and exemplified by Christ.

[40] Cf. Gottfried Leibniz, *The Monadology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898) par. 53–55.

[41] Cf. Augustine, *The Enchiridion* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1873) ch 11. Cf. Gen 50:20.

[42] Rom 8:28. Who are "those who love GOD"? - cf. John 14:21-24, 15:12-14.

[43] Cf. *JMG*, ch. 3, par. 1, 6-7.

7. Contemplation of the Baptismal Image

Christians are baptized in the name of the:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

hence the baptismal Trinity. Not only does it introduce us to Who GOD is, it informs us of right relationship. The Son became human that humans might become children of GOD.[44] Jesus Christ, the Word and Son, teaches, exemplifies, and enables right relation of child with the Father and makes possible reception of the Holy Spirit.[45] Through baptism the child of Adam dies to sin, is washed clean, and made a new creation: a child of the Father, a sibling of the Son, a temple and instrument of the Holy Spirit.[46] Baptism initiates personal relationship and union with the Most Holy TRINITY. Yet GOD does not "save us without us."[47] To die to sin, we must follow the Son to the Father.[48] We must take up our cross and follow Him.[49] To bear fruit, to attain eternal union, we must apply ourselves with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind to love and cooperate with GOD, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[50] Observe: the unity of the most Holy TRINITY is so perfect, that it is impossible to consider the Father apart from the Son or the Holy Spirit; or the Son apart from the Father or the Holy Spirit; or the Holy Spirit apart from the Father or the Son. Are we not called to the same unity with the Father, Son,

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[44] *Catechism,* 460. Cf. 2 Pet 1:4.

[45] Cf. John 12:44-50; John 14:23; 1 Cor 11:1; John 14:15-17.

[46] Cf. Rom 6:3-6; Eph 4:22-24; *Denzinger,* 239; John 20:17; Rom 8:14-17; Matt 12:48-50; 1 Cor 3:16-17; 1 John 4:16.

[47] *Catechism,* 1847; Augustine, *Sermons*, 169.13.

[48] Matt 6:24; Luke 5:27-28; John 8:12, 14:6.

[49] Matt 16:24-28; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-27.

[50] Cf. Luke 13:6-9; Mark 11:12-21; Luke 10:25-28 (Douay–Rheims Bible); John 3:36; *Catechism,* 1427, 1430-31; *ItC* 88-89; Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), 11; Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 14; John 19:28.

and Holy Spirit and with each other? Hence, is not the sowing of discord a wreaking of havoc? A direct opposition to the unity of Agape?

8. Contemplation of the Universal Image

The universal image:

Being, Truth, Love

manifests what GOD is in relation to Creation and discloses the TRINITY as Source of our present good (life, understanding, love) and as the final and Highest Good - Eternal Being, All-encompassing Truth, Perfect Love. What implications can we see? If GOD is the universal and eternal Good and Christ the way to right relationship with that Good, then Christ remains ever relevant, necessary, and beneficial. Thus it would seem the mission of the people of GOD, the Church, to make Christ universally present, comprehensible, and approachable to contemporary society.[51] Hence, if the baptized are to fulfill that mission, it would appear counterproductive to isolate ourselves by shunning those outside our group. With the birth of the Church at Pentecost, the Mosaic theology and praxis of social separation, isolation and exclusion[52] was supplanted with that of interaction, relationship, and community.[53] All peoples share in common their humanity but in the Christian should also be found the humility, wisdom, and love that is of Christ. Thus our neighbors are not to be avoided, looked down upon, or spurned but, if possible, led to Christ.[54] Thus it seems the duty of the people of GOD to immerse themselves in society, exercise tolerance, seek common ground, build solidarity, and overcome division through love - all while remaining faithful to Jesus Christ, His Gospel, and to one

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[51] To make Christ present to society *does not* imply, include, or involve force or compulsion (cf. *Catechism*, 160).

[52] Cf. Exod 23:31-33, 33:16; Lev 20:24, 26; 1 Kgs 8:53.

[53] Cf. Mark 12:29-31, 16:15-18; Matt 28:18-20; John 4:4-42; Acts 1:8; *Catechism,* 1878-79, 1931, 1939.

[54] Cf. Acts 10:28. How can the lost sheep be led home if not sought? Christ became human that humans may be led to GOD. So too we are to unite to humanity that humanity may be led to Christ.

another.[55] Nonetheless, if GOD is the Source, Creator, and Sustainer of creation, then to gravely abuse creation (including fellow humans) is to contravene the principle of agape.[56] Rebuke may suffice.[57] But to intentionally, knowingly, and deliberately oppose agape is to oppose GOD, for GOD is Agape.[58] That which opposes GOD cannot stand forever. Yet, who will stand with Christ in the breach?[59] Who will uphold agape even in the face of violent, coercive, and oppressive opposition that agape may endure, take root, and spread?[60]

9. Orthodoxy

Let us summarize our observations.

Who is GOD?

> **Father, Son, Holy Spirit**.

What is GOD?

> **Holy, Infinite, Eternal Consciousness; Holy, Infinite, Eternal Wisdom; Holy, Infinite, Eternal Love**.
>
> And
>
> **Being, Truth, Love**.

[55] Cf. Rom 12:9-21, 14:19, 15:1-2; Heb 12:14; Luke 6:27-49; *Catechism*, 900.

[56] Cf. Deut 6:4-5; Gen 2:15; Exod 22:20-27; Ps 109:5; Prov 17:13; Luke 10:25-37.

[57] Lev:19:17; Ezek 3:17-21, 33:1-9; Matt 18:15-17.

[58] 1 John 4:8, 16, 21.

[59] Cf. Ezek 22.

[60] Cf. John 10:14-15, 15:12-17; Matt 26:17-27:50; Mark 14:12-15:37; Luke 22:7-23:46; John 13:1-19:30.

Are the above statements in conformity with Catholic teaching? Enshrined in dogma are the dictums: “We cannot know what GOD is.”[61] And: “Great and incomprehensible is the mystery of the Holy TRINITY.”[62] It is true we are incapable of comprehending the Infinite. We cannot even know ourselves, or anything, in an absolute sense. But we are, in general, capable of understanding enough to live and direct our way in life.[63] Yet, if we are incapable of knowing or understanding GOD in a practicable sense, then theology seems merely a diversion little different than study of the Star Wars canon or Tolkien’s Middle-earth. How can we claim to be children of GOD, please GOD, orient ourselves towards GOD, lead others to GOD if we know not who or what GOD is? Scripture teaches us GOD is Spirit (John 4:24), GOD is Logos (John 1:1), GOD is Love (1 John 4:7-8), GOD is Holy (Isa 6:3), GOD is Eternal (Ps 90:2), GOD is Infinite (1 Kgs 8:27), GOD is One (Mark 12:29 DRB). From the Gospel it is apparent Christ enables us to know GOD, to dwell ever with GOD, and to know the way to GOD.[64] Thus it is manifest from scripture we are capable of understanding, in a practicable sense, what is GOD and of GOD. Moreover, if Christ is fully GOD and fully human, humans must possess natural compatibility for union with GOD. Thus it seems we must have an innate capacity to know GOD.[65] Again, if the human soul is immortal, then we must bear more resemblance to GOD than to nothing. If the soul is immortal, then truly we are gods.[66] But if we refuse to internalize GOD’s Word and Love, to follow Christ, how do we differ from unholy devils? Thus (given the gravity of the consequences) it seems inconceivable that we be incapable of distinguishing between what GOD is and what GOD is not.[67] In fact it seems only GOD is knowable, for how can we have firm knowledge of what is

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[61] *ST* 1, q. 3; cf. *Denzinger,* 367.

[62] *Denzinger,* 367.

[63] Though we know not the exact value of pi (π), we can calculate it accurately enough for practical purposes.

[64] Cf. John 14.

[65] Cf. John 17:3.

[66] Cf. Dan 12:2; Matt 25:45-46; John 10:34-36; Ps 82.

[67] Cf. *Catechism,* 366; Ps 82:6; John 10:34; Matt 5:48; Matt 25:31-46; John 10:14; Heb 5:14. By devil I mean an immortal soul who knowingly and willing is at variance with the order of reality and thus suffers from the resultant discordance with Eternal Truth and Universal Love.

mutable? Only GOD is immutable Being, immutable Truth, immutable Love: the Source, Creator, and Sustainer of creation. Thus every creature, every event, every situation provides opportunity to contemplate and commune with the LORD: through the circle we may glimpse the eternal.[68]

Now from Christ we learn GOD is Triune.[69] And since Christ came to reveal and unite us to GOD, why would He make known the TRINITY if not to help us understand Who and What GOD is and who and what we are and called to be?[70] Christ is the Word made flesh and words convey definite meaning. Christ came to bring light, not shroud in impenetrable darkness, to bring understanding, not confusion.[71] Genesis divulges humans were made in the image of GOD and since GOD is none other than a Trinity, should we not expect the divine image residing in each human to be triune? It is that very fact which makes the image distinguishable. GOD is not alien but Source and Father of all. Made in GOD's Image, we should have an intrinsic capacity to recognize GOD and recognition of the Trinitarian image within provides a key opening access to the Mystery and though we perceive as "through a glass darkly", discerning vaguely and indistinctly, nevertheless it provides a foundation for intelligibility in a practical sense.[72] Thus this paper does not seek or claim to invent a new Trinity or to disclose the ineffable but rather to discern and contemplate aspects of the Most Holy TRINITY gleaned from revelation, creation, theology, personal observation, and analysis.

Aquinas holds: "Man cannot obtain the knowledge of GOD by natural reason except from creatures. Now creatures lead us to the knowledge of GOD, as effects do to their cause. Accordingly, by natural reason we can know of GOD that only which of necessity belongs to Him as the principle of things. Now, the creative power of GOD is common to the whole Trinity; and hence it belongs to the unity of the essence,

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[68] Is not a circle a symbol of the eternal? As we cycle though the temporal, what remains invariable?

[69] Matt 28:19.

[70] Cf. *Catechism,* 1, 460; Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), 22.

[71] John 1:4-5, 9, 8:12, 12:46.

[72] Cf. 1 Cor 13:12 KJV; *JMG*, ch. 3, par. 1; *ItC*, 76-77.

and not to the distinction of the persons. Therefore, by natural reason we can know what belongs to the unity of the essence, but not what belongs to the distinction of the persons" (ST 1, q. 32, a. 1.).

I agree that humans may obtain some understanding of the Creator by studying creatures and creation. However, since we too are creatures, are made in the image of GOD, and are capable of peering into the inner world, into the realm of the spirit, into the soul, into the "I am", and discover there a trinity; I contend we are able to view an image or likeness of the TRINITY. If the image reflects the Imaged, we see perception, cognition, and volition, in humans, each contribute uniquely to the act of creation and the unique character of each is discernable, to an extent, in that which is created.[73] Thus the image within gives cause to infer each Person of the TRINITY similarly contributes uniquely in the one work of creation, and this seems confirmed when considering the economy of salvation, for we see the Father remains, the Son reveals, and the Holy Spirit resides - each fulfilling a distinct role in the one work of salvation.[74]

Thomists surely respond: "GOD can be in no way composite. 1. Every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but GOD is the first being. 2. Every composite has a cause, for things in themselves different cannot unite unless something causes them to unite. But GOD is uncaused, since He is the first efficient cause. 3. In every composite there must be potentiality and actuality; but this does not apply to GOD; for either one of the parts actuates another, or at least all the parts are potential to the whole. 4. Nothing composite can be predicated of any single one of its parts."[75]

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[73] For example: if we found a terracotta oil lamp buried among ancient ruins, we could deduce the existence of a conscious being who made the lamp, knowledge incorporated to design and construct it, and purpose for which it was intended.

[74] The Father sends – thus remaining eternally in heaven, the unmoved Mover ("Our Father who art in heaven"; cf. *ST* 1, q. 2, a. 3). The Son is sent to reveal (cf. Matt 11:27; John 1;18, 9:4-5, 14:21). The Holy Spirit is sent to reside with those who love GOD (John 14:15-17; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:19-22).

[75] *ST* 1, q. 3, a. 7.

I retort: GOD is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “He is not the Father who is the Son, nor is the Son he who is the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit he who is the Father or the Son.”[76] “We distinguish the Persons, but we do not divide the Godhead.”[77] The conscious human soul (which I hold to be the Trinitarian image within) is one though it be awareness, intellect, and will. 1. The Son and Holy Spirit spring eternally from the Father. The intellect and will ever spring from the awareness. 2. GOD is Trinity eternally. The fully conscious human soul is ever awareness, intellect, and will. 3. GOD is ever GOD, not potentially GOD. The conscious soul is ever soul, not potentially soul. 4. The Father is GOD, the Son is GOD, the Holy Spirit is GOD; not three GODs but One. The awareness is soul, the intellect is soul, the will is soul; not three souls but one.

Does not the human soul bear a Trinitarian semblance? Observe a photograph, how alike and yet unlike the image to the actual object. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts” (Isa 55: 8-9). GOD will ever exceed our capacity. Nonetheless should that prevent the Word from revealing, to those who seek, what they are capable of understanding?

Yet, on what basis do I presume to contest an established doctrine? Actually, I contest not the doctrine but call to question interpretation and application. I appeal to the teaching of Christ, Himself, and to reason. For, if a prevalent interpretation of a traditional teaching renders scripture unintelligible and an intelligible interpretation congruent with the word of Christ and experience be offered, then the alternative interpretation, it seems, should merit consideration. If the tenets: “we cannot know what GOD is” and “great and incomprehensible is the mystery of the Holy Trinity” are held to be absolutely true, then I find them in contradiction to the

[76] *Denzinger,* 530.

[77] Ibid.

positive teaching of Christ, as stated above. For if the Word/Logos is unable to communicate, according to our capacity, a true understanding of GOD, what light does Christ bring to humanity? of what relevance the Gospel? – even the word "GOD" is stripped of meaning and the intellect rendered incapable of directing the will toward its final end. Is such teaching intelligible? If the Holy TRINITY is an incomprehensible mystery, then how is it possible for us to know and love and reveal to others the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Are not such assertions, if interpreted in an absolute manner, in radical contradiction to the teaching and mission of Christ? Some may say: "Belief is not equivalent to knowledge. We may believe things about GOD but not know what GOD is. We are saved by faith not knowledge." But is not a false belief equivalent to a fantasy? If the content of a belief corresponds with reality, then the belief serves as practicable knowledge. Truth believed and acted upon serves as knowledge. If someone knows something and shares it, then others too can make use of it. If someone knows how to get to a destination and produces an accurate map, then others too are enabled to make the journey: the knowledge has been made available. We place faith in the map, but once arrived we too acquire direct knowledge and experience of the destination and passage. A well placed trust is confirmed by its fruits: it serves as knowledge and brings to knowledge. Now Christ claims knowledge of GOD and proclaims the way to union with GOD. We must place faith in Christ to follow and learn from Him but upon conversion we too begin to enter into direct personal and conscious relationship with GOD and are enabled to help lead others to Christ and the Father.[78] But the Father must be intelligible to the human mind before it is possible to orient the will toward Him, before conversion is possible. If our whole life is to be directed toward GOD, then we must know how to distinguish GOD from all else. Christ leads to encounter with GOD, to relationship with GOD, to communion and friendship with GOD – thus to knowledge of GOD. Christ is the Light of humanity, in whom there is no darkness,[79] His revelation of GOD's nature must, of necessity, be intelligible and capable of illumining understanding. Christ is both infinite and finite,

[78] Cf. *Catechism,* 1431, 545, 591, 1041; John 4:42, 14:18-21.

[79] Cf. John 1:4, 8:12; 1 John 1:5

He manifests the Infinite to the finite; He reveals GOD through human language and action. Sense impressions provide the immaterial material necessary to formulate and accumulate a vocabulary of associative meaning. This vocabulary is employed in human thought and communication. It may also be used in parabolic expression through which the Word enables meaningful and apposite understanding of GOD to human beings. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with GOD, and the Word was GOD” (John 1:1). The words of Christ manifest, according to our capacity, the Ineffable. “Being incomprehensible, he wished to be comprehended.”[80] For how is it possible to love with our whole heart, our whole mind, our whole soul something we are incapable of knowing or understanding? Children are instructed in what they are able to comprehend, not in what is beyond them, but how can we please the Father, or even relate to Him, if He be wholly beyond comprehension? If union with GOD is the purpose of the Catholic faith, then Christ must enable practicable knowledge of GOD. Thus, as to doctrine, I agree we cannot know GOD, the Trinity, in an absolute sense. However, since the Logos brings Light to humanity, humans are capable of knowing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a practical sense.

10. Conclusion

Because the soul is spirit, it has a direct view into the realm of the spirit. Thus it is able to relate to and observe spiritual reality. In that it also has cognition and volition, it is able spiritually to interact, learn, and grow. If GOD is the I AM, then the “I am” of the human soul seems directly related. Since every human is also a spiritual being, human interaction is also a spiritual interaction. Now on the human level, “I am” may refer to the awareness that resides within each of us or to the conscious soul as a whole or even to the unity which is the living human person.[81] Does not our very being reside in the consciousness which is the I am? Now if

[80] Denzinger, 294.

[81] It is impossible to communicate “awareness” without usings words or signs (thus employing the intellect) but from experience we know awareness itself does not require words: intellect springs from awareness not vice versa. In John 18:1-8, the person of Jesus refers to himself as I am.

humans are images of GOD, then does not the image reflect the Imaged? Thus, if GOD the Father is the Principle of the Godhead and of all that exists, can we not suitably refer to the Father as the I AM? - for does not Being spring from the Father? Further, does not the soul impart life, unity, and direction to the human body? Thus if the Church is the body of Christ,[82] and Christ is the Logos (Word) made flesh, and the teaching of the Logos is agape, and the Spirit we receive from Christ is Agape; then agape must be the distinguishing feature of the Church. Thus that which is Church may be distinguished by its mature fruit.[83] If humans are made in the image of GOD, then, it would seem, they also have the capability to unite with GOD as closely as the body unites with the soul. But if we direct our lives toward the temporal, we build upon shifting sand. If we seek to build upon the Eternal, in Christ we find a firm foundation.[84] And so, summarizing our investigation: GOD is subsistent Being, the I AM, perfect Being. Truth is the intelligible and communicable Image of Being, the Word, the Logos, the Light which enables understanding of the Father and of right relation with creation, and informs Agape. Agape (the Will of GOD) is the Way of communion with the Father (Who resides in Life eternal) and of harmony with creation. Since humans have agency,[85] it is necessary they know and understand GOD, in a practical sense, so that seeking the Highest Good and cooperating with the Light of the Logos and the Spirit of Agape, they may strive for communion and friendship with the “I am” that resides in each and every human and persevere in their Covenant of communion and friendship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Eternal Living GOD. [86]

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[82] 1 Cor 12:27; Rom 12:4-5; Eph 1:22-23.

[83] Luke 6:43-45, 13:6-9; Gal 5:22-23.

[84] Matt 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-19.

[85] Cf. Deut 30:19-20; Josh 24:14-15; Sir 15:14; Matt 23:37; Mark 8:34; John 7:17; Rev 3:20.

[86] There is no end to contemplation, thus no definitive rendition. Special thanks to Steve L. Montoya of Springer, NM and A. Robert Lauer of the University of Oklahoma for reviewing drafts of this paper and sharing criticism, insights and advice.

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