
THE DIVINE EPISTEMOLOGY OF SAINT IRENAEUS OF LYON

The struggle for the divinity of the human mind

By Pierre Beaudry, 8/15/18

INTRODUCTION

“For no one can know the Father, unless through the Word of God, that is, unless by the Son revealing [Him]; neither can he have knowledge of the Son, unless through the good pleasure of the Father. But the Son performs the good pleasure of the Father; for the Father sends, and the Son is sent, and comes. And His Word knows that His Father is, as far as regards us, invisible and infinite; and since He cannot be declared [by anyone else], He does Himself declare Him to us; and, on the other hand, it is the Father alone who knows His own Word. And both these truths have our Lord declared. Wherefore the Son reveals the knowledge of the Father through His own manifestation. For the manifestation of the Son is the knowledge of the Father; for all things are manifested through the Word. In order, therefore, that we might know that the Son who came is He who imparts to those believing on Him a knowledge of the Father, He said to His disciples: *‘No man knows the Son but the Father, nor the Father but the Son, and those to whomsoever the Son shall reveal Him;’* thus setting Himself forth and the Father as He [really] is, that we may not receive any other Father, except Him who is revealed by the Son.” St Irenaeus of Lyon, [*Against Heresies*](#), Book IV, Chapter 6, Section 3.

How can the human mind relate to the eternal mind of God outside of religion? Can man discover God's mind through his own mind? Can and should such knowledge be acquired and communicated through ordinary human means, or is it so impracticable that it can only be discovered and expressed in a trance of ecstasy by way of revelation? Those are some of the questions that St. Irenaeus addressed in the last two books of his master work: [*Against Heresies*](#).

From time immemorial humans have searched the hidden purpose behind God's intention for creating man in His own resemblance, but in doing so, very few discovered that the intention of God was to make the mind of man divine. Of all Christian theologians, St. Irenaeus of Lyon is the most explicit thinker to have identified the knowledge of the Divine Mind within the human mind as a unique experiment in Christian *divine epistemology*. However, he also added that for such an experiment to succeed human beings are required to discover such knowledge in a very special way which the Apostle Matthew had identified as follows: ***"No man knows the Son but the Father, neither the Father but the Son, and those to whomsoever the Son shall reveal Him."***¹

This means that no one can know the Father directly. The only way to know the Father is through Christ. But, is that an exclusive religious experiment or can it also be an epistemological experiment? From the standpoint of epistemology the conception can be metaphorically conceived as a triply-extended function of the human mind that reflects the Holy Trinity. It should, therefore, be possible to know God outside of religion provided that the conception is understood through a process generated by means of the Holy Spirit by the unification of reason and faith. It is in that context that the Apostle John reported Christ as saying: ***"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."***²

However, Jesus said that the knowledge of God will only be available to those that He, Christ, is willing to reveal the Father to. What is the significance of that exclusivity? Why can't the Father be known directly? The answer to that is the

¹ Matthew ,11:27

² John 14:6

answer to Christ's prayer which comes right after Matthew, 11, 27 and which says: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"³

The irony, here, is that it is not God who excludes some human beings from accessing this higher knowledge; it is the arrogant and self-centered who are incapable of understanding the true nature of the Holy Trinity and thereby exclude themselves.

1. THE DISPUTE OVER THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

“In "*The Vision of God*" (1464), Nicolaus of Cusa develops the conception that each species, with its natural faculties as they develop, "yearns" for the existence of a higher species, as man does for the knowledge of the Absolute, of God. Here, Cusa's idea of negentropic species-evolution as the characteristic of Creation, is expressed by the poetic conception of *terminus specie*. The universe consists of negentropic growth of higher orderings, whose microcosm is human reason. The species recognizes this divine order of Creation, in its own way, and becomes a singularity in the transition from one ordering to the next. Thus, the species has a *terminus specie*, the actualization of infinity in one point, which enables further development.” Lyndon LaRouche.⁴

One of the best ways to approach this difficult epistemological subject of the knowledge of God is to investigate the matter of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and to study, for instance, the way that Franciscan philosopher and theologian, Duns Scotus, OFM (c. 1266-1308), approached the subject matter.

³ Matthew, 11:28-30.

⁴ Lyndon H. LaRouche Jr., [Mozart's 1792-1786 Revolution in Music](#), FIDELIO Magazine, Vol. 1 No. 4, Winter 1992.

At the beginning of the 14th century, Duns Scotus brought a definite solution to the hot debate at that time regarding the Immaculate Conception of Mary. More than five centuries later, in 1854, Pope Pius IX closed that debate and adopted Duns Scotus's view of the matter by declaring the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Duns Scotus was beatified in 1993 by Pope John Paul II.

The subject of the Immaculate Conception had been controversial not only as a matter of faith, but also as a crucial matter of epistemology. At the time of Duns Scotus, all of the philosophers and theologians of the West were divided over the subject and it was acknowledged that even Thomas Aquinas had sided with those who denied that special condition of Mary. Human reason was profoundly challenged because it could not explain adequately that amazing mystery. Although the Church Fathers had considered the matter of the Immaculate Conception as self-evident, a great part of the Church elite during the scholastic period of the Middle Ages could not bring human reason to accept this condition of Mary, because they could not resolve the crucial paradox of how one can conceive of the similarity between the *divinization of Man* and the *humanization of God*. That is the crucial paradox to be resolved, and the solution involved a question of finding the connection between human time and divine time; that is, what LaRouche identified as the time of *the simultaneity of eternity*.⁵

During all of the centuries which separated Saint Irenaeus of Lyon and Nicholas of Cusa, who may be considered as the two book ends of *Christian epistemology*, it was the Platonic thinker Duns Scotus who was able to bring satisfactory doctrinal clarity to the problem of “timing” between the divine and the human in the case of the Immaculate Conception.

Duns Scotus is historically known as “*Doctor Subtilis*” (Subtle Doctor), because his Franciscan superior at the University of Paris considered him to be “distinguished for his ingenious and very subtle learning.”⁶ In fact, he had found a very insightful way to resolve the difficult problem of the Immaculate Conception

⁵ Lyndon LaRouche, [Jesus Christ and Civilization](#), EIR, Oct 6, 2000.

⁶ Brother John M. Samaha, S. M., [John Duns Scotus on the Immaculate Conception](#).



by using the St. Anselm of Canterbury principle which stated: “*potuit, deuit, ergo fecit* (It was possible, it was fitting, and therefore, it was accomplished).”⁷

Figure 1 John Duns Scotus, (c. 1266-1308) by Justus van Gent. Note how his two hands express a state of mind of how to transform a difficult point into a clear idea through the coincidence of opposites.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1108982>

This approach was very close to the conception of God that Nicholas of Cusa later developed in [*The Vision of God*](#) and in his concept of *Posse Ipsum*. However, Thomas Aquinas and others had objected to the idea of the Immaculate Conception, because they insisted on addressing the matter from the logical and sense perception standpoint of chronological time. The Aristotelian theologians were attempting to define the precise moment when Mary was actually preserved from sin. Was it before or after animation; that is, before the soul was infused into Anne’s embryo or after? Was it when she was conceived by her mother or later, when the moment of the Annunciation came?

This line of questioning demonstrates that such Aristotelian deductive reasoning places human time in opposition to divine time; where clock-time cannot be made to coincide with eternal time; demonstrating, therefore, that deductive reasoning and sense perception are incapable of satisfying the mind because the logical mind must exclude all contradictory opposition. What the Aristotelians failed to see was that it is primarily the mental *coincidence of opposites* which is required for addressing the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. Thus, the conception required that the mind solve the difficulty as Cusa best identified it:

⁷ Brother John M. Samaha, S. M., [*John Duns Scotus: Champion of the Immaculate Conception*](#).

“But the reason that [only] in this world [do] things exist according to earlier and later is that You did not conceive mundane things *before* they existed. For if You had earlier conceived them, they would have existed earlier. Now, if *earlier* and *later* can occur in someone's concept, so that he conceives first one thing and then another, this concept is not omnipotent. (By comparison, that eye which sees first one thing and then another is not omnipotent.) So because You are God Almighty, You dwell in Paradise on the inner side of the wall. Now, the wall is the coincidence where *later* coincides with *earlier*, where *end* coincides with *beginning*, where *alpha* and *omega* are the same.”⁸

Scotus solved the paradox in a similar way by considering a more perfect redemption coming to Mary; that is, a redemption by means of the eternal nature of omnipotent divine grace issued forth by the Father to the Son through the Holy Spirit. This transfinite process of God making Mary “*full of Grace*” in the “*fullness of time*,” is a process which reflects divine creation by way of the Holy Trinity, rather than by finite clock-time moments. A present day insightful Franciscan Brother, Noel Muscat, put the matter quite beautifully as follows:

“Scotus’ *Lectura* on the Third Book of Sentences of Peter Lombard deals with the mystery of the Incarnation. The Christological basis for Scotus’ theology on the Immaculate Conception is fundamental in order to understand this privilege of the Virgin Mary in its correct theological setting. Scotus builds a theology centred upon Christ, who is eternally predestined by God the Father to assume human nature in the Incarnation. According to the Subtle Doctor the Incarnation was not primarily intended to be the condition for the redemption of humanity from sin. In God’s provident plan, the Incarnation of the Word in the person of Jesus Christ was, first and foremost, the apex of the act of creation by God the Father. All creation has been fashioned according to the image of the Incarnate Word, and is the result of a pure and free act of love on the part of God. Creation, in this way, enters in a mysterious but real way into a loving relationship with God as a Trinity of Persons. Each and every creature, being complete in itself and unique in its essence, is a model of God the Son,

⁸ Nicholas of Cusa, [*The Vision of God*](#), trans. Jasper Hopkins.

who became Incarnate in order to glorify His Father for the beauty of creation. This vision is a direct result of Franciscan spirituality at its best. It is true that, in the history of redemption, the Incarnation was then orientated toward the salvation of humankind from sin, but this aspect, important though it may be, could not be the only reason for the Incarnation. Otherwise God would not be seen as the personification of the primacy of the free will, expressed in love which overflows from Him onto His creatures.”⁹

Thus, the question of the Immaculate Conception as well as the question of the Annunciation, both pertain to the epistemological domain of the creative process of knowledge as reflected in the process of composition of the triply-extended relationship of the Trinity. This has immense implications for both religion and for epistemology, because it means that human beings can have access to the divinity of the Trinity through knowledge and not exclusively through faith; that is, through the power of reason in resolving the *coincidence of opposites*, as Nicholas of Cusa advocated.

Throughout Christianity, Aristotelians, as opposed to Platonists, have believed that human knowledge is axiomatically determined by the physical body, through sense perception. This is also the conception of empiricists, existentialists, and of phenomenologists more generally. As a result, the question of the precise moment that the Virgin Mary may have been conceived without the blemish of the original sin entirely depends on the human body clock-time. That is the problem that Thomas Aquinas was unable to get himself away from, because of his committed allegiance to Aristotelian deductive logic.

Duns Scotus believed that the privilege of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is entirely dependent on a conception of time which is determined by the

⁹ Noel Muscat, OFM, [JOHN DUNS SCOTUS AND HIS DEFENCE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION](#), Scotus, *Lectura III Sent.*, 138.

creative process of the Divine Mind and, therefore, it implies the necessity of an axiomatic transformation inside of the human mind. Thus, Scotus began to consider the conception of the mind and soul of Mary as it was formed in the *fullness of Grace* and the *fullness of time* through the creative process of the Holy Trinity. According to Brother Noel Muscat, Duns Scotus came to the following conclusion:

“We can therefore say that it was possible that the Blessed Virgin was not conceived in original sin. This assertion does not diminish in any way the universal redemption of her Son, as we have outlined above. We can furthermore confirm this, since the passion of Christ was immediately and principally ordered to delete original guilt as well as actual guilt, in such a way that all the Trinity, since it had the foresight of the merits of the passion of Christ, applied them to the Virgin and preserved her from all actual sin, and also from all original sin.”¹⁰

Scotus was a theological voluntarist, that is, a clergyman who focused on the omnipotence of God's Will and on human freedom rather than on a scholastic rationalist approach. This is entirely coherent with Cusa's idea of God as “*Posse Ipsum*,” which implies that from the standpoint of God, everything is possible. Theological voluntarism was developed during the Middle Ages in strict opposition to the Aristotelian rationalizations developed by Thomas Aquinas.

By focussing on the resolution of the paradox of freedom and necessity, Duns Scotus was able to solve paradoxes that other theologians were not able to solve. The question of the Immaculate Conception, therefore, had to be taken out of the realm of speculative and deductive logic. Duns Scotus conceptualized the solution as follows:

“Mary was in need of redemption like all other human beings, but through the merits of Jesus' crucifixion, given in advance, she was conceived

¹⁰ Noel Muscat, *Ibidem*.

without the stain of original sin. God could have brought it about (1) that she was never in original sin, (2) she was in sin only for an instant, (3) she was in sin for a period of time, being purged at the last instant. Whichever of these options was most excellent should probably be attributed to Mary.”¹¹

Thus, Mary's Immaculate Conception was no longer subjected to the chronological defect of impotent clock-timing as Thomas Aquinas and other theologians would have it. And, divine reason had decided, *in the simultaneity of eternity*, where to append the badge of creative insight.

The issue is not merely to appease the mind with satisfactory doctrinal clarity. What is at issue, here, is not only a theological question but emphatically an epistemological one where the subject matter requires an axiomatic transformation in which the human mind must demonstrate it is capable of resolving the *coincidence of opposites* between the divine and the human, and that can only be done directly by way of the Grace of God.

The best example of how to settle such a dispute is to find how to resolve the *coincidence of opposites* as Plato formulated it in the *Meno Paradox*. Remember what Socrates said in response to Meno's state of perplexity on the question of the origin of knowledge before the slave boy discovered how to double the area of the square. Socrates merely remarked:

“I know what you mean. Do you realize that what you are bringing up is the trick argument that a man cannot try to discover what he knows or what he doesn't know? He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is looking for.”¹²

¹¹ Duns Scotus, [Ordinatio III](#), d. 3, q. 1. Duns Scotus's argument was taken up by Pope Pius IX for his 1854 Declaration of Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The Pope wrote: "At the first moment of Her conception, Mary was preserved free from the stain of original sin, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ." Quoted from [The Life of Blessed John Duns Scotus](#).

¹² Plato [Meno](#), 81d. Trans. W.R.M Lamb, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, 1967.

Aristotle's rebuttal, his infamous *Posterior Analytics*, is his attempt at denying the "Meno Paradox" of Plato.¹³ Aristotle agreed with Plato that learning was based on pre-existing knowledge, but such knowledge, for Aristotle, had to be based on previously acquired logical categories.¹⁴

I do not wish to imply, here, that the Franciscans are all Platonists. Quite a significant number of them were recruited to Aristotle and to nominalism, especially under the influence of the Franciscan nominalist, William of Ockham. My suggestion for the reader to avoid such pitfalls is to reconstruct the mental exercise of doubling the area of the square as reflected by the method used in Plato's *Meno* dialogue, but by making some changes. The challenge is to further discover how to construct the Pythagorean Theorem from the boundary conditions set by the doubling of the square. See my report: [WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE FUTURE.](#)

2. HOW TO SOLVE THE PARADOX OF THE HOLY TRINITY

*"The one thing you don't need to change
the world is clock-time."*

Dehors Debonneheure

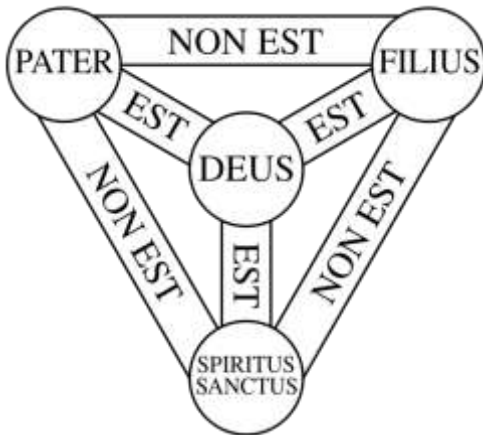
Here is how to look at the Holy Trinity from the standpoint of epistemology and how to conceptualize it as a process of axiomatic change as opposed to an object of sense perception or of a logical relationship. First, think of the paradox of *something which is and is not at the same time*; that is, think of God as a *coincidence of opposites*. How would you express such a reality? Deductive reason cannot help you because logic refuses to accept contradictions. Sense perception cannot help you either, because such a thing cannot be made visible as such. The imagination, however, can help your mind conceive of such an impossibility, but

¹³Aristotle, [Posterior Analytics](#), Book I, Chapter 1, Art. 1. Mesa Community College. Trans. Dave Yount, May, 2013.

¹⁴ See the Aristotelian argument in David Bronstein, [Aristotle on Knowledge and Learning: General Introduction.](#)

only if you look at it as a process of transformation within the same thing. Contemplate for a while the following “Shield of the Trinity” diagram. (Figure2)

What we have here is a contradiction within itself. The Father is not Christ, Christ is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father; yet the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are One and the Same God. Only the imagination can



come up with something like that. That is how the Most Powerful Imagination of all, the Divine Imagination, created this process of transformation within itself. And, God did not create that process to confuse us, but to help us change the way we think about everything and to make us understand that everything that exists has been generated by the same creative process.

Figure2 The Medieval “Shield of the Trinity” diagram. Originally from Peter of Poitiers’s writings, c. 1210. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shield_of_the_Trinity

The way to conceive of the Holy Trinity is as a way to discover new ideas through the *coincidence of opposites*; that is, by having your mind become like the transforming process of the Holy Trinity, Itself. Take, for instance, the classical opposition of *mind and body*: how can you arrive at the coincidence between those two opposites?

Most people spend their entire life believing that a human being is a mixture of *body and soul* without ever asking themselves how these two opposites have come together to coincide. They don’t realize they are, themselves, living paradoxes. They don’t realize that there seems to be another part of them that is neither their soul neither their body, but a third element which has been identified as different from the other two, yet subsuming the other two, which is the spirit. Has God also created man with a spirit? Why do the Scriptures say that only believers are said to be “spiritually alive” (1Corinthian 2:11; Hebrews 4:12; James 2:26), while non-believers are said to be “spiritually dead” (Ephesians 2:1–5; Colossians 2:13)? What is that third part of the human being that some people have

and others lack? It is as if the spirit were a dormant faculty inside of the human mind, which is just waiting to be awakened and to be connected to its maker.

According to the scriptures, and this is also verifiable epistemologically, the spirit is the part of man which has the ability to relate directly to God. This is our direct connection to God, because God is Himself the Holy Spirit. In fact, the spirit in humanity is the connection between mankind and the Holy Trinity, or the connection with God as a Triply-Connected Infinite Spirit.

From the vantage point of epistemology, the spirit is the divine function in man which makes the *coincidence of opposite* possible; and this is how man is capable of discovering that he has been created in the image of God. In a sense, the spirit is the divine spark which not only makes the human being immortal, but makes the human person capable of becoming known as a divinity.

The most curious aspect of this triply-extended conception of man is that it only becomes true when the human being gives himself to the Truth of the Trinity of God and becomes God-Like. As St. Paul said: "If Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness" (*Romans 8:10*). St. Irenaeus makes this point quite clearly at the end of his work *Against Heresies*:

"1. Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modeled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a *part* of the man, but certainly not *the* man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was molded after the image of God. For this reason does the apostle declare, 'We speak wisdom among them that are perfect,' 1 Corinthians 2:6 terming those persons '*perfect*' who have received the Spirit of God, and who through the Spirit of God do speak in all languages, as he used Himself also to speak. In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God, whom also the apostle terms '*spiritual*,' they being

spiritual because they partake of the Spirit, and not because their flesh has been stripped off and taken away, and because they have become purely spiritual. For if anyone take away the substance of flesh, that is, of the handiwork [of God], and understand that which is purely spiritual, such then would not be a spiritual man but would be the spirit of a man, or the Spirit of God. But when the spirit here blended with the soul is united to [God's] handiwork, the man is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God. But if the Spirit be wanting to the soul, he who is such is indeed of an animal nature, and being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image [of God] in his formation (*in plasmate*), but not receiving the similitude through the Spirit; and thus is this being imperfect. Thus also, if any one take away the image and set aside the handiwork, he cannot then understand this as being a man, but as either some part of a man, as I have already said, or as something else than a man. For that flesh which has been molded is not a perfect man in itself, but the body of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the soul itself, considered apart by itself, the man; but it is the soul of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the spirit a man, for it is called the spirit, and not a man; but the commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man. And for this cause does the apostle, explaining himself, make it clear that the saved man is a complete man as well as a spiritual man; saying thus in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, '*Now the God of peace sanctify you perfect (perfectos); and may your spirit, and soul, and body be preserved whole without complaint to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.*' Now what was his object in praying that these three — that is, soul, body, and spirit — might be preserved to the coming of the Lord, unless he was aware of the [future] reintegration and union of the three, and [that they should be heirs of] one and the same salvation? For this cause also he declares that those are '*the perfect*' who present unto the Lord the three [component parts] without offense. Those, then, are the perfect who have had the Spirit of God remaining in them, and have preserved their souls and bodies blameless, holding fast the faith of God, that is, that faith which is [directed] towards God, and maintaining righteous dealings with respect to their neighbours."¹⁵

¹⁵ St. Irenaeus, [*Against Heresies, Book V, Chapter 6, 1.*](#)

This epistemological exegesis is a fitting conclusion to the great work of St. Irenaeus, because his genius put the very nature of the relationship of man to God at the center of a triply-extended monist form of divine epistemology. The Thomists and Aristotelians argue that the conception of man is a dichotomy or a duality of matter and form, and that body and soul, reflecting the dualistic conception of Hylemorphism, are the only two components of man. How else could creativity, especially artistic creativity, be explained and fostered? Clearly, it is the divine spirit of creativity which is the part of man that speaks directly to his Maker.

The result of St. Irenaeus's epistemological exercise is strikingly beautiful because if one follows his method of a triply-extended process of change and adds to it the Leibniz principle of harmony between reason and power and the LaRouche principle of increase in relative population density, such a divine epistemological doctrine would also become coherent with the traditional Confucian principle which is presently extending its hand everywhere for the purpose of solving world poverty.

As I have reported earlier, the reason for this congruence between East and West is because the Confucian human development principle is a reflection of the Christian relationship of the Holy Trinity; that is, where God the Father is the ultimate end (太極 *Taiji*), the Son is reason (理 *li*), and the Spirit is power (氣 *qi*). When all dissonances among these three principles get resolved into unity, their congruence works as the principle of creativity causing change similar to those demonstrated by the Peace of Westphalia.¹⁶

3. RAPHAEL'S DISPUTE IN THE LIGHT OF THE HOLY TRINITY

¹⁶ See how the same triply-connected principle also applies to artistic composition: [AMERICAN ART AS A FUTURE-DETERMINED PERFORMATIVE CULTURE](#)

Observe how the entire fresco of Raphael's *The Dispute* is divided into two parts; the upper part representing the Triumphant Church in Heaven and the lower part representing the Militant Church on Earth. The subject of the Dispute is essentially calling on the spectator to discover how the coincidence between those two opposite Churches are divided and can be reconciled. Raphael represented such a coincidence by locating the unity of effect of the entire fresco in the host inside of the Monstrance standing on the altar. This is the central focus of the consubstantiation of the Holy Trinity bringing together the human perspective of the lower fresco in congruence with the upper triple-circle of the Heaven's irradiation of the "*knowledge of the Father*" through the Son and the Holy Spirit. The vertical radius of this divine circular action is formed by the Holy Trinity.¹⁷



¹⁷ See my two previous reports on Raphael in: [RAPHAEL SANZIO. THE SCHOOL OF ATHENS AND THE DISPUTE, PART I](#); [RAPHAEL SANZIO. THE SCHOOL OF ATHENS AND THE DISPUTE, PART II](#).

Figure 3 Raphael The Dispute of the Holy Sacrament. Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican.

A remarkable article published in *Franciscan Studies* reported that Raphael might have gotten his inspiration from a contemporary Franciscan theologian by the name of Cardinal Marco Vigerio whose inspiration may have come from St. Bonaventure (*Seraphic Doctor*). According to the account of Vasari, three of the four doctors of the Church represented in the Dispute are Franciscans; that is, St. Bonaventure, Nicholas of Lira, and Duns Scotus. The two authors of the *Franciscan Studies* article, Harry B. Gutman and Philotheus Boehner, reported the following very insightful view. In spite of his pronounced affinity with Aristotle, Gutman had a wonderful Platonic moment when he stated:

“The frescoes of the Stanza della Segnatura breathe the spirit of the Franciscan philosophy of the Middle Ages. They glorify divine and human wisdom. Science, justice, and grace are the paths leading to that wisdom. ‘*Nemo venit ad sapientiam nisi per scientiam, iustitiam et gratiam,*’ St. Bonaventure wrote in his *Itinerarium mentis* (CI, 8). The spirit of the Renaissance added poetry to them, described since the times of Petrarch as a product of divine inspiration, or as Landino, contemporary of young Raphael, called it, ‘quasi-theology.’ The natural light which was given to the soul from its creation illumines the groups of the scientists and philosophers of the School of Athens. To achieve the highest enlightenment, however, the superior and higher light of grace is needed. The descent of this light is demonstrated in the Disputa.”¹⁸

Note how the light of the Holy Trinity in the upper part of the Dispute is reflected through the *coincidence of opposites* of the soft primary colors in order to become mixed into a golden crepuscule projection of lighting coming down on the Militant Church through golden rays. There is no doubt that Gutman’s insight had been influenced by Franciscan Father Boehner who had identified the appropriate

¹⁸ Harry B. Gutman and Philotheus Boehner, *Franciscan Studies*, New Series, Vol. 2, No. 1 (MARCH 1942), p. 35. [Raphael's Disputa](#), pp. 35-48

epistemological character of Raphael's Dispute as being inspired by St. Bonaventure's recognition of the light coming from above as a reflection of the Epistle of St. James: "***Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.***"¹⁹ Relate that same idea of the creative effect of light that St Irenaeus relates to in the concluding section of Book IV, Chapter 6:

"But the Son, administering all things for the Father, works from the beginning even to the end, and without Him no man can attain the knowledge of God. For the Son is the knowledge of the Father; but the knowledge of the Son is in the Father, and has been revealed through the Son; and this was the reason why the Lord declared: 'No man knows the Son, but the Father; nor the Father, save the Son, and those to whomsoever the Son shall reveal [Him].' For 'shall reveal' was said not with reference to the future alone, as if then [only] the Word had begun to manifest the Father when He was born of Mary, but it applies indifferently throughout all time. For the Son, being present with His own handiwork from the beginning, reveals the Father to all; to whom He wills, and when He wills, and as the Father wills. ***Wherefore, then, in all things, and through all things, there is one God, the Father, and one Word, and one Son, and one Spirit, and one salvation to all who believe in Him.***"²⁰

In *The Dispute*, Raphael ordered the principle of the creative process of the Trinity following St. Bonaventure's account of the revelation in *Breviloquium*, Chapter X, Part IV. The revelation descends from the top down; that is, from the Father and from the Son, through the Holy Spirit. That is the way that the "***knowledge of the Father***" works upon the Earth. Why does the knowledge of God have to be acquired through such a triply-connected modality, and in that order? Because this is the modality of the creative process of generating new ideas as well as articulating the modality for solving a dispute, which requires two elements in opposition (Father and Son) and the resolution of that opposition into congruence (The Spirit).

¹⁹ St. James 1:17.

²⁰ St Irenaeus, [Against Heresies](#), Book IV, Chapter 6, Section 7.

This artistic principle of composition of Raphael shows that the religious level of human development is an immature level contracted by guilt, while the epistemological level is a level of maturity contracted by truthfulness. Since the ordering process is generated from discovering the creative solution for a peace agreement between two opposing forces, the elimination of the difference between the two is what creates congruence. If the reason for this were to be so obvious as to be self-evident, then, human beings would not continuously fall prey to wars and would not systematically degenerate into dark ages at about every 500 years. In a way, St. Irenaeus answered these questions in the previous section of his Book IV, Chapter 6, when he recalled what Justin had said against the heretic Marcion:

“I would not have believed the Lord Himself, if He had announced any other than He who is our framer, maker, and nourisher. But because the only-begotten Son came to us from the one God, who both made this world and formed us, and contains and administers all things, summing up His own handiwork in Himself, my faith towards Him is steadfast, and my love to the Father immoveable, God bestowing both upon us.”²¹

Aside from receiving His divine grace, the question is: how are we fed and supported by God's creation? Doesn't the Universe provide us with everything that is required for us to be creative human beings? Why don't we replicate what God has created for us to use in our own way? Why are we not creative ourselves? Why is creativity the only thing that is not being taught in schools? Why has great art declined so much over the last hundred years? Why is the human population as a whole so dumbed-down? And, why do we still have war?

Have a look at how the Chinese have begun to answer these questions by solving the geopolitical crisis in the South China Sea and you will see how the process works. On August 4, 2018, *Xinhua* published a very revealing article on how the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) expressed their desire to have regional peace in the South China Sea. The ASEAN nations signed a Code of Conduct by integrating 11 different designs into a single one.

²¹ St. Irenaeus, *Idem*. Book IV, 6.

Eleven is more than three, but they never the less succeeded in finding a unity of purpose for the entire region. As [Xinhuanet](#) reported:

“There were plenty of bumps along the road, too, mostly due to foreign interference; yet those efforts failed to kill the common aspiration of those involved to establish a necessary order, one that would facilitate regional cooperation and prosperity.

“The agreement illustrates that a longing for peace outweighs any outstanding differences between the parties. It defeats attempts by non-regional countries to mislead public opinion, provoke confrontation and create tension; dialogue and consultation have proven better at settling disputes than outside meddling.”²²

Similarly, eight days later, Al Jazeera English announced on August 12, 2018 that a five-nation landmark [Caspian Sea Agreement](#) has been reached. After 22 years of negotiations, the leaders of Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan have signed a mutual security agreement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea. The agreement emphasized that no country which doesn't share a border on the Caspian sea will be allowed to interfere. Those two peace agreements alone represent the cornerstone of a secured future for this part of the world for a long time to come. Are the United States committed to adopt a similar outlook for the sake of world peace?

FIN

²² [XINHUANET](#). Commentary: A significant step toward lasting peace in the South China Sea, 2018-08-03