

# Trinitarian References in Leonardo Polo's *Sobre la existencia cristiana*

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Aliza Racelis

University of the Philippines  
aliza.racelis@up.edu.ph

RECEIVED: October 5, 2017

ACCEPTED: October 5, 2017

DEFINITIVE VERSION: November 27, 2017



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

On the occasion of the homage given to Leonardo Polo on his retirement, the University of Navarra's Faculty of Philosophy and Letters was pleased to offer Prof. Polo two books, one of which was *Sobre la existencia cristiana* which was composed of commentaries of his on the various social Encyclicals of John Paul II and other works in which he dealt with various anthropological issues in Christian life. In this paper, I am interested in picking out his references to the Blessed Trinity –his Trinitarian theology –in order to draw implications for further analyses of Polo's works and his major proposals in *transcendental anthropology*.

It should be worth noting that one of Polo's later works –*Epistemología, Creación y Divinidad* –contains broader and more comprehensive references to the One and Triune God, for in it he strived to investigate the figure of Christ and to make a more intimate connection between his philosophy and Christology. In effect, in this work Polo enforces his anthropological discoveries in order to understand Christian revelation better. This is understandable, as the dogma of the Most Blessed Trinity marks the summit of all dogmatic Theology (Polo, 2015). In fact, the mystery of the Holy Trinity is “the substance of the New Testament”; the Trinity is not one topic of reflection among others, but rather it constitutes the heart of Christian faith (Emery, 2011).

This brief paper limits itself to only three works in the anthology *Sobre la existencia cristiana*: two which contain direct references to the Blessed Trinity –*Tener y Dar* (Having and Giving) and *Reflections on the 'Sollicitudo Rei Socialis'* –and one –the *Acerca de la plenitud* (About Fullness) –which amounts to deep Christological reflections on how man's incorporation into Christ is almost like, as it were, an “invasion of God”. Section 2 of this brief paper expounds on the relationship between Polo's anthropological proposal and Trinitarian Theology. Section 3 dwells on the cited three monographic works. Thereafter, in Section 4, implications are drawn for a more *theological* understanding of the *anthropological* proposal of Polo.

## 2. TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY AND POLIAN TRANSCENDENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY

It is a known fact that the transcendental anthropology of Leonardo Polo proposes four “anthropological transcendentals”, namely: (1) Personal Co-existence, (2) Personal Freedom, (3) Personal Intellection, and (4) Transcendental Love (Self-Gift) (Sellés, 2013). Personal *co-existence*, in Polo, is not a mere *living with, dwelling in* or *coinciding with* (these belong to *manifestations*), but rather it refers to the personal being’s being personally *open* in his intimacy, and in this, he does not find any other person (each one of us is a person, not two or more) to whom to manifest in his interior his own personal meaning that he seeks. This implies that there necessarily has to exist at least one other distinct person to whom to open himself up (otherwise, the person has no meaning at all), which means to say, it is not possible for only one person to exist – which in turn implies that *solitude* would be the negation of personal being. Personal *freedom* is not the freedom which is manifested, say, in the will, when it chooses, e.g., between one thing and another, but rather the transcendental and unrestricted openness of the human person. It is that activity of the human spirit that pushes it to seek its own personal meaning or truth, a dynamism that moves him to seek that distinct person capable of entirely accepting the unrestricted personal freedom that each one is. In sum, personal freedom is so immense that it cannot be exhaustively invested in any human enterprise; it can only be given up *completely* to God, because only He is able to accept completely. Personal *intellecion* refers to the personal cognitive light that each one *is*, that is to say, the personal meaning or truth of each one. Since such meaning is never completed in one’s earthly life, *personal intellection* is thus the search for that significance in another distinct human person which can manifest in its entirety the personal meaning that each one is. *Self-giving Love* does not refer to the loving that resides in the will —since this potency requires that which it does not have— but rather it is a love that does not lack anything, one that is superabundant, effusive, and thus, it gives of itself. This personal loving takes on three dimensions that are

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hierarchically distinct among them in every man, which are (in the order of superiority): (1) acceptance, (2) giving, and (3) gift. Each human person is in the first place an accepting with respect to God; and, in second place, is a giving, that is to say, a loving giving of oneself with respect to the Creator and to others; and then, in third place, the person is a gift, a loving gift with respect to them (Polo & Llano, 1997).

Among the names of God the Father that relate to *intimacy*, we have “Father”, which Jesus used in its diminutive/affectionate Aramaic *Abbá*. Jesus taught His disciples to deal with God with that name in the *Our Father*, the *Lord’s Prayer*. In the expression *Our Father*, both personal intimacy and the universality of divine Paternity are broadly patent. According to the *personalists*, there is *no I without a you*. This aspect of *person* corresponding to the human being, when found in the human *act of being* (and not just in the human *essence*), is in effect the anthropological transcendental *co-existence* or *co-act* (Polo, 2015). Of course this occurs in a much inferior manner compared to the *three Persons in God*. Alongside Christ’s own words and actions, Thomas examines the titles and the names given to Christ by others (such as Son of God, Son, the Son, Word): they express the divine intimacy of the Son with His Father, the divine relationship which the Son has with the Father. The communal ‘in-being’ of the persons creates the opportunity to gather the diverse aspects of the Trinitarian mystery into a single portrait: the substantial unity of the persons, the relations, the processions of Son and Holy Spirit, their unity of action and their shared presence within the grace given to human beings (Emery, 2007).

We say, in the *Athanasian Creed*, that there are not three gods, but that God is One. This Trinitarian dogma does not go against monotheism, but rather signifies progress in the knowledge of the divine Unity since the essence of God is not distinguished from His *esse* and He is One. Having affirmed the divine Unity, we also affirm that God is the *Original Identity* (*Identidad originaria*) (Polo, 2015). Trinitarian faith is required for a firm grasp on God’s creative activity, and, by extension, on the whole of God’s activity in the world (in other words, the exercise of divine providence). Knowledge of the Son and of the

Holy Spirit, that is, of the Word and of Love, give the best perspective on the gratuity and *freedom* of creation: so we cannot understand creation well without receiving knowledge of the Trinitarian mystery. Philosophical reflection on creation can appreciate that God's creative activity is *free*, since it can work out that God does not act without wisdom or volition; but it is Trinitarian faith which gives us God's deep personhood. Moreover, the Trinitarian character of creation lays the foundation of that Trinitarian reality which is salvation. The Trinitarian mode of divine action is not restricted to salvation: one and the same God creates and saves us through his Trinitarian action (Emery, 2007). Now, the creature –especially the human being –is *manifestation*. Since the person is also capable of immanent operations (discussed at length below through the analysis of Polo's *Tener y Dar*), he is likewise capable of relationships that we can call *self-effusion* (*efusión de sí misma*). This effusion is an expansion that is not determined by a previous necessity and is, therefore, a contribution. This granting puts us before the reality of *freedom*. That man is *free* implies, above all, that his manifestation is effusive (Polo, 1970).

The Son of God is the Alpha and the Omega. Only by remitting to the ineffable height of the Son can one understand the elevation of man. But in fact, the Son is, for man, the Word Incarnate, which in turn leads us to say that human re-birth has to have its reference in the life of Christ. Now, this life is that of the Son of God which St Paul referred to as the *self-abasement* (*anonadamiento*) of the Son. This Incarnation –this self-abasement –is not unworthy of the Word: our faith discovers in it, so to speak, another model of *Expression* (Polo, 1996). In Polian transcendental anthropology, human essence is described as *contribution* (*aportación*) with respect to the will, through whose acts the human essence attains it *donal* character; and also as *illuminating light* with respect to *intellection* (Polo, 2015), from which flows the anthropological transcendental which is *personal knowing*.

To the Holy Spirit the Church has typically attributed the names “Gift” and “Love”, with which His relation with the other divine Persons is expressed. To the *Great Unknown* is owing the new light with which Christian revelation can be understood and which constitutes

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the strength necessary in order to follow Christ. We can also speak of God's *joy* as well as human celebrations after joyous events. As we see in a phrase contained in the Foreword to the book by Pieper, *ubi caritas gaudet ibi es festivitas*<sup>1</sup>. Feasting consists in the joy of *love*; thus, it is supremely intimate and is not a well-organized event. The highest appearance of joy is found in the *act of gifting* (*regalar*), which pertains to the structure of personal *love*. If we focus for a while on this act, the act of gifting has a triadic structure: first, someone gives the gift, but the gift is not thus constituted until it is accepted, so that the act of receiving is as generous as the giving. Thus, the gift as such arises because of the act of giving as well as the act of accepting (Polo, 2015).

### 3. REFERENCES TO AND REFLECTIONS ON THE BLESSED TRINITY IN POLO'S *SOBRE LA EXISTENCIA CRISTIANA*

#### a) *Tener y Dar: Reflections on Laborem Exercens*

In *Tener y Dar*, Polo reviews for us the definition of man by Greek anthropology: by establishing his differential character, *man* is the being that is capable of *having* (of *possession*). The being capable of having is not merely a thing. Neither is he God, for He, being in strict identity with Himself, is beyond having. Thus, man is an intermediate being, above mere physical entity and inferior to the divinity. Whenever a difference is hierarchical—especially if it is in the same being—, a dependency exists: the inferior depends on the superior. And, with regard to activities, this dependency is expressed according to the “means-end” formula: the inferior *having* has the character of means with respect to the superior ones. Aristotle distinguishes three levels in having as activity that defines man. The first level is *making*, a corporeal-practical having. The second level is immanent possession, which is characteristic of cognitive operations. In contrast with making, the cognitive operations are not activities that terminate outside, or which are exercised with respect to a pre-existing substrate that it shapes or reshapes. The immanent operations do not go outside themselves, but

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Pieper, J., *Las virtudes fundamentales*, Madrid, Rialp, 9<sup>a</sup> ed., 2007.

rather, in contrast, expound or lay out what is possessed when possessing it (for this reason they refer above all to *knowledge*). Now there is yet another form of possession that follows immanent operations, whose principle is immaterial. This derivation indicates that the immanent operation is, in its own way, a means for the *habits*. This mark, which always follows from the operation, is *virtue* for the executing principle or, if it is negative, vice. Therefore, the operations are ordered toward the *virtues*, which are what really perfect man (Polo, 1996).

Greek anthropology is correct in its basic lines, but is not complete: it does not investigate some major human themes. If one obtains a high ideal of human nature from Greek philosophy, the strict discovery of the dignity of man is *Christian*, not pagan. The great Socratic philosophers are, among the pagan philosophers, the most humanistic; but, on the other hand, this philosophy pales next to Christian “theandricism”. Strictly speaking, Christianity is not only humanistic: it is theandric: divine-human. Now it has to be made clear that the meaning of Christianity is completely distorted by establishing as its fundamental truth the man-God relationship. Christianity is not primarily an andro-theism, but rather the opposite: what is primary is the God-Man relation, the Incarnation. Christianity is not mere humanism, nor primarily the deification of man (which follows as a consequence); what is primary, the revealed news, is the Incarnation of God. Now, what is the reason for theandricism, for the existence of God made man? It cannot be anything else except *love*. With this, Christianity arrives at something absolutely unsuspected and unexpected. It is what St. John literally expresses: *God is Love* (cf. 1 Jn. 4: 8) (Polo, 1996).

In Trinitarian theology, we say that in God there is a procession of *love*. By saying so, we show that God produced things not because He needed them, but on account of the *love* of His own goodness. We thus understand why it is said that the “mystery of the Trinity” refers, on the one hand, to God himself, as He reveals Himself in the economy of the Son and Holy Spirit, making a free *gift* of himself that surpasses anything at which human reason could arrive by its own devices, and on the other, to the fact that what was veiled under the Old Covenant



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is exhibited to the eyes of faith under the New. Further, St Thomas explains that regeneration [which baptism brings about] involves three things: that *in view of which* it is done, that *through which* it is done, and that *whereby* it is achieved. And we are baptized in the *gift* of the Holy Spirit, which we *receive*: *'You have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry: Abba, Father'*(Rom. 8.15) (Emery, 2007). The relationship to Polian transcendental anthropology seems to be quite clear: that the *act of gifting* involves three dimensions, viz. (1) acceptance, (2) giving, and (3) gift (Polo, 2015).

### *b) Reflections on Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*

Polo's reflections on the encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* constitute an examination of the complexity of the prevailing (at the time of the encyclical's writing) historical situation and an agreement with the sentiment that the hopes expressed by Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* seemed to be very far from reality and that the world situation, under the lens of development, was rather negative and had deteriorated notably (Polo, 2015). This section does not deal with the solutions proposed in the author's monograph, but rather refers only to the references to the Blessed Trinity in order to search for links to Polian transcendental anthropology.

Before proceeding, we need to recall those aspects of Polian anthropology which refer to human social dimensions, that is, to the man-society nexus. Polian anthropology suggests that, in man, there exists a real distinction between the dimension which is most important – personal *intimacy* – and the other which is on the second plane – man's *manifestative* dimension, which in turn depends on the former. Man's social dimension pertains to this latter: to every man belong human potencies as well as that which is social which we *manifest* through those potencies. On the other hand, to the first order belongs the intimate life of each one, his human heart (Sellés, 2013).

Now, human self-manifestation is not self-sufficient and not subsistent: this is very much unlike *intimacy* and *manifestation* in God

which are identical (this distinguishes clearly the human being from the Blessed Trinity) (we say that, in God, His *esse* is identified with His *essence*). From this reality arises the person-society distinction; but this distinction nevertheless allows us to say that *living-together* (*convivencia*) is not human without the alternative statute of *manifestation*, that is to say, what is interpersonal is not a valid notion at the level of man without the mediation of society (Polo, 2015).

Speculative theology aims to seek out the root of truth, with the ultimate purpose of discovering how one can know the truth of the revealed texts and the teaching of the Church. The doctrine of Trinitarian processions, relations, persons, and so on, are very precisely engraved into this intention. In offering us understanding of the truth, Trinitarian theology provides believers with a foretaste of that which they hope to contemplate in the beatific vision of God: this is Trinitarian theology's essential contemplative dimension (Emery, 2007). Now, man is a rather complex being, and all historical situations have been complex. But the present historical situation (at the time of the encyclical's writing) is characterized by a *new* complexity: one bereft of *unity*. It is a complexity different than that of an organism: an organism is complex, but in a coordinated and unitary manner. Not so with this historical situation: it is of a complexity that is not unitary, but rather disaggregated. And our ways of managing it seem to increase that lack of unity, because partial remedies cause further dislocations and disorder. Such *disaggregated complexity* is characterized by: fragmentation, perverse effects, collapse (*anomía*) and drowning of institutions (Polo, 2015).

We must find hope in God, especially the promises of the Son of God made Man. With St Thomas, the strong perception of God's transcendent *unity* does not separate thinking about God from thinking about the world or human beings. Rather, it shows and ensures the gratuity of divine action in the world, by showing the depth at which the world's bond to God is rooted within God (Emery, 2007). In the magnificent vital event which is Revelation, we see shining forth an essential characteristic: the renewal of the Primordial Fullness – '*new*

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*heavens and a new earth*' (2 Pet. 3: 13)– focused on a reiterated gushing forth in *unity* of orientation and of destiny (Polo, 1996).

### *c) The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity in Acerca de la Plenitud*

In *Acerca de la plenitud*, Polo had wished to take note of and transmit the personal reflections he picked up from the teachings of St Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, especially the content of the homily he pronounced during the Mass celebrated on the campus of the University of Navarra on 8 October 1967. “Christian life consists primarily in the fusion of the renewing gift and the responsibility we have of carrying it out,” the author says. Jesus Christ, Son of God, perfect God, is born eternally. In the Beginning, in Him, are found supreme strength and meaning (Polo, 1996).

God the Father’s mode of action is that of the principle or source within the Trinity: his Son and Spirit issue from him, and he acts through them. St Thomas explains this by describing creation and the operation of grace in terms of the going out and return to God. Coming forth from God in creation, creatures move toward the good under the hand of divine providence (Emery, 2007). Christ, who is our very rebirth, ought to expand (go out) through our thought and our speech, through our affections and our deeds. At one and the same time, we are Christ and Christ is in us. But man’s entering into God is not an evolution from a created terminus to a divine terminus, but rather – and please excuse the daring terminology– an *invasion of God*. In parallel fashion, an elevated existence is not limited to one’s own order of perfection, but one which is entirely *open* to God. Man in grace does not limit himself to merely carrying out actions, to choosing his life, to choosing to work uprightly, but rather when he occupies himself with living, God is in the midst of such expression, that is, God has wanted mercifully to enroll the new creature into His Being (Polo, 1996).

The author goes on to reflect on the implications for Christian living of the knowledge and grasp of the notion of God One and Triune, in a special way, the Redemption wrought by Jesus Christ, God made Man. For instance, forewarnings against depression and sadness, or

against any ‘shortcutting’ of the meaning and reach of the Cross of Christ. ‘The most incalculable, the most immeasurable, is not sin but rather mercy and forgiveness. A forgiven man is not an exempt being, but rather somebody who remains at God’s disposal and therefore who ought to dedicate himself to the assigned task, to the good works that God has prepared so that we may tread on them’ (Polo, 1996).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Although the above is not an exhaustive –much less refined and sharp– analysis of the connections between Polian transcendental anthropology and Trinitarian theology especially as appearing in selected works in Polo’s *Sobre la existencia cristiana*, we could nevertheless attempt to make the following conclusions: (a) That Polian transcendental anthropology does not find bases in Trinitarian theology is totally not the case. In fact, as shown above, Polo’s work is strewn with theological discussions and analyses as well as interlinkages between these and his philosophical anthropology. Although *Epistemología, creación y divinidad* –where one finds a complete Trinitarian theology– has been a belated work (published posthumously), it is clear that theological ruminations can be found in many of his earlier works (*Acerca de la plenitud* of 1967 being just one among the many); (b) In his theology, just as in his philosophy and anthropology, Polo shows himself to be completely orthodox and in sync with the classics and the masters; further, just as in his philosophy and anthropology, he extends –especially to the realm of the human person –the already extant theological expositions. Examples are: man’s being an *open and free* system and his *donal* nature; man’s radical *manifestativeness* in such a way as to be *co-act* or *co-existence*, etc. (c) The evidence in Trinitarian theology, especially of the anthropological transcendentals, seems most appropriate and helpful. For example, the notion that the human being is called, by his nature, to a *self-giving love*, based on the notion of God ‘making a free *gift* of himself that surpasses anything at which human reason could arrive’ and, in turn, the reality of man being made unto the Image and Likeness of God. All told, it seems that there is much

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that can be made of this brief paper for a more *theological* understanding of the *anthropological* proposal of Polo.

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