



O Beauty Ever Ancient, Ever New

Theological Reflection on the Triune God



School Sisters
of Notre Dame

Cover image: Icon by Andrei Rublev. Title: The Trinity. 1411/1425. Public Domain. Rublev's famous icon showing the three Angels being hosted by Abraham at Mambré. Source: **Wikimedia**.

Foreword

*The Triune God impels us into the heart of the world
to be women of peace, hope, and love.*

Love Gives Everything, Directional Statement, October 24, 2017

As a congregation, we have been reflecting and acting in a variety of ways to gain a greater awareness of what it means to live into this statement from our 24th General Chapter. It is our hope that this theological reflection process on the Triune God will “deepen our consciousness of who we are in relationship with the Triune God, one another and God’s amazing universe.”

We are grateful to the five SSNDs from around the globe who gathered resources and looked at how we as a congregation experience theological reflection:

- Sister Mary Heather MacKinnon (AM), facilitator/participant
- Sister Lucy Clement Etim (AF)
- Sister Maria Josete Rech (ALC)
- Sister Rosangela Lamana (ÖR-IT/CE) and
- Sister Martina Radež, general councillor.

A Guide to Theological Reflection and a *Theological Reflection on the Triune God* are the result of their work.

A clear learning from their dialogue is that sisters have been engaged in theological reflection in a variety of ways particular to their province and cultural understanding of theological reflection. The committee offers a few additional learnings from their working together.

- Language, words, and images play critical roles and they function very differently depending on our native language.
- Local experiences of culture, religion, politics, society, education, history, and economics shape and influence our faith life.

- Theology and spirituality cannot be separated — you cannot have one without the other.
- Deep listening and respect for each other's faith journey are necessary.
- As SSNDs we have many different ways to pray, name God, and experience church today.
- SSNDs have very different understandings of the role of evolutionary consciousness and ecological spirituality.
- We may use a common method of theological reflection throughout the congregation, and the richness of our outcomes may reflect our “unity in diversity.” (YAS, C 45, GD 10)

Consecrated by the Triune God for mission, let us continue our creative response to God's call for us at this critical time for *“Love Gives Everything.”*

The General Council

June 2019

Theological Reflection on the Triune God

O Beauty Ever Ancient, Ever New¹

We know that our theology and spirituality have evolved over the years. St. Augustine captures this reality when he exclaims, “O Beauty ever ancient, ever new.” This theological reflection process offers us a new way of engaging one another in prayer and dialogue about our relationship with our Triune God.

This process takes extended time and involves more than one meeting for each step outlined below. There are some key questions listed for each step. Further questions are available at the end of the booklet. It is important to do each step in a prayerful context. Select a facilitator to lead the process and a recorder to keep the group's reflections, common insights, and decisions.

Step One: Experience

*Everything is interconnected,
and this invites us to develop a spirituality
of that global solidarity which flows
from the mystery of the Trinity.*

Laudato Si', 240



Begin by spending time in prayer and reflection alone, and then with others, on the commitment from *Love Gives Everything* to “deepen our consciousness of who we are in relationship with the Triune God, one another, and God’s amazing universe, particularly through theological reflection on the Trinity.” Use the following questions, or those of your

¹ St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), *Confessions*, X.

own choice, to share your experience of reflection on this profound call from the General Chapter.

Suggested Questions:

- What comes to mind and heart for you when you reflect on “who we are in relation to the Triune God”?
- In what ways do you feel you can respond best to the call of the General Chapter to do theological reflection on the Trinity? What do you need to do this well?
- How have any experiences or understandings of who you are in relationship with the Triune God, others, and God's amazing universe changed or deepened recently? Why?

Step Two: Reflection

I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17:23



Step Two is a time of deep listening and entering a contemplative space, first alone and then with others. It needs extended time to bring our life experiences into deeper relationship with our faith tradition. The experiences and feelings shared in step one on the call of the General Chapter are now illuminated and filtered through scripture, our faith tradition, *You Are Sent*, church documents, contemporary culture, history, science, and current events.

Suggested Questions:

- What wisdom surfaces within you as you deepen your “consciousness of who we are in relationship with the Triune God, one another, and God’s amazing universe”?
- How have the writers of the Old and New Testament helped you to name and picture God? Share if there is one image that you find most helpful and why.
- What are new ways in which *Laudato Si’* calls you to understand your relationship with God, one another, creation, the world, and the church today?

Step Three: Response

“The deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is revealed when they are viewed in relation to the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness. They are in fact an expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Vita Consecrata, 21



Consider now what concrete response or actions you are being called to make because of bringing your life experience together with scripture, our faith tradition, *You Are Sent*, *Laudato Si’*, and any other resources you used.

Spend time in prayerful discernment. Share any movement that calls you to conversion, transformation, and openness to new ways of relating with the Triune God, others, and God’s amazing universe.

Suggested Questions:

- From the insights gained from your theological reflection, how are you inspired to respond more deeply to the critical needs of our time?
- In what ways does a Trinitarian theology of relationship move you to live the “integral ecology” message of *Laudato Si’*?
- In the midst of the diverse realities of our church and world, in what new ways are you impelled “into the heart of world to be women of peace, hope, and love”?

Conclusion

After you have completed steps one, two and three, review the notes your recorder has kept for each of your group meetings. Schedule other meetings:

- to discuss the notes;
- to consider what you feel have been your most important learnings, discoveries, concerns;
- to decide if you wish to do more theological reflection together;
- to record the individual and group actions you will take after completing this theological reflection process.

At your final meeting, create a prayer celebration during which the members of your group receive a special “artistic” copy of the actions that you committed to carry out individually and as a group.

Further Questions to Deepen Your Reflection

Step One:

- Scientists tell us that the origin of the universe is about 13.8 billion years ago and that we belong to a dynamic evolving universe of more than 2 trillion observable galaxies. Share any feelings that surface for you about your relationship with our Triune God when you think of the vastness of our universe?
- The General Chapter indicates in *Love Gives Everything* that we are at a “critical turning point in the sacred history of creation and humanity”. What are your experiences of this?

Step Two:

- Today many theologians encourage us to deepen our understanding of the Trinity in terms of a dynamic, loving relationship. Share with others what happens for you in prayer when you try to imagine the Trinity as “Source of Love, Word of Love, and Spirit of Love.”²
- *Laudato Si'* proclaims that our Triune God is in loving relationship with *all* of creation (238-240), and not just with human beings (69). Reflect and share with one another how you think *Laudato Si'* might expand our *You Are Sent* understandings of *mission* and *community life* in the world today.
- What do you recall most about your feelings or thoughts during your sharing time with others in step one? Note any reasons why these memories seem significant for you.

² Heidi Russell, *The Source of All Love: Catholicity and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), xvii.

Step Three:

- How might understanding of the profound interconnection of everything that exists (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 238-240) help us to respond more fully to the political, social, and ecological crises we face in the world today? What personal conversions might this ask of you?
- If we immerse ourselves in the love of our Triune God, how might we participate more deeply in God's own self-emptying (kenosis) and make visible Christ's presence in the world today (*YAS*, C4; *Vita Consecrata* 20, 21)?
- What actions do your learnings call you to take? Why? How? For whom? With whom?

Some Resources on the Holy Trinity in Church Documents

Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), 232-267.

Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (1996), 16-21, 41-42.

Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001), 23, 29, 32, 43.

Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), 19.

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (2015), 99-100, 238-240.

Additional study and reflection resources are available on the Gerhardinger.org intranet in multiple languages.

The image on the following page is a stained glass window entitled "Creation". It is installed on an inside wall of the Beatty Valley Gospel Mission in Beatty, Oregon. Designer: Thomas D. Rogers, Sr. Stained glass artisan: Margaret H. Rogers, his wife. Permission received to use the photo in this booklet. Source: <http://www.tdrogers.com>.



*I solemnly commend all the sisters
to the most Holy Trinity.*

*May God, the Father, care for you all and keep you
steadfast and faithful in your holy vocation!*

*May God, the Son, deliver you from all evil of sin;
may he be the way you walk, the truth you follow,
the life you lead!*

*May the Holy Spirit preserve you
in his love and grace!*

*May Mary, the mother of divine grace and mother of
our congregation, take you all into her loving,
maternal heart and stand by you in life and in death!*

Blessed M. Theresa Gerhardinger, Letter 714
