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Theological Synthesis: Icons as a Locus of Encountering the Divine  
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**OUTLINE**

- I. Introduction
- II. Chapter One: Icon of the Holy Trinity
  - A. Icons are Images: The Basic Concept of Iconography
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    - 2. Biblical Foundation and Spirituality of Icons
  - B. Holy Trinity: The Icon of Perfect Love and Communion
  - C. Finding the Image of God in Creation
  - D. Image of God in Salvation History
- III. Chapter Two: Jesus — The Perfect Icon of the Father
  - A. Incarnation: Jesus is the Face of the Invisible God
  - B. Blessed Virgin Mary: Perfect Icon of Discipleship
  - C. The Three-Fold Mission of Jesus: Prophet, King and Priest
    - 1. The Words of Jesus: Jesus as a Prophet
    - 2. The Deeds of Jesus: Jesus as a King
    - 3. The Paschal Mystery: Jesus as a Priest
- IV. Chapter Three: The Church — The Icon Where the Holy Spirit Dwells
  - A. The Holy Spirit in the Church
  - B. Marks of the Church
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  - D. The Life of the Church in the Spirit
- V. Conclusion

*The text of the Introduction and Conclusion follows.*

## INTRODUCTION

There are different and various ways of encountering God. We encounter Him in the Liturgy, in our scriptural readings, in our apostolate, and even in the arts. I would like to further elucidate this by presenting *Icons as a Locus of Encountering the Divine* in my synthesis. Icons in a lay man's understanding are sacred works of art that present the sacred images of Jesus, Mary and the saints.

I personally chose this topic because I paint icons and I am fascinated with how icons were employed as a tool to evangelize and draw people to a deeper communion with God. I plan to discuss this topic to illustrate or to show that icons proclaim God's reality in a visible and tangible manner. Icons are windows which invite and offer us a glimpse of the Divine, leading us to contemplate and encounter God in a visual yet mysterious way.

In this synthesis, I hope to look into some actual icons, and also point out certain realities, and even people in our world that image God. The latter, for the purpose of this synthesis, I will also consider as icons, in a sense. It is my hope that the blend of sacred paintings, tangible materials and even people would show how everything the Lord made is created to ultimately point us back to Him. I will make use of icons heavily in the discussion, as the outline below will show:

*Chapter 1: Icon of the Trinity* talks about the rudiments and the fundamental concepts of iconography followed by its biblical and spiritual foundations. Then it will be followed by the discussion of the Holy Trinity, both its immanent relationship and its economic plan of salvation (the role of God in creation, the fall of man, and how God employs individuals in the history of salvation to remind humanity of His loving presence).

*Chapter 2: Jesus — The Perfect Icon of the Father* talks about the incarnation of the Divine Logos. God pitching His tent among us to meet us personally and intimately. This segment begins with the Incarnation, and then moves on to Mary, as an icon of discipleship. Then I will discuss how our own discipleship can be made concrete by taking in the words and deeds of Jesus in His ministry and in the paschal mystery. I have chosen to organize the discussion along the lines of presenting the mission of Christ as priest, prophet and king.

*Chapter 3: The Church — The Icon Where the Holy Spirit Dwells* talks about Holy Spirit's role in Pentecost and in the early period of the Church, and His continuing work of sanctification. This is followed by the marks of the Church and a discussion on the liturgy and sacraments as "supra icons." This chapter ends with a short elaboration on the life of the Church lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In this somewhat artistic discussion of the faith, I have come to realize how, truly, every single thing on earth speaks volumes about the glory of God, and how everything is but a frail image of His goodness and grace. In probing into the world of icons, I have come to see how all things point to His love, prepare for His salvific plan, and are meant to draw all creation into encountering Him who is Communion, and Love, and Faithfulness.

## CONCLUSION

Icons were made to make us realize the magnificence and beauty of the economy of salvation which centers on Christ; for “Christ is the visible image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). It was only when Jesus entered human history that we were able to see the countenance of God.

The different icons employed in this synthesis moved us to further our encounter with the Divine. In the first chapter we met Andrew Rublev’s masterpiece, i.e. the Trinity Icon, which revealed that God is a communion-of-persons whose nature is love. We are being invited to be such a person who likewise communicates love and understanding and acceptance. The table at the Trinity Icon is waiting for us to be the fourth person, to dwell with Our Triune God, and participate in their fellowship of love.

We saw how creation is peppered with the images of God, as the Almighty Loving Father. We were reminded about His masterpiece of creation, i.e. man, and about how the marred image of man caused by sin did not deter God from His plan. In the history of salvation, we saw how God chose men to serve as icons of faithfulness, the saving love of God, His authority and majesty, urging humanity to become once again the image and likeness of God as he was created.

The *Pantocrator* icon of Jesus showed us that the Second Person of the Trinity indeed became one of us — the Word made flesh who dwelt among us. Jesus Christ came to fully reveal to us the merciful, loving, forgiving face of God. Jesus Christ is the restorer of man’s true being, always reminding us to seek and follow His ways, and join Him in His mission as prophet, priest and king. He urges us to love with an *agape* love – one that does not expect anything in return, that gives life to others, and which He showed on the cross. By His death and resurrection, He not only won salvation for humanity, He also showed humanity its destiny, to be with the God who is love.

The redemptive works of Jesus can be seen in the life of Mary, His perfect disciple. The presence of Mary in our Christian life is important because we consider her not only Mother of God, but also our Mother. She points the way to Jesus, and intercedes for us before her Son. We look to her as our model and our guide for she showed true discipleship in her obedience to the Divine Plan which led to our salvation. By her life, we are shown the rewards of discipleship, redemption and eternal life with the Triune God.

The Pentecost icon disclosed the Holy Spirit as the one who empowered the early church and continues to do so for the Church of today. The Spirit guides the Church to be one, holy, Catholic and apostolic in order that she may faithfully carry on the works of the Divine Master. Through her liturgy and her Sacraments, which may be considered “supra icons,” she continues to sanctify her members every day, and most especially at important moments of their lives. Each Church member is called to heed the Spirit in the present day — in the struggle against the forces of evil by witnessing to a life of faith and love, and by being an icon for other Christians and for the world.

All these icons are meant to help us encounter God. All around us, all of creation already shouts out the glory of the Creator, serving as icons of the Divine. We may reflect that we too are icons of God; we are icons who, because of our frailties, limitations and sins, became marred, stained and ugly. Trusting in the plan of the Father, we rely on and cooperate with the Holy Spirit for the redemptive works of Jesus Christ the Ultimate Icon of the Father to continue to clean and restore us back to our original image. We are all being invited to be icons of love who will radiate the face of Jesus to everyone we will see and encounter. We are icons! And we pray that those who see us would see Christ in the way we live and the way we co-exist with one another in love.

*Deo Gratias!*