

# Vatican Being Vetted Part III: Pope Francis and the Role of Trinitarian Theology

[New Era World News](#)

**Pope Francis and Trinitarian Theology**

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POPE FRANCIS IS ADROITLY applying Trinitarian Theology in the modern context; he is demonstrating that **wisdom** (the truths of dogmatic theology) **by itself though a good**, among the highest and greatest goods, **is a deficient good. Wisdom reaches its perfection in love; wisdom is consummate in love.**

*Without love wisdom cannot reach its telos or end, which is communion with other human beings as the Body of Christ and union with God as sons in the Son.*

God the Father in knowing Himself from eternity begot the Eternal Word born out of His infinite and eternal self-knowledge. The Holy Trinity however is *not* consummate in the begetting of the Word, Divine Wisdom; **the Holy Trinity is consummate in the union of Father and Son by the Love they have for each other, a love from which the Holy Spirit is spirated perfecting the Trinity and making them One. It is not wisdom ALONE, BUT WISDOM CONSUMMATE IN LOVE that is the bond of Trinitarian and therefore perfect Substantial Unity – The Holy Trinity.** The Father first knows the Son, the Son knows the Father and in reciprocal knowing, They are impelled to love each other with the fullness of Divine Love and Divine Life that we call the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Divine Love spirated from the infinite and eternal Love shared between Father and Son.

**POINT: Wisdom is consummate in loving.** That is, wisdom without love *is not* and *cannot* be fecund, wisdom without love is incomplete-imperfect. Divine wisdom, the self-knowledge of God brings forth the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from, and is the “fruit” of, Divine Love the perfection of the Holy Trinity, who is Love. All-Knowing Wisdom and Life-Giving love constitute one integral Divine being – Wisdom and Love belong together; one without the other is deficient. Wisdom is consummate in love; wisdom precedes love in the “order of operation”:

*“For the procession of love occurs in due order as regards the procession of the Word (wisdom); since nothing can be loved by the will unless it is (first) conceived in the intellect”* ([Aquinas Q 27, A 3](#)).

In **human terms**, this means that there must be a unity and profound cooperation between wisdom and love and among the sentient powers and operations of the human soul, passions, intellect and will. This is why the masters of mystical theology have articulated three stages on the road to spiritual perfection: the *purgative* (having to do with the sentient passions), the *illuminative*, (having to do with the acquisition of wisdom) and the *unitive* (having to do with growth in love by which a person is united to God.) Notice the order of perfection: purgative-illuminative-unitive. **The unitive, which depends on love, is last, the final end, the consummation of discipline of body and enlightening of intellect that ascends to union with God by way of love.**

*Wisdom is not the telos. Love of God that brings about union with God, the divinization of man as the Body of Christ is the telos, the end of human powers and operations assisted by Divine Grace.*

**Love, not wisdom, is the highest attainment of the human mind.** It is an attainment of the human mind because love proceeds

from the **will**, which as Aquinas tells us is an **“INTELLECTUAL appetite.”** This is the key to understanding Pope Francis’ insistence on pastoral theology. Wisdom, one might say, represents an attainment of dogmatic theology; it is an intellectual virtue that remains incomplete unless consummated in unitive love, the love of **God AND neighbor** – the love that is the work of **“pastoral theology.”**

Those who do not like to hear that God is Love must answer to the sacred scriptures wherein Saint John clearly and explicitly informs the universal body, that **“God is Love.”** Moreover those who do not know love, those who do not live love, those who over-emphasize wisdom and dogma to the detriment of love, do not know God because **“God is love.”**

*“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. **Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.**” ([1 John 4: 7-8](#)).*

Why does Francis want his pastors to “get dirty” to mix with their sheep so they can “smell” like their flock? Why, because he wants them to discern openings for possible fuller admission into the ministries of the laity and eventual invitation to the sacraments, why because pastoral theology is the work of love:

*“Love is **patient**, love is **kind**. It is not jealous, [love] is **not pompous**, it is not inflated, it is **not rude**, it does not seek its own interests, it is **not quick-tempered**, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It **bears all things**, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” ([1 Corinthians 13:4-8](#)).*

Love moreover, unlike justice, love is not interested in claiming its rights, in counting wrongs done. Love seeks to

*pardon and excuse, while the devil looks to condemn and accuse (Rev. 12:10). Unfortunately, he is sometimes imitated by some members of the Body of Christ whom the pope is addressing when he often times belittles condemnation and judgmentalism.*

*“Love (however) never fails.” (1 Cor 13:8).*

It is by love, not dogma, that priests leave the comfort of their studies, of their offices and rectories, to encounter the world and become “fishers of men.”

*“‘This is what I am asking you’,” Pope Francis emphasized while looking up from his prepared text, “be shepherds with the smell of sheep,” so that people can sense the priest is not just concerned with his own congregation, but is also a fisher of men.’*

This is rudimentary; it is therefore also **surprising that so many miss this primordial dictum of the faith, so many in the Church who cry for justice, demand condemnation of sinners,** look forward to and predict global cataclysms and chastisements, while Jesus Christ, is Himself calling for Mercy and asking His Church to proclaim mercy – mercy before justice. However there are those in the Church (those whom Francis is prodding to become pastors) who are content with expressing the faith by straining at the gnat of dogmatic truths and swallowing the camel of mercy and therefore erroneously cry for justice – justice – justice.

*“Many publicans and sinners came, and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And the Pharisees seeing it, said to his disciples: **Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners?** But Jesus hearing it, said: They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill. **Go then and learn what this meaneth, I will have MERCY and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners.**”*

HAVE WE FORGOTTEN THIS? THE STUDY OF DOGMA AND REFLECTION ON  
DIVINE LAW LEAD TO  
WISDOM THAT MUST BE ACTUALIZED IN LOVE AND MERCY BECAUSE THE  
DIVINE LAW IS LOVE – AGAPE

As was said in a previous column, those calling for justice and predicting calamities should watch what they are pleading for, they might receive it themselves. Was it justice or mercy that characterized the attitudes of Moses, of Peter, of Paul or of Christ Himself, when He and they interceded for members of their flock? What did the Lord say to James and John when they bellowed for the thunder of justice to be rained down upon sinners?

*“And he sent messengers before his face; and going, they entered into a city of the Samaritans, to prepare for him. And they received him not, because his face was of one going to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John had seen this, they said: Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them? And turning, he rebuked them, saying: You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save” ([Luke 9: 52-56](#)).*

No, until the “*Parousia*” it **belongs to the state, not the Church, to administer justice and punish sinners:**

*“Let every soul be subject to higher powers: for there is no power but from God: and those that are, are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist, purchase to themselves damnation. For princes are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good: and thou shalt have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to thee, for good. But if thou do that which is evil, fear: for he beareth not the sword in vain. For he is God’s minister: an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil”([Romans 13:1-4](#)).*

**It belongs to the Church to tame severity**, to put away the sword of vindictive justice and to suffer for the unjust as Christ did ([Matt 26:52](#)). This is what Our Lady at Fatima asked for: reparation prayer, prayer fructified by suffering for the sins of others borne out of charity and love for lost souls.

*“I Paul am made a minister. [Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you](#), and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for his body, which is [the church](#).”*

*God did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world ([John 3:17](#)).*

A priest intercedes for his people; he implores mercy and like Christ the High Priest whom he images (persona Christi), he offers himself as a victim in their place. This is a far cry from judgmentalism, from what Pope Francis refers to as Phariseeism, a Phariseeism that has infected some of his pastors and turned them into dogmatic theologians. A leader intercedes for his people:

*“But Moses besought the Lord his God, saying: **Why, O Lord, is thy indignation kindled against thy people**, whom thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt, with great power, and with a mighty hand? Let not the Egyptians say, I beseech thee: He craftily brought them out, that he might kill them in the mountains, and destroy them from the earth: **let thy anger cease**, and be appeased upon the wickedness of thy people. **Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou sworeest by thy own self**, saying: I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven: and this whole land that I have spoken of, I will give to you seed, and you shall possess it for ever. **And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil which he had spoken against his people**” ([Exodus 32: 11-14](#)).*

God was “appeased” due to the intercession of Moses who chose to plead for, rather than condemn, the sinners in his flock. In this, he prefigured the ultimate and infinite intercession of Jesus Christ the High Priest who offered Himself on the cross for sinners. Applying this lesson and example of intercessory and reparative love to modern-day lay leaders, it might be stressed that Jesus did *not* come to introduce a fashion show and to have medallions hung on His chest as Francis has pointed out to the Knights of Malta when reminding them of their charism of service to the poor. They and all members of the Body of Christ are to serve in humility and simplicity, to save souls by offering themselves in Christ for them. This is love and reparation. Reparation is not something intended solely for the priests. Is not this what Our Lady requested at Fatima – “Communions of Reparation”. Did we somehow forget about reparation, of sacrificial self-giving for love of poor sinners who have no one to pray for them???

Traditionalists who are big on Fatima should be stressing mercy for poor sinners and laying down their lives to win the grace of conversion for them. But, what we constantly here is an unending refrain about supposed dogmatic abuses and supposed erring formulas of papal consecration for the conversion of Russia, which is essentially none of the laity’s business anyway. Our Lady asked the pope to conduct the consecration; it is up to the pope to decide how it should be carried out. If Fatima connotes a battle over the consecration of Russia in your mind, you can be sure that you missed the Message of Fatima: Penance-Penance-Penance in an attitude of reparative love offered to God in union with His Passion in the Sacrifice of the Mass for the conversion of poor sinners and the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary!

*What does penance and reparation mean but mercy and love – the mercy and love from which they flow manifest in pastoral care for straying and lost sheep?*

Yet, often instead of pastoral care, instead of mercy, love and compassion bringing life to those in blighted outcast ghettos, on roaring sensual highways, and forgotten lonesome byways, etc, instead of love and mercy manifest in the daily toil of evangelization by means of pastoral care binding up the wounds of the lost and forgotten, instead of this we often find bloated men and women who want to wear military regalia, don titles of nobility and desirous of preferred seats, men and women who spend great swathes of time talking about trying to make things like they used to be in some romantic and unrealistic nostalgic past, while the wolves pulverize the sheep economically, morally and spiritually and the best bloated nobles can do is offer “philanthropy”. Pope Francis might be stinging a few consciences, but he is not wrong!

Philanthropy is NOT charity. Philanthropy condescends, philanthropy is a show; it gives far too little while holding the bulk for itself. Charity, on the other hand, gets out of its royal seat on a daily basis; it embraces both poverty and the poor – it is empathetic and compassionate, not condescending and stooping; charity is humble, it gives in secret ([Matt 6:6](#)) and it gives fully of its assets saddened that it cannot give more; charity expects nothing not even an acknowledgement from men:

*“A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, “Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood” ([Mark 12: 42-44](#)).*

Charity embraces those who are being served, it lives among them, eats with them, sleeps with them – charity, in short, begins to look and “smell” like the sheep it serves.



This is exactly what Francis is trying to promote. To bring it about, easy-living, worldliness, grandiosity, and vain-glory must be purged. But the enemy of Christ and of His Church is the King of Pride and Vain-glory. He surrounds himself, his followers and numerous others whom he lulls to spiritual sleep, he surrounds them with luxuries and the trappings that come with material abundance, an abundance that feeds pride and kills the soul.

*“And calling the multitude together with his disciples, he said to them: **If any man will follow me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel, shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?** ([Mark 8: 34-36](#)).*

The “Way of the Cross” is antithetical to the “Way of Perdition” most manifest in the spirit of materialism that has deeply infected the Church.

*“For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and **those who enter through it are many** ([Matt 7:13](#)).*

Interestingly, in the following line of Matthew’s Gospel, immediately following the one just quoted, Jesus warns His Church that those who are on the Road to Perdition are often deceivers who hide behind a veil of good deeds:

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves.”*

Then He further reveals that their spirit can be discerned by their conduct:

*“By **their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes of***

*thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit."*

That is, the spirit is *not* discerned by the works they do, but by **how they go about doing their works**. Fruits are *not* works *per-se*, but how works are done, for the fruits are:

*"Charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, Mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity. Against such there is no law. And **they that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences.** ([Galatians 5: 22-24](#)).*

All the fruits grow out of Charity, which makes souls joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, long-suffering, chaste etc. That is why even small gifts, such as a few coins from a poor woman, can surpass large donations given by a rich man. One is given in love, the other out of necessity, justice, vanity or some associated reason. **God regards the heart more than the gift.** Francis, like Christ, is *not* impressed by regalia, by insignia, or material abundance and worldliness, which are often a cover for corrupt spirits. The Holy Spirit is manifest in love, joy and mercy, in those who have "crucified their flesh".

But there are those in the Church who identify holiness with "Titles of Nobility", with medallions and regalia that, although not bad in themselves, easily infect the soul, easily corrupt virtue by the allurements of riches leading to vain-glory and the pride of life that result in dullness and ease that flatten virility and make men useless ([Matt 5:13](#)). Francis wants humble and virile men, men full of mercy, compassion love, which is the life of the soul and the light of the world. He therefore wants worldliness and materialism out of Malta, out of the Vatican, out of diocesan chanceries, institutes of religious life, out of deaneries and parishes;

in short, he wants worldliness out of the Church.

He has asked the Knights of Malta to focus less on the outer regalia, less on worldly traditions associated with royalty; he wants them to become truly chivalrous by noble deeds of service out of love for Christ's wounded Body on earth. To be militant, spiritually militant, requires much more than the donning of *beau monde* regalia and sword followed by salutes, hand shakes, and *mondaine* banquets. To be militant, truly militant, requires disinterested love of neighbor, to be ready to die to self out of love for the salvation of souls and the temporal needs of others *esp.* those of poor sinners. This is radical, the radical stuff of authentic Christian militancy.

Apparently the Island of Malta has been under severe material attack and has subcomb in many ways to the materialism that is infecting its prelates and noble men. The fact that it is not just lay leaders but also [the Maltese bishops who are also having a bout with the Vatican](#) is further indication of the serious problems festering on the stalwart island.

[The Maltese bishops' "Criteria for the Application of Chapter of Amoris Laetitia" has been referred to as "disastrous".](#)

They indicate, **against the express critique of Cardinal Mueller** (who will now have to work on correcting the egregious error promulgated by the Maltese Bishops), that it might prove to be "humanly impossible" for some civilly remarried couples to live chastely; nonetheless, a Catholic couple living in an objectively sinful situation may receive Holy Communion if they "are at peace with God."

It appears that some of the English Knights of Malta are bordering on elitist traditionalism and judgmentalism, what Francis refers to a Pharisee-ism, while the bishops have seemingly abdicated their prophetic responsibility and are not judging at all – bedlam on both ends of the theological spectrum. This is the problem, a problem that foments subjectivism in the name of a false pastoral theology that

leads to excessive tolerance and false charity on one hand (liberalism on the part of the episcopate) and rigorous objectivism in the name of dogmatic theology and traditionalism leading to judgmentalism (ultra-conservatism on the part of some knights) on the other. There is an apparent and egregious struggle raging on the Island of Malta, a struggle between liberal and conservative knights and between conservative knights and liberal bishops of the State – the perfect dialectical recipe long used by secret societies to hatch discontent, division, and then subversion of both Church and State thereby compromising the works of love carried out by the authentic sons of the Church.

Focusing on the Knights, Francis is concerned that they engage in charitable work, charity that gives up its comforts to assist the uncomfortable, charity that *“comforts the afflicted but afflicts the comforted”*.

Thus according to [Austen Ivereigh](#) writing for [CRUX](#)

*“The president of the order’s German Association, Erich Lobkowitz, has [described](#) the struggle as “a battle between all that Pope Francis stands for and a tiny clique of ultraconservative frilly old diehards in the Church – diehards that have missed the train in every conceivable respect.”*

*“The reformers want to focus on the Order’s humanitarian work among the poor, downplay the ceremonial pomp, and align the order more with Francis’s vision of an evangelizing, missionary Church.”*

This is how we are to understand the stance Pope Francis has taken with the Knights of Malta. The Church is not a Puritan society of the elect; **the Church is the suffering Body of Christ full of sinners until the eschatological harvest** ([Matt](#)

[13:36-43](#)).

Without love no one can enter the Kingdom of God, yet there are a whole host of Catholics who continue to insist that it is wisdom that is the *summa bonum* (the greatest good). This is an error innocently advanced by Aristotle, the pagan philosopher who with the *unaided*-intellect examined the human soul and concluded that wisdom is the greatest human good. Near the end of his “Ethics” he moved close to the mystery of unitive love that he called “friendship”. Nonetheless, not having the benefit of sanctifying grace and the mystery of the Cross to contemplate, he referred to wisdom as the *summum bonum*, the highest intellectual attainment possible for mortal men. As we know, in the light of the Cross, Aristotle was partially correct (an astounding accomplishment for a pagan philosopher): **Wisdom participates in the greatest good, but by itself is not the *summum bonum***, Wisdom consummate in love that unites mankind to God and to each other is the *summum bonum*, the highest attainment of the rational spiritual soul aided by supernatural grace- it is love that unites man to God as one body, the Body of Christ – a body composed of sinners whom Christ came to save.

*“The two, **intellect and will, work together as an integral unity**. It is the nature of the mind to know and will to love or to unite that which is known to that by which it is known. The more the known is like the knower, the more the known can be loved because “likeness is the principle of loving” (Aquinas, Q 27, A 4). Like attracts like (Father and Son – Christ and members of His Body – man and wife) and **their union is consummated by way of love**, which is the “impulse” and “movement” that unites the one who loves to the one who is loved” ([Trinitarian Humanism, p 292](#)).*

In the end there are faith (theological virtue of wisdom), hope and love, but the greatest of these is love:

*“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” ([Matthew 25:34–39](#)).*