

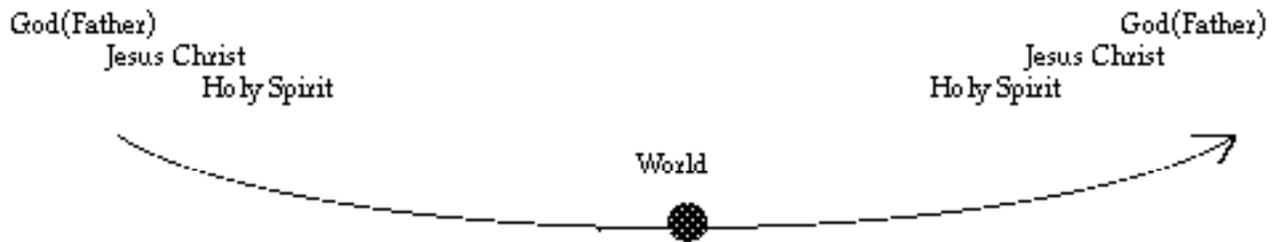
A MODEL OF THE TRINITY IN CHRISTIANITY

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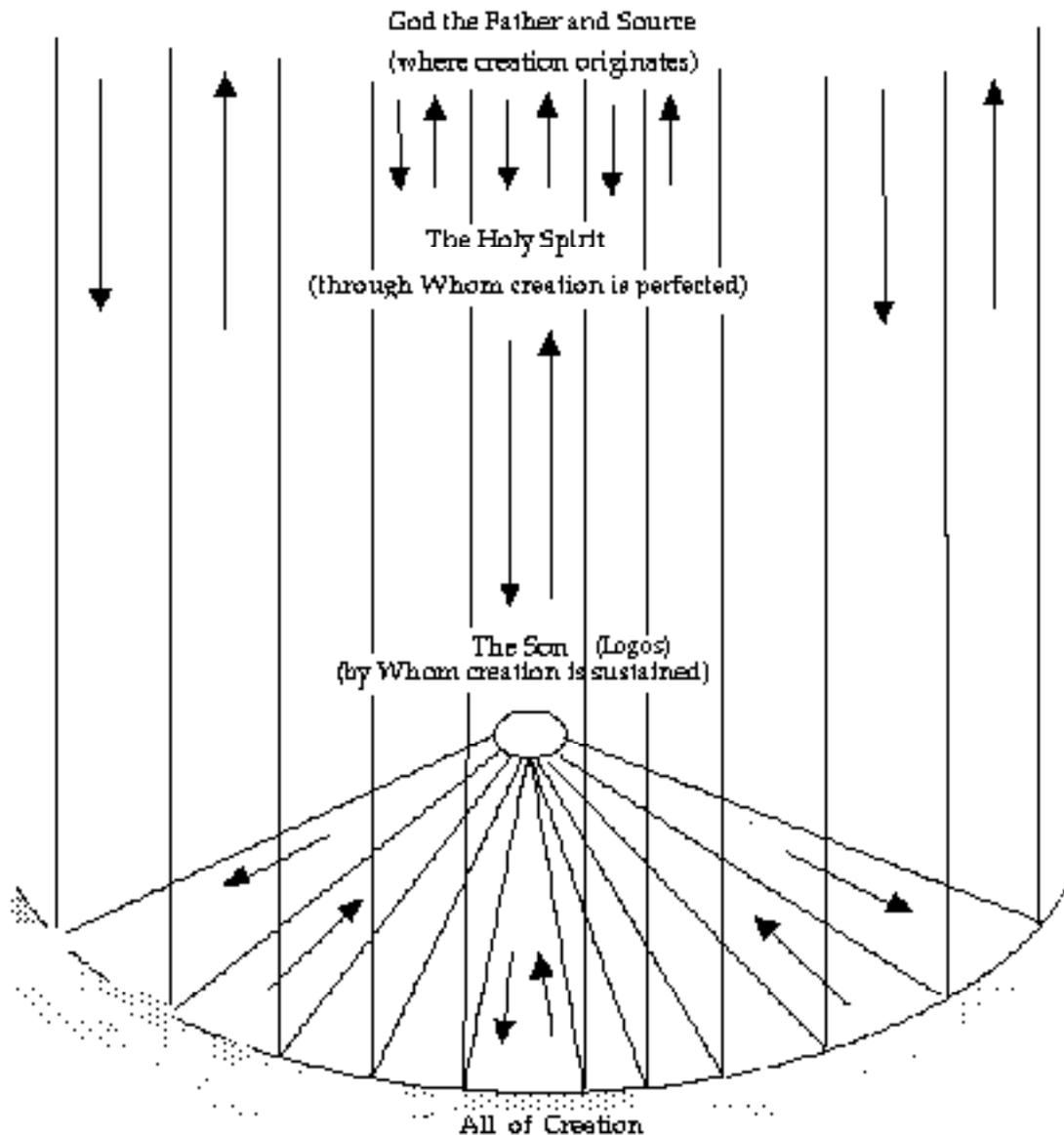
It is clear that all analogies are imperfect and models are caricatures. Even so they can be useful in searching for understanding. The model which follows is an analogy. While a metaphor claims to be a complete equivalence, a truth with infinite extent, an analogy doesn't make this claim. It claims merely to be a local equivalence, a truth with limited extent.

When discussing the Trinity, St. Patrick used the three-leaf clover to indicate the idea of three-in-one, while others have commonly used the equilateral triangle and labeled the vertices as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. More recently, Catherine M. LaCugna (1991) proposed that the dynamic shape of the economy (which she defines as God's concrete existence in Christ and as Spirit; and also as the 'distribution' of God's life lived with and for the creature) could be represented (crudely) as a point moving along a parabola. This is a chiasmic model of the created world's emanation and return to God (Father), Jesus Christ (Son), and the Holy Spirit as visualized along the trajectory of the parabola. Her model is



Trinitarian theology brings two important words into play, *Theologia* and *Oikonomia*. The first relates to the knowledge of the eternal being of God while the second to the self-communication of God in the person of Jesus Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation. Put in another way there is the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. The first being the eternal perichoresis between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (independent of creation) while the second comes into existence with creation and is manifested externally in the world through creation, redemption and consummation. The point is that there is one Trinity but it is viewed two different ways; again, one is viewing the Trinity in itself, in terms of its immanent relations, while the other is viewing it externally, as it related to what is created, to what is not in itself divine. Recent Trinitarian views explore the hypothesis that the economic and immanent aspects are really the same. This idea was introduced by Karl Rahner and further developed by Eberhard Jungel and Jurgen Moltmann. Ted Peters (1993) gives a lucid historical sketch on these developments. More particularly, Ted Peters' thesis is that time is incorporated into eternity through the eschatological incorporation of the temporal creation into the eternal perichoresis of the three persons that characterize the Trinitarian life.

The analogy I propose uses the parabola in a different sense from LaCugna as it draws upon its well-known geometric properties. If we visualize the parabola as a reflector, then light rays coming in from infinity will all redirect to the focus; in a similar way if the focus is a light source then all rays emanate out to infinity with a definite parallel structure. The TV dish pointing upwards exemplifies the first case while the headlight in your automobile the second.



God the Father is the mysterious unknown God of Israel, whose real name is unknown; He is called Yahweh, the Personal Originating Principle, the One who makes it all happen. As a symbol the Father communicates the sense of beyond, the eternal. He is "out there," but he doesn't act separately.

The Son is at the focus so that all of creation is reflected to and from the Logos, who "sustains all things by his powerful word." (Hebrews 1:3). He passed through creation, our space-time, as Jesus Christ. To the Christian he symbolizes a sense of the intimate and is the presence of God in a finite world. He has human and divine natures and belongs to the temporal and the eternal; i.e., in time and out of time. Christianity is Christocentric and everything focuses on Jesus. He is the "Creative Word" out of which creation was precipitated, the big bang, the pouring out of transcendent energy into and expanding through and encompassing the field of time.

The bi-directional energy flow represents the ongoing action of the Holy Spirit, in communion with Father and Son, continuously touching and infusing creation. God is not isolated from the affairs of creation. Creation is continuously being transformed and the Christian looks to an eschatological consummation promised by God. LaCugna notes that "the Holy Spirit consummates the world into the eschatological unity of Jesus Christ, who remits all to God the Father." Augustine (see Hill, 1990) was first to say that the Holy Spirit is the love of Father and Son for each other and in this sense we, as part of creation, are the beneficiaries of the ongoing act of love of the creator.

Since the inception of relativity theory it is natural to visualize space as curved and we envision the parabola as representing all of creation. Using this analogy the Trinitarian life of God spans the entire scope of temporal history as it continuously sustains and perfects creation. Creation is part of the divine

workings, part of the life of God, and we are part of this divine life. Creation is then not totally external to God so that space-time is a part of the eternal.

A comment on gender is also appropriate since the Father-Son terminology is used. God has no gender and this is a clear position of the Judeo-Christian heritage although the anthropomorphic terminology of Judaism has been inherited. In relation to Jesus' redemptive work there is nothing which owes to his being male. The theologian Lonergan (1964) gives examples of gender-free terminology and draws a comparison of the Trinity with three distinct acts of consciousness in the one conscious subject; the act of understanding, the act of affirmation, and the act of decision. The act of falling in love is a case where the Father is the Lover, the Word is the Judgment of value (this person is lovable), and the Spirit is the Loving and the three are part of the same reality.

Other world religions commonly use triads of deities (see Pannikar, 1970) but their relationships, as distinguished by theologians, are quite different from those in Christianity. Lao-Tzu was the founder of Taoism and wrote *Tao-te-Ching*, a sacred book of China. He states, "out of the Tao, out of the transcendent, comes the One, out of the One comes Two; out of the Two comes Three; out of the Three come all things."

A final thought. The geometrical pattern associated with the parabolic interface (of creation) assumes a smooth surface, yet recent research often discovers a fractal nature to boundaries. It would be helpful then to visualize the interface of creation, the surface of the parabola, as fractal in structure so that flow patterns would exhibit a multitude of scattered and diffused reflections along with the main flow pattern given in the model. In terms of our human nature the Christian can say that our often imperfect responses to divine

inspiration and guidance end up as less effective in the patterns of what could be.

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