

10. The Magic of Three

The dynamics of the Trinity can also be found in the fabrics of temporal life. Let's begin with the dynamics of a living animal. What is life? Unlike a rock, an amoeba (1) takes in signals from the environment, (2) processes those signals for a meaning (i.e. food or danger), and (3) creates an appropriate response in the environment. Similarly, human consciousness expands by (1) taking in more awareness from the surrounding and inward environment, (2) processing that additional awareness, and (3) enacting that awareness in a new quality of living

These simple dynamics of the nature of consciousness are congruent with the dynamics of the Trinity explored in the last discourse. The Christian-elaborated experience of God includes: (1) taking in the Mysterious Awesome Otherness shining through nature and history (the Almighty Parent), (2) processing this taking-in as states of personal Awe (Holy Spirit), and (3) enacting the life of the Awed Ones (the Body of Christ) among other humans in history on this Earth.

The elemental structure of these three dynamics can be stated as: Knowing, Being, and Doing. The Christian Trinity is about: (1) Knowing the Almighty Awesomeness, (2) Being the Awe Spirit, and (3) Doing the Awed One in History.

(1) Knowing the Almighty Awesomeness

Knowing in this context means an aware "taking-in" of the Reality that is coming at us. Such foundational knowing is an openness to what is happening. Thinking about this primal knowing comes second. When this primal awareness combines with the symbol-using mind we have something we can call "understanding," but the aware knowing of the Almighty Awesomeness is an experience that precedes theological understanding.

(2) Being the Awe Spirit

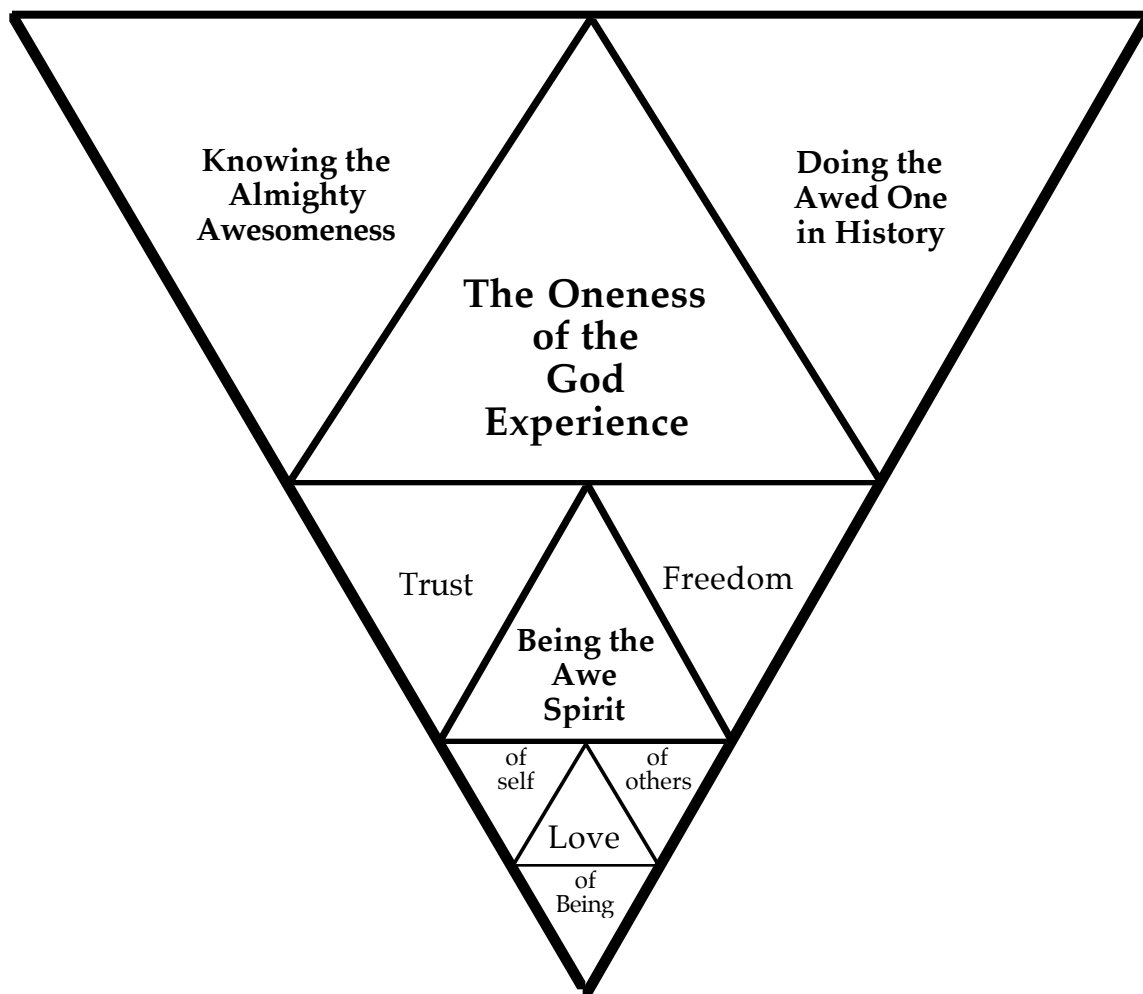
As we come know the Awesome, we discover within ourselves states of Awe. Awe is an opening to the Reality of the Awesome. By opening to the Awesome we are Trusting the Awesome. Trust is the courage to Be in Awe. Trust is taking on the assignment of being the Awesome's son or daughter. Trust is part of what Christian heritage calls "Holy Spirit." Love and Freedom are also states of Awe and aspects of Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit is the **Being** aspect of experiencing the One Experience of the Christian God.

(3) Doing the Awed One in History

The **Doing** aspect of the Trinity is flinging our flesh-and-blood life into the cauldron of history. Christ is a flesh-and-blood community of resurrected people serving a specific space/time segment of history. The Body of Christ is not church membership, but action from our Holy Spirit essence toward others, toward their finding their true Life, toward the repair of rotting social structures, toward the conservation, respect, and appropriate use of the Earth. The Body of Christ freely creates works of love and acts of trust in the face of a humanity that is fleeing in the opposite direction, a humanity that is estranged from knowing, being, and enacting the God experience. Each of us who do experience the God experience also participate in this fallen humanity. We are not yet grown up into the full stature of Christ, we are only on our way, step-by-step, toward the unfoldment of our essential nature. Nevertheless, we enact now the Body of Christ over against our own and our world's fallenness. We act with the confidence that we are on the winning side of history. Christ does not lose. The Christ life is supported by the Absolute Almightyness that has called us into this

Life and assigned us to our specific role in the healing of the world.

Here is a knowing-being-doing triangular diagram of the three faces or aspects of the one experience of the Oneness that describes Christian worship.

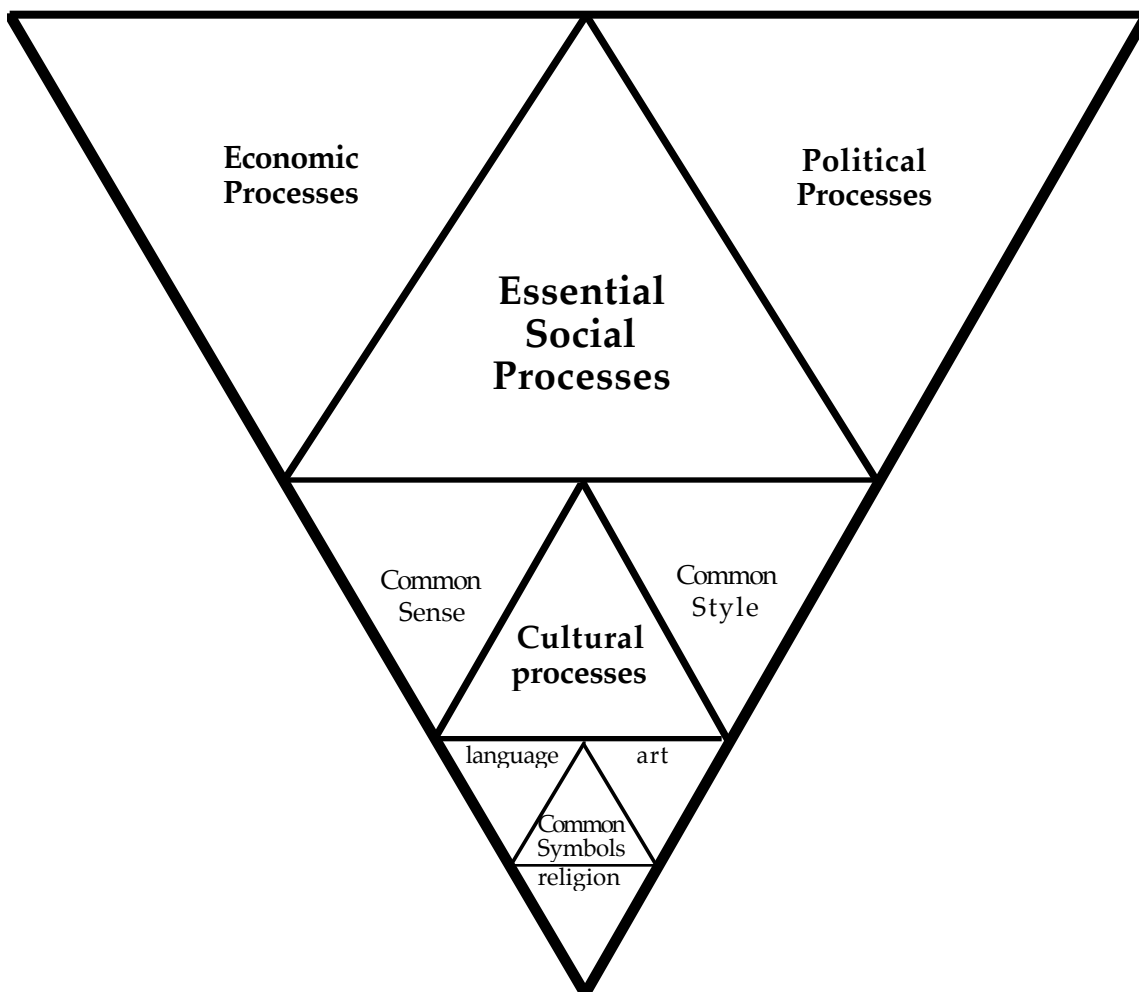


We can use the knowing-being-doing dynamics to further delineate each of above aspects of this One experience of the Oneness. I have broken down Holy Spirit as an example. Trust can be viewed as the knowing aspect of Holy Spirit. The trust of Awesome Reality is the opposite of despair over Reality. The being aspect of Holy Spirit can be called "Love" or "Compassion." Spirit Love or "agape" is the opposite of malice toward the Almighty, self, and others. The doing aspect of Holy Spirit can be called "Freedom." Paul, the first relatively systematic Christian theologian, often calls Freedom "Hope," thus yielding his formulae "faith, hope, and love." This hope is not the everyday hope whose companion is fear: every hope for something happening is also a fear that it won't happen. But the hope of Holy Spirit is a hope that does not disappoint. There is no fear involved in this hope, because there is nothing to fear in this absolutely certain hope. So what is this hope? It is the anticipation that in every situation that may ever happen, I will be free to respond in freedom. Creative response is my nature, I need never be without hope of realizing that freedom. As Jesus instructed his disciples, "when you are arrested and taken away, do not worry beforehand about what you will say, but when the time comes say whatever is given you to say; for it will not be you that speaks, but the Holy Spirit." (Mark 13.11) Your freedom will be there. This is your hope that does not disappoint. Faith/trust, love/compassion, and hope/freedom, are three aspects of one overall "being in Awe"

before the Awesome. Holy Spirit includes the spontaneity of complete Freedom combined with the fire of universal Compassion and an enduring Trust that Awesome Reality is dedicated to our appropriate unfoldment toward the aliveness that is our true nature. Holy Spirit is our true nature. Holy Spirit is sometimes described of as a wind blowing through the depths of our inner being. It is our true nature that is blowing, but it can seem like something alien because we identify with the more temporal aspects of our existence. So this Divine Wind can seem disturbing to us, for we do not know where it is coming from or where it is going. So when we are blown by the Spirit Wind we do not know where we are going; we are challenged to live in trust concerning where Spirit will lead us.

Religion

We can also apply the magic of three to social processes, one of which is called "religion." Religion is not the same as Spirit or any other face of the God-experience. Religion is a social process, a creation of humanity that, at its best, aims to assist humans to experience the Awesome, the Awe, and to enact the Awed Ones in history. In the following triangular diagram we can locate religion in relation to the other processes that make up a human society.



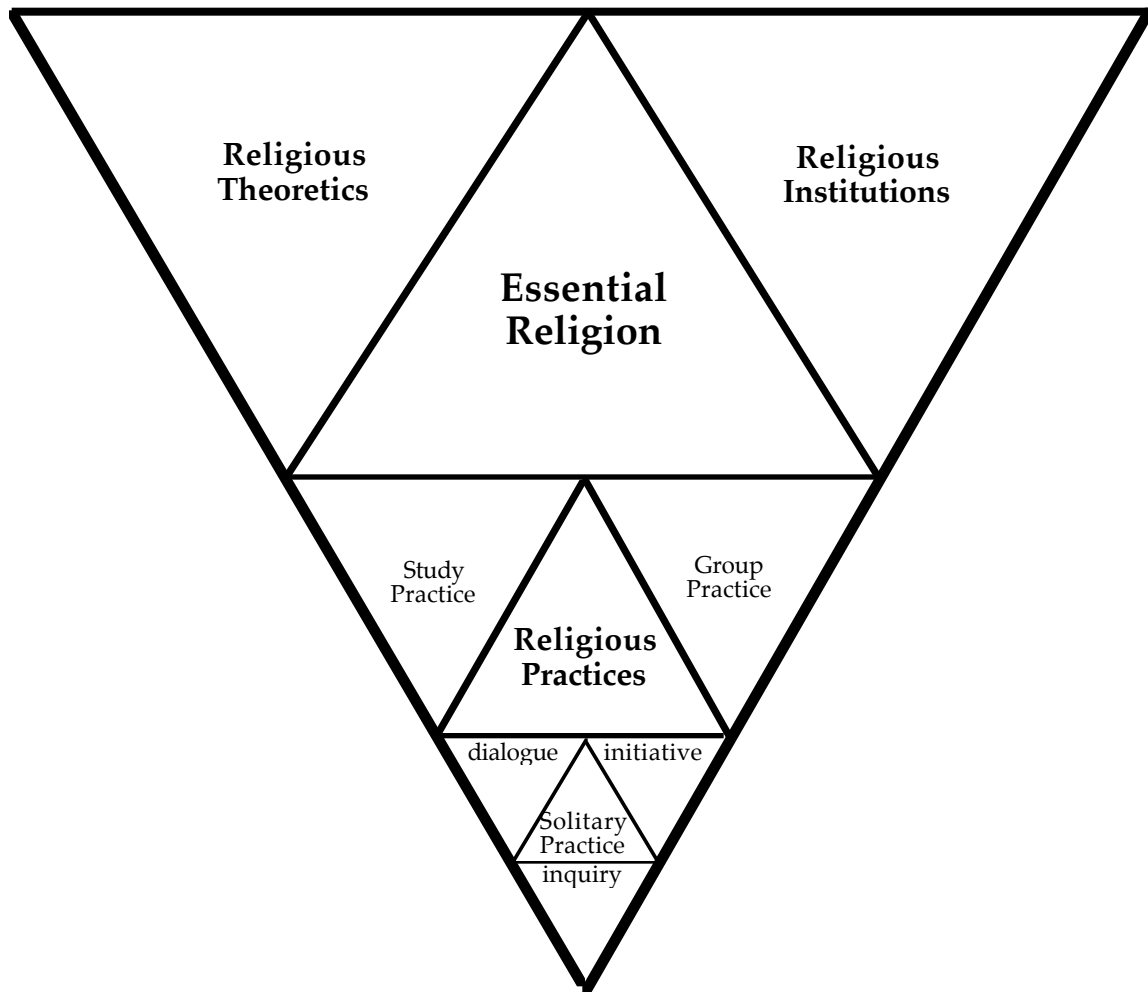
These processes are common to every society. They are different in their specific manifestations, but some form of these processes appears in every society. This is true because these processes can be seen as essential to every human society. Of course,

what is essential to all societies and what is unique to a specific society is a debatable inquiry, but conclusions about what is essential to a human society can be drawn. The above triangle is part of my current drawing together of what I experience as essential to every society.

This drawing together is of special importance for understanding “religion.” Some form of religion occurs in every society, because every society has to handle its relations with the Absolute Mysteriousness that humans confront. Just as there is very bad economics, so there is very bad religion. Many of us are so used to rejecting bad religion that we may doubt the possibility of good religion. We may even doubt the wisdom of giving a place to the category of religion in a discussion of essential society. Part of the answer to this doubt is the need to expand our understanding of the concept of religion. We can probably see how language and art naturally arise in every human society, for being human obviously entails the development of some form of speech as well as the symbolic forms of painting, sculpture, music, dance, drama, poetry, story, and so on. Religion uses language forms and artistic forms in a special way. Its rituals, icons, and stories are used to point beyond themselves to experiences of Awe. We can define Awe as dread of the Mysteriousness that aware humans must confront, fascination with the capacity of being Mystery-experiencing beings, and the courage to live such an intensification of human life. Religion comes into being to express, nurture, and access over and over again this profound aspect of being human. If some specific religion is not doing this, it can be counted as bad religion. “Bad religion” need not mean judging other people’s religion by my religion. I am suggesting that there is an essential social process of religion that judges all religion as good or bad, including my religion. And we need to clarify that even good religion may not succeed in accessing profound humanness or Awe/Spirit in every instant of its practice. As leaders of religious rituals or givers of religious talks, we may have noticed that sometimes the magic works and sometimes it doesn't.

Perhaps you are inclined to doubt the very idea of essential social processes. Most of us can see the essential social processes of economics more easily than religion. If we break down economics into its knowing, being, and doing aspects, we can come up with something like this: an economy is (1) the taking-in of the *resources* of the planet, (2) the *production* of those resources into forms that more fully meet human needs or wants, and (3) the *distribution* of these products, as well as services, to the members of the population. Obviously this is a humanly-created analysis of economic processes, but every society can be shown to do these processes. An ancient tribal society finds proper kinds of stones; shapes them into cutting instruments, weapons, and so forth; and then distributes these shaped products to those who use them.

Similarly, every society comes up with cultural processes, including religion. Let us examine the essential social process of religion more carefully. The following triangular diagram illuminates how the magic-of-three method of seeing three parts of a larger whole can work in the analysis of the nature of essential religion.



Religious practices are the being aspect of religion. The **theoretics** of religion is a knowing of religion. It is our understanding of the states of being that the practices of religion call into consciousness. The **institutions** of religion come into being to protect and share those practices and theoretics.

Let's look more carefully at the religious-practices aspect of religion. By "**study practices**" I mean Spirit talks that attempt to communicate Spirit, reading and group discussion of the various traditional and contemporary documents that attempt to communicate Spirit, and any other way of languaging that is a regular practice. By "**group practices**" I mean meetings of people for rituals, worship, pageants, dances, plays, and so on. These events are religious to the extent that they attempt to call forth Awe or Spirit. By "**solitary practices**" I mean the disciplines or practices that a religious person does alone.

Let's look at the breakdown of solitary practices. By "**dialogue**" I mean devotional reading of religious classics, scriptures, or contemporary religious writers. This aspect of solitary practice can be called "dialogue," for this discipline builds up an interior council of Spirit advisors whose person or words the practitioner can call upon. As any of us who have practiced devotional reading over a period of time can attest, we now have a large array of advisors who sit in our own interior council. We can consult this council with questions like: What would Luther do in this situation? What would Jesus do? What would St. Teresa say? What would Thomas Merton think about this or that? How would Buddha approach this? And so on. We can talk back, argue, discuss, reflect with any of these members of our interior council.

By "**inquiry**" I mean allowing our consciousness to inquire into itself to see what is actually there by way of blocks, estrangement, silly stories, helpful stories, break-looses

of Spirit, etc. Inquiry requires concentration, often built up in periods of stillness and silence as taught by Buddhist teachers. The Buddhist term “meditation” points to concentrating the consciousness and then moving into the discovery of states of inward being pointed to with the word Enlightenment. Christian heritage has used the term “contemplation” to refer to the inquiry aspect of religious practice. Christians use the term “meditation” to refer to what I have described above as “dialogue.” The terms of specific religious groups are not what I am defining here. I am indicating essential practices of a sort found in all serious long-standing religious traditions.

By “**initiative**” I am referring to solitary work that is directed toward the future, directed toward new styles of living or new thrusts of living – perhaps a focus on fresh causes, demands, commitments, and the like. Christians typically call this “prayer.” Christian prayer, properly understood, can be broken down into at least these four types of initiative: confession, gratitude, petition, and intercession. *Confession* means owning up to our departures from living realistically. *Gratitude* means acknowledging our various gifts of possibility, the joy of our forgiveness for a fresh start, or our happiness over the realization of various aspects of our “Spirit” potential. *Petition* means asking of the future something for ourselves by way of material need or Spirit realization. *Intercession* means asking of the future something for others by way of material improvement of Spirit realization. All these forms of prayer are initiatives taken in solitary time (perhaps in group time as well) that program our psychic computer for the ongoing action of our lives. We are not pulling on the “good will” of a supernatural being; we are pulling on our own good will and readying ourselves to put our lives on the line in keeping with this praying. This may indeed change how events work out. In this sense, prayer does change things.

All three of these types of solitary practice are best done regularly, perhaps daily at a set time. It is difficult to imagine progress being made in our Spirit realization without some form of regular solitary practice. And this is the very core of what religion is: *practice*. Before religion is theoretics or theologizing, it is practice. Before religion is institutions of society, it is practice. Such practice does not assure Spirit realization, but it makes it more likely. As a Buddhist teacher remarked, “Meditation does not cause Enlightenment. Enlightenment is an accident. But Meditation makes a person more accident prone.” This corresponds with the Christian view of grace. Christian practices do not force the grace of God, but they make a person more accident prone to the “happening” of grace.

Still More Magic of Three

So far, I have only scratched the surface of the potential of this triangular analysis. In the first chapter of my study book, *Great Paragraphs of Protestant Theology*, I discuss three approaches to truth (scientific, contemplative, and social consensus) and how those three, pushed to their limits, reveal respectively the presence of the Almighty, Holy Spirit, and the Body of Christ. In the first chapter of Part Three of that same book is an essay on **The Three Types of Unitarianism**. This essay describes how emphasizing only one of the three poles of the Christian Trinity leads to a lack of wholeness and to a perversion of the emphasized third of the Trinity.

Also, each part of the Oneness-of-God-Experience triangle can be broken down further. This is done in my book, *Jacob's Dream: A Christen Inquiry into Spirit Realization*. In this book, I examine how the experience of the Almighty can be discussed as the experience of The Void, The Fullness, and The Total Demand, and how the Body of Christ can be discussed as a Spirit Hospital, the Communion of Saints, and the Vanguard of Social Change. I show how these dynamics apply not only to Christian sanctification, but to any religion that realizes the essential role of religion as an ever-present part of every human society.

Finally, the social process triangle can be broken down in all its parts for many levels of breakdown, revealing more fully what a thoroughgoing revolution of social forms must encompass.

The Magic of Three is a tool for analysis. It is a human tool and the models we create with it are temporal and can be improved. But this tool has arisen from deep insight, and it can guide us into clearer visions if we pay close attention to our conscious experience while we use this mental tool. For everyone, but for Christians especially, the Magic of Three is a useful mathematics for exploring the Divine (Awesomeness) and for living the Divine (Awed) Life.

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These ten discourses on *The Mathematics of Divinity* are only a beginning for the ongoing task of constructing a vital theological understanding of the Christian breakthrough and its restatement for our times. It is, however, a valid beginning because it illustrates something quite profound and needful for the success of this project. Our experiences of the Almighty, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit are beyond the capacity of the symbol-using human mind to encompass. Nevertheless, the remarkable capacities of the human mind – with its detailed genius of mathematics, language, and art – can be used to point beyond itself to our enigmatic experiences of that Mysterious Trinity of the Awesome Almightyness, the Wind of Awe, and the Awed Ones in history. That this Infinite Mysteriousness and the finite human mind can be so joined in sharable understanding might be one of the most wondrous aspects of this entire theological project.