

Trinitarian Education in the Digital Age

Zachary T. Melton¹, Michael Kolta², Gregory Rummo³

¹Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, USA

²Palm Beach Atlantic University, USA

³Palm Beach Atlantic University, USA

Correspondence email: koltam@pba.edu

Received: 23/05/2026

Accepted: 01/09/2026

Published: 30/09/2026

Abstract

With the rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) that has greatly affected modern thought and education, this paper examines Trinitarian theology through the Augustinian framework of memory, understanding, and love, connecting it to the medieval Trivium: Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric, and to the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It contends, through logical arguments that connect the findings of several Christian authors to each other and to modern technology in novel ways, that an educational model grounded in the Trinity promotes human flourishing. While expressing concern that improper design and use of technology can rob us of our humanity if we let it do too much of the hard work for us, this paper concludes that the Trivium can serve as a tool to navigate learning alongside AI, while being cautious to preserve our unique human faculties, especially love (agape), rooted in the imago Dei.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Trivium, Education, Trinity, Trinitarian, Logic, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Grammar, Memory, Saint Augustine of Hippo, Augustinian, imago Dei

Introduction

Devices, social media, and artificial intelligence (AI) are everywhere. In his book *Christian Ethics in Computers, Software, and Artificial Intelligence*, Michael Kolta¹, a professor at Palm Beach Atlantic University who earned a Computer Science doctorate focusing on AI related research, and a patent holder of a unique algorithm, argues that computer software affects every aspect of life for those who live in first-world countries.² Although AI has been integrated into computing since the 1980s, recent advancements in generative AI are now achieving mainstream adoption (for the remainder of this paper, AI will refer specifically to generative AI). However, some of the creators of this and similar technologies have not adopted it into their personal lives as readily as the mainstream. This gives rise to the question—why are the world's greatest technocrats also its greatest private technophobes? For example, Adam Alter, a professor of marketing and psychology at New York University's Stern School of Business, and a New York Times bestselling author in his book *Irresistible*³

¹ Michael Kolta, *Christian Ethics in Computers, Software and Artificial Intelligence* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2025).

² Kolta, *Christian Ethics in Computers*, 1.

³ Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2017).

references Steve Jobs of Apple who said in a 2014 interview, “We limit how much technology our kids use in the home.” Additionally, Alters references Chris Anderson, former editor of Wired, and his strict time limits on every device in his home, attributed to his “firsthand” experiences with “the dangers of technology.”⁴ Evan Williams, founder of Blogger, Twitter, and Medium, bought hundreds of books for his two young sons, but refused to give them an iPad.⁵ These are clear examples of technocrats limiting or disallowing the use of technology in their own homes. Can you imagine the outcry if religious leaders refused to let their children practice religion? Adam Alter is discussing how modern technology can become an addiction. Recently, in theological and ethical scholarship, Christos Papakostas has raised similar concerns around AI’s intrusion into education and its effects on human agency and spiritual integrity.⁶ This astonishing discovery about our technocrats should make us ponder how we allow modern technology to hinder our education and learning.⁷

The purpose of this paper is to explore how we can navigate the usage of AI in education while honouring God’s wisdom and maintaining our uniquely human place in God’s creation. To do this, we explore the human condition by connecting the Trinity to the medieval Trivium to the triune human psyche and apply these connections to show how AI can be used to enhance our humanity rather than detract from it.

Methodology

We compiled the writings and research of several authors, most of whom are Christian, from different time periods in novel ways to come to unique conclusions and provide a helpful framework about how AI should be used in modern education. Among the authors cited are theologians such as Augustine of Hippo, Karl Barth, Stratford Caldecott, John Frame, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, Scott R. Swain, and Michael Reeves. Aristotle was chosen for his contributions to philosophy, and modern writers such as Adam Alter, Nicholas Carr, Johnathan Haidt, Michael Kolta, and Christos Papakostas were chosen for their focus on ethical and societal issues in technology. Resources were selected based on their discussion of Trinitarian theology, the medieval Trivium, and/or societal concerns regarding the design and use of modern technology. The scope is limited to specific, highly relevant literature, and provides only general commentaries about the use and impacts of AI in education without evaluating specific instances of modern technology that involve AI.

Modern Education and Trivium

Our current education system focuses on utility and skill acquisition.⁸ Can this utility model withstand the inroads of AI, which are more efficient than humans? Stratford Caldecott is a recent contributor to the classical school movement, a British Catholic theologian, author, and editor who founded Second Spring, a journal of faith and culture, and the co-editor of Magnificat UK. In one of his books on education *Beauty in the Word*, he writes “education is

⁴ Alter, *Irresistible*, 13.

⁵ Alter, *Irresistible*, 13.

⁶ Christos Papakostas, “Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education: Ethical, Pedagogical, and Theological Perspectives,” *Religions* 16, no. 5 (April 2025). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050563>.

⁷ Papakostas, “Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education.”

⁸ “Classical vs Modern ‘Progressive’ Education: What’s the Difference?” University of Dallas, last modified April 17, 2025, <https://blog.udallas.edu/tower-thoughts/classical-education-vs-modern-education-whats-the-difference>.

not primarily about acquiring information. It is not even about the acquisition of ‘skills’ in the conventional sense, to equip us for particular roles in society. It is about how we become more human (and therefore freer, in the truest sense of that word).”⁹ For Christians, Caldecott is pointing to the primary goal of education. Although utility may be a lesser goal, education’s highest end is fostering our humanity. This is self-evident for Christians who believe humans are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). What makes us unique compared to the rest of creation is the *imago Dei*, which encompasses, though is not limited to, our capacity for thinking and reasoning. Education should nurture these.

Writing about the negative impacts of technology on Generation Z, Jonathan Haidt, in his New York Times bestseller *The Anxious Generation*, says “Many of my religious friends disagree about the origin of our God-shaped hole; they believe that the hole is there because we are God’s creations and we long for our creator. But although we disagree about its origins, we agree about its implications.”¹⁰ We inherit the “God-Shaped hole” in the consequences of the Fall in Genesis chapter three. Though secular scholars like Haidt, disagree regarding the origin, they agree with Christians and other religious groups on the effect of modern technology on our humanity, or this “God-shaped hole”. Yet, this origin of the “God-shaped hole” is an important piece of the puzzle. Genesis 1:27 teaches us that the origins are from God, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them.”¹¹ Therefore, let us inquire more about who this God is through the Christian lens.

Christians believe God is triune and believe we bear the image of God. Theologians often look for the shadow of the Trinity in humanity. Writing in *Trinity, Revelation and Reading*, Scott R. Swain explains that the eternal life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit “is a life of perfect communication and communion.”¹² He further describes this perfect communication as “one divine life,” a sharing and a “holding in common”¹³. Through communication with one another we build community, which reflects the communion of the Trinity. C. S. Lewis described the Trinity’s own blissful life as a dance. Writing in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis explains that “God is not a static thing [...] but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance.”¹⁴ He goes on to say “If you think of the Father as something ‘out there’, in front of you, and of the Son as someone standing at your side, helping you to pray, trying to turn you into another son, then you have to think of the third Person as something inside you, or behind you.”¹⁵ God was willing to share his own divine life when he breathed His image into Adam at the creation (Genesis 2:7). Karl Barth also recognizes the miracle that God wants to share life with us when he proclaimed, “It is a matter of sheer wonder that this glorious and blessed Trinity would desire anything beyond and outside of his own inherently blissful life.”¹⁶ Echoing these sentiments

⁹ Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* (Tacoma, WA: Angelico Press, 2012), 11.

¹⁰ Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2024), 183.

¹¹ Genesis 1:27 (New American Standard Bible [NASB]).

¹² Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and its Interpretation* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2011).

¹³ Swain, *Trinity, Revelation and Reading*, 5.

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1952), 175.

¹⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 176.

¹⁶ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1959).

is Michael Reeves. In *Delighting in the Trinity*, the author explains, “God the father enjoys being himself: he enjoys his Son, he enjoys being a Father to him, and all so much that he chose to share his Fatherliness and fellowship with those he would create [...] As the Father, Son and Spirit have always known fellowship with each other, so we in the image of God are made for fellowship with each other.”¹⁷ John M. Frame describes these in terms of being normative, existential and situational, further clarifying that “each perspective necessitates consideration of the others. Each includes the others.”¹⁸

Augustine of Hippo believed humanity was the best place to learn about the Trinity, and the primary framework presented here is indeed Augustinian. In *De Trinitate*, he devotes several pages to searching for the shadow of the image of God in humanity.¹⁹ It is here that he connects the three parts of the human psyche—memory, understanding, and will/love, to the three parts of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, respectively. In *The City of God*, he writes, “And, in fact, we even recognize in ourselves an image of God, that is the supreme Trinity.”²⁰ The primary question we aim to answer is this: What does the image of the triune God in humanity teach us about how we should be educated in the digital age, particularly with the advent of AI? While keeping the Augustinian framework, we explore Lewis’s analogy of the Trinity as a “dance” and concepts such as “communion” and “fellowship” to introduce the more relational accounts of the Trinity. These ideas are presented as an extension of Augustine’s unity-first framework to emphasize that these sacred triunes are at once divine and an eternal relation of love.

Dorothy Sayers delves into our next triune, which is within the field of education. She spoke compellingly about education, was a contemporary of C. S. Lewis, educated at Oxford, and showcased a mastery of language, logic, and literature. She discusses in her essay *The Lost Tools of Learning*²¹ the medieval foundation of education, known as the Trivium. Sayers defines the Trivium consisting of Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric, although as we shall see, other authors define it slightly differently.²² Stratford Caldecott’s interpretive proposal is that the medieval education process appears to be Trinitarian, as he argues in his work *Beauty in the Word*²³, in which he connects the Trivium (Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric) as outlined by Dorothy Sayers to Augustine’s search for the Trinity in humanity, to the previously mentioned human psyche triune of memory, understanding, and will/love.²⁴ Since education is about becoming more human, and humanity is created in the image of God, which is Trinitarian, this informs how education models should be designed. We will examine how the medieval model of the Trivium aids in our pursuit of becoming more human through education.

¹⁷ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 102.

¹⁸ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life (A Theology of Lordship)* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 34.

¹⁹ Saint Augustine, *The Trinity: De Trinitate*, 2nd ed, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2015), 21, 303, 398.

²⁰ Saint Augustine, *The City of God: De Civitate Dei*, trans. William Babcock (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2013).

²¹ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning: Paper Read at a Vacation Course in Education Oxford, 1947* (London, UK: Methuen, 1948).

²² Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 19 – 20.

²³ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*.

²⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 377.

Contextualizing all of this in the digital age, where technology affects every area of our lives and AI is commonplace, we will explore related topics for each section of the Trivium (Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric). Michael Kolta, in his book *Christian Ethics in Computers, Software, and Artificial Intelligence*, discusses the need to ask hard questions about how we design and use AI to encourage the improvement, and not the degradation, of the human condition.²⁵ Therefore, regarding the use of AI, we will ask these questions: Are we allowing AI to hinder us in our growth? Or is it assisting and bringing us along in our humanity? Put simply, “Are we enhancing or detracting from our humanity?”

Jesus Christ is the model for what it means to be human; He is the God-Man who became sin on the cross, though He was sinless, (2 Corinthians 5:21) and rose again to reverse the consequences of the Fall. He gives us a new life and calls us to enter the resurrection of life. Jesus is the second Adam (Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15), the perfect human and the perfect image of God. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15). As Christians, God predestined us “to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). Paul also uses this Greek word for “conformed” in Philippians 3:21, “who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.” Slowly but surely, God is transforming us into the image of His Son, “from glory to glory” (1 Corinthians 3:8). Therefore, in our education, let us work with the grain of creation, not against it.

When considering models of education, we ask: What is the most natural way He intended for us to learn? Which methods enhance our humanity or detract from it? The Holy Scriptures serve as our final authority, while Sayers and Caldecott provide insights into the Trivium, Augustine explores the Trinity, and Kolta examines modern technology and AI, informing our discussion.

Grammar (Memory)

Caldecott refers to the first part of the Trivium, called “Grammar,” as “Remembering” or “memory.”²⁶ This concept relates to Augustine’s discussion of humans’ “memory” and its connection to God the Father. Dorothy Sayers, in the context of educating young children, writes, “Observation and memory are the faculties liveliest at this period.”²⁷ For children, this stage is one where their minds are like sponges, absorbing and retaining a great deal of information. Caldecott writes, “Memory, then, is the mother both of language and of civilization.”²⁸ This is why it is called the “Grammar” stage in the Trivium, since language is the building block to our memory. Although we can have memory and recall without language, through mental imagery, as Augustine would say, language provides the foundation to delve deeper into reality and build upon our memory.²⁹ Caldecott defines the function of a teacher, “which is to raise a student from the state of confusion, with some vague images in our mind, and ignorance to a state of knowing.”³⁰ All these point to God the Father, who knows all things, and holds all things in “memory”.

²⁵ Kolta, *Christian Ethics in Computers*, 107.

²⁶ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 36.

²⁷ Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 12.

²⁸ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 36.

²⁹ Augustine, *The Trinity*.

³⁰ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 38.

In this piece of the Trivium, “story” is essential to our memory. Sayers says, “In English, verse and prose can be learned by heart, and the pupil’s memory should be stored with stories of every kind: classical myth, European legend, and so forth.”³¹ Stories build the memory of a particular tradition that transmits culture. Caldecott explains, “The ‘spirit of tradition’ is an essential element of education. It is the spirit in which the transmission of culture takes place. (for example, it can be introduced to the child through folk songs, local history, and family history) This allows succeeding generations to enter the truth that binds them together.”³² In James K.A. Smith’s book *You Are What You Love*, chapter four is titled “What story are you in?”, in which he discusses how Christian liturgy and worship re-stories us.³³ Reflecting on the Church’s ancient creeds, we see that they are built on memory and provide us with the story of the Christian faith.

Augustine helps us understand that this memory stage is connected to God the Father. Caldecott writing about Augustine, says, “Remembering [...] resembles the Person of the Father [...] Without the Father, God’s act of self-knowledge would have nothing to reflect upon. Memory is a bit like that.”³⁴ Memory can be viewed as the storehouse of our knowledge. When we contemplate God the Father, we think of Him as the one who knows and remembers everything. The difference is that our memory changes over time, while God’s does not.

Since we are created in the image of the Triune God, developing our memory is vital for our growth. Considering how this plays out in education, in the memory piece of the Trivium, the student is pointed to the teacher, who has greater memory. The teacher enriches the student’s memory through various methods. Yet, it doesn’t stop at the teacher, since they are directed towards God, who knows the entire story, never forgets, and possesses all memory. In the teacher’s humble reliance on God, they grow in memory.

As children, we memorize the alphabet, grammar rules, spelling, vocabulary, geography, and math facts, among other things. With the advent of AI and a utilitarian approach to education, some of the need for memorization is called into question. AI interacts with our humanity, specifically our memory (which is also connected to the first person of the Trinity). Kolta defines AI as advanced software capable of intellectual tasks typically reserved for humans.³⁵ Someone in the midst of a difficult intellectual task may say, “Yes, I may need to learn how to spell generally and maybe some grammar, but spell check and AI will do most of this for me.” Or “Why spend so much time memorizing facts about geography and history when AI can tell me what I need to know?” Kolta expresses his concerns about over-reliance on AI because of the very real threat to a student’s learning experience.³⁶ The learning experience can be challenging, brutal, and slow. While AI may have some positive impacts on education if used properly,³⁷ there is a strong temptation to replace the learning experience

³¹ Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 12.

³² Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 46.

³³ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016).

³⁴ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 50.

³⁵ Kolta, *Christian Ethics in Computers*, 63.

³⁶ Kolta, *Christian Ethics in Computers*, 65.

³⁷ “39 Examples of Artificial Intelligence in Education,” University of San Diego MS-AAI Faculty, accessed August 21, 2026, <https://onlinedegrees.sandiego.edu/artificial-intelligence-education/>.

with AI in the name of efficiency and utility, but that may detract from our humanity.³⁸ Therefore, doing the hard work of memorization is essential; it is growing our humanity, the *imago Dei* in us.

On the other hand, perhaps AI can assist us with our memorization. By creating memorization tools and/or testing our memory, well-designed AI tools can streamline our own human memorization process. If AI is designed and used with this end in mind, then this is a way in which AI can support our humanity.

Logic (Logos)/Dialectic

The second part of the Trivium, Sayers calls formal logic,³⁹ Caldecott refers to it as “Dialectic,” which could also be described as “Thinking”, “Logos”, or “Knowing the Real.”⁴⁰ This stage is connected to Augustine’s discussion on “understanding,” which relates to God the Son, who is the “Logos” (Word), made flesh in John 1:1 and 14. In this stage, Caldecott explains, “we move from the realm of Mythos to that of Logos—from the realm of the father to that of the son”.⁴¹ We have transitioned from “memory”, in which we recall the many stories and liturgies of scripture and knowledge, to that of logic, now starting to organize our memory into coherent arguments.

When discussing children entering this stage, which is typically the beginning of adolescence, Sayers says, “My answer is that children of that age are intolerable anyhow; and that their natural argumentativeness may just as well be canalized to good purpose as allowed to run away into the sands. It may, indeed, be rather less obtrusive at home if it is disciplined in school.”⁴² Around the “middle-school” years, as we would say in the US, children are naturally argumentative, so this is the time to help them grow and learn to form reasonable arguments. We can help children grow in the *imago Dei* by training them to use their God-given logic.

The other term for this stage, “Dialectic,” describes the dialogue needed. It involves sparring back and forth, refining each other’s arguments. Caldecott writes, “Teaching is not simply a matter of putting knowledge into it [...] Learning is an active, not a passive, process [...] all learning is based in dialogue, beginning with the recognition of the other and proceeding through the asking of the question, ‘Why?’”⁴³ Asking the question “Why?” marks the beginning of this stage. Of course, we may never fully know “why”; however, as Caldecott puts it, this question “is the dawn of thinking.”⁴⁴ Here, we become more human by learning to think things through. We acknowledge and examine our assumptions, learning that all arguments begin with original assumptions and dogmas. In this way, we are created in the image of God; we are “thinking” beings, as God is a “thinking God”, reflected in God the Son.

Observing this stage of the Trivium, let us explore how it connects to God the Son. Jesus, being the “Word” or “Logos” in Greek, as we read, “In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word (Logos) was with God, and the Word (Logos) was God” (John 1:1). This “Word”

³⁸ Jennifer Vilcarino and Lauraine Langreo, “Rising Use of AI in Schools Comes with Big Downsides for Students,” last modified October 8, 2025, <https://www.edweek.org/technology/rising-use-of-ai-in-schools-comes-with-big-downsides-for-students/2025/10>.

³⁹ Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 14.

⁴⁰ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 60.

⁴¹ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 60.

⁴² Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 16.

⁴³ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 66.

⁴⁴ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 66.

has existed eternally with the Father yet remains one God. God the Father represents the relationship of “memory,” while God the Son represents “Logos” or “Word,” or as Augustine would say, “understanding.” In John 1:14, this “Word” becomes flesh and dwells among us in the person of Jesus. Augustine connects Jesus the Word to the human mind of understanding: “But our word, the one that has neither sound nor thought of sound, the one that belongs to the thing we utter inside as we see it and thus not to any language...is at least something like that Word of God which is also God, since this one is born of our knowledge as that one was born of the Father’s.”⁴⁵ “This one” refers to a thought in our mind, while “that one” refers to God the Son. We can form a thought or “word” in our mind before verbalizing it by pulling it from our knowledge or memory. It is then embodied when our lips produce soundwaves. Similarly, though not precisely, God the Word (Jesus) has existed eternally with the Father, before this Word is embodied. In Genesis 1, we observe that God created by His Word, through speaking. Then, in John 1, we learn that this Word (Jesus) takes humanity on Himself, being fully God and fully man.

Jesus, the “Word” embodied, demonstrates wonderful dialectic and logic. One example is Matthew 22:15-22, when the Pharisees tried to plot against Jesus and catch him in a logical trap. Their question is this: “Tell us then, what do you think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” (Matthew 22:15). In his paper *Rabbinic Rhetoric and the Tribute Passage*, David T. Owen-Ball explores the importance and mysteriousness of Jesus’ rhetoric with a Pharisee.⁴⁶ First, we see dialectic at play in this embodied conversation. The logical flow to their question is that if He says “yes”, He gives the appearance of siding with the Roman oppressors. However, if He says “no”, He risks arrest for rebellion. According to Owen-Ball, the Pharisees were not simply trying to embarrass Jesus but intended “to cast aspersions upon Jesus’ qualifications to interpret God’s law.”⁴⁷ Instead of answering the question directly, He continues the dialogue, “But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, ‘Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the poll tax...Whose likeness and inscription is this?’” (Matthew 22:18-19). By asking this question, He exposes their false dilemmas and points them to a higher good. They answer that Caesar is the one on the coin, and He concludes, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matthew 22:21). We see Jesus’ mastery of logic and dialectic here, and we can learn much from Him. Indeed, Owen-Ball explains the importance and genius of Jesus’s rhetoric,⁴⁸ and from that we extrapolate the importance of rhetoric in education. If God predestined us “...to become conformed to the image of His son...” (Romans 8:29), we should take our logic and dialectic growth seriously.

AI can interfere greatly with the Trivium’s dialectic or logic component. Kolta’s concern is that people seem to be ready to outsource some of our most critical thinking responsibilities to software, some of which is so complex that no one fully understands it.⁴⁹ Kolta rightly expresses his concern for the human race. We are often too quick to transfer our cognitive capabilities and responsibilities to modern technology.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 418.

⁴⁶ David T. Owen-Ball, “Rabbinic Rhetoric and the Tribute Passage (Mt. 22:15–22; Mk. 12:13–17; Lk. 20:20–26),” *Novum Testamentum* 35, no. 1 (January 1993), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1561422>.

⁴⁷ Owen-Ball, *Rabbinic Rhetoric and the Tribute Passage*.

⁴⁸ Owen-Ball, *Rabbinic Rhetoric and the Tribute Passage*.

⁴⁹ Kolta, *Christian Ethics in Computers*, 67.

In his book *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, Nicholas Carr discusses the observations made by some researchers about the differences between reading online and reading offline. They found that reading online tends to overstimulate with many distractions, making it difficult to engage in deep reading or thinking. He writes regarding paper books, "By allowing us to filter out distractions, to quiet the problem-solving functions of the frontal lobes, deep reading becomes a form of deep thinking."⁵⁰ With the advent of AI, which sometimes does our "thinking" for us, we should be even more cautious about allowing technology to take over this part of our humanity.

"Thinking" is in quotes because it is artificial "thinking". As Kolta points out, artificial intelligence is called artificial for a reason - it is not the same as natural or real intelligence. He lists the following: AI systems do not possess free will; AI struggles with fluid adaptation to new situations compared to humans; AI systems are limited to logical reasoning; and AI systems cannot attain wisdom.⁵¹ AI systems can all eventually be traced back to simple binary code, 0s and 1s. Although a sufficiently advanced AI system may appear to have free will or act randomly, this is not possible. Anything that a piece of software does, whether it involves AI or not, is determined by three things: programming, training, and input data. While an AI system may be very complex and unpredictable to a human, this is not the same thing as free will, as everything is eventually traceable and explainable. However, even though all software including AI is understandable, this does not mean that we as humans understand all the software we have created. It is sometimes the case that for complex software, especially AI, we do not expend the time and resources necessary to understand every detail, even though it is theoretically possible. Humans, on the other hand, can behave irrationally, perhaps out of fear, empathy, compassion, or some other reason. These are things an AI system will never be able to do. The behaviour of software is always deterministic (although sometimes not easily understood) while the behaviour of humans is sometimes not deterministic. However, as software and AI systems become more sophisticated, AI may become effective at simulating these human behaviours, making it difficult to distinguish between human (non-deterministic) and artificial (deterministic) behaviours to the casual observer.

Since humans bear the image of the triune God as it relates to our understanding, logic, thinking, or dialectic, letting AI "think" for us, instead of doing the hard work of thinking for ourselves, detracts from our humanity. Surely, we do not want to become dependent on it for our critical thinking, and we must pass on the skills of logic and dialectic to our children. The next generation should grasp the basics of the Trivium's second part before engaging with AI. Perhaps connecting with AI as an assistant, as well as dialoguing with other humans, can lead to higher calibre results than any component could achieve on its own. Although the line between using AI as an assistant or a replacement for human thinking may not be entirely clear, it is evident that we should intentionally use AI only to the extent that it enhances our humanity rather than detracts from it.

Rhetoric

This third part of the Trivium, called Rhetoric, is the final phase in the medieval educational system before progressing to the Quadrivium, or "subjects." This Trivium (Grammar, Logic/Dialectic, and Rhetoric) forms the foundation of the medieval educational

⁵⁰ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 123.

⁵¹ Kolta, *Christian Ethics in Computers*, 85-86.

model. In children, Dorothy Sayers argues, “The imagination—usually dormant during the Pert Age—will reawaken, and prompt them to suspect the limitations of logic and reason.”⁵² Rhetoric, in a basic sense, is the art of persuasion, often tied to the Aristotelian categories of ethos, pathos, and logos.⁵³ Aristotle says “Now the proofs furnished by the speech are of three kinds. The first depends upon the moral character of the speaker [ethos], the second upon putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind [pathos], the third upon the speech itself, in so far as it proves or seems to prove [logos]”.⁵⁴ This implies we have a triune within a triune, that is to say, the Trivium consists of grammar, logic and rhetoric, and now according to Aristotle, rhetoric consists of ethos, pathos, and logos. We need high moral character, an appropriate frame of mind, and well-crafted speech to achieve a high level of rhetoric, and we contend that the best way to accomplish this is through education. This promotes our hypothesis that rhetoric should be a part of education as per the Trivium. Aristotle introduces yet another triune within rhetoric when he says “For the orator to produce conviction three qualities are necessary; for, independently of demonstrations, the things which induce belief are three in number. These qualities are good sense, virtue, and goodwill [...]”.⁵⁵ From this we connect goodwill, the third quality in this triune, to love (agape), which complements our previous connection of rhetoric to love according to Augustine, Caldecott, and Sayers. In consideration of the triune human psyche, memory, logic, and reason will only take us so far; rhetoric is the human expression, the will or love. For example, in 1 John 4:10, John uses the Greek word agape to define love. It says, “In this is Love (agape), not that we loved (agape) God, but that he loved (agape) us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (Hereafter, agape will be used to encapsulate this idea of “will or love.”) Caldecott writes, “A voice from the lungs is not enough to carry another along with the meaning of our words. The voice has to carry with the warmth and living fire of the heart around which the lungs are wrapped.”⁵⁶ Memory and logic are insufficient; this third part of the Trivium makes us fully human—the “fire of the heart”—the expression of the “will,” rooted in our memory and logic. Augustine would connect our will or love (agape) to the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. Caldecott notes how God’s Word is spoken by His breath or spirit, “ruah” in Hebrew.

As mentioned, the Logos exists entirely as dialogue (dia-logos). The Word is spoken on the breath of God (ruah, spirit), God giving himself eternally, a perfect act of self-expression perfectly received and loved. Echoed in the Creation, this means that real human communication is only possible in the context of love, without which the self can neither be given in an act of speech (we describe someone as ‘not meaning a word of it’), nor received in an act of sympathetic hearing (we accuse someone of ‘not listening to what I was saying’).⁵⁷

As humans, we are embodied creatures in time, living in community. Rhetoric is how we express ourselves to one another. When done properly and with proper motives, it is a way we agape one another.

⁵² Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 17.

⁵³ Aristotle, *The “Art” of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (London, UK: W. Heinemann, 1926), 1.2 (1356a).

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *The “Art” of Rhetoric*, 1.2 (1356a).

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *The “Art” of Rhetoric*, 1.2 (1378a).

⁵⁶ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 84.

⁵⁷ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 85.

Caldecott ties rhetoric closely to “ethos,” a Greek word equivalent to “character.”⁵⁸ This is the part of the Trivium where we express a truth that is changing us. Caldecott says, “You cannot communicate a truth that has not changed you... The person is, to some extent, the message.”⁵⁹ This makes humans distinctly different from modern technology and AI. The overflow of our memory and logic is expression, the truth in action, the agape.

Dorothy Sayers admits, “It is difficult to map out any general syllabus for the study of rhetoric: a certain freedom is demanded.”⁶⁰ This stage of the Trivium is more ambiguous, as it represents the fullest expression of humanity. A person trained in memory and the rules of logic is now free to express themselves. This Trivium education empowers individuals to think critically and articulate their thoughts effectively. Considering the Fall of Man (Genesis 3), we may not remember correctly, or our logic may contain fallacies; thus, our expression will always have room to grow. However, if we train children from a young age, as Dorothy Sayers argues in *The Lost Tools of Learning*⁶¹, they will have many years to develop and enhance their humanity with the foundation of the Trivium.

Rhetoric is where we see all three stages working together as a unified whole. Augustine's work in *De Trinitate* had a significant influence on the Athanasian Creed.⁶² As there is a mystery to our humanity, there is a mystery to the Trinity. The Athanasian Creed states, “And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance.”⁶³ Similarly, we see all three pieces of the Trivium working together in unity, though maintaining their unique identities. The expression of this collaboration is in the form of rhetoric and is also manifest in our agape.

Augustine connects our agape to the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. Writing about the Holy Spirit, he says, “I think it is because charity is poured out in our hearts through this gift, charity by which we are to love God and neighbour according to those two commandments on which the whole law depends and the prophets.”⁶⁴ This gift of the Holy Spirit gives us the “charity,” to agape God and our neighbour. There seems to be an activeness, similar to a human will, in God the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8 we read, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” God, the Holy Spirit, gives the church the power to be His witness to the ends of the earth. Additionally, we observe the miraculous transformation of Peter in the book of Acts, compared to the end of the Gospel accounts. Through the power of the resurrection and the Holy Spirit coming upon him, he expresses himself in powerful ways that bring many people to faith. Thus, God the Holy Spirit is the expression, the will, the overflow of agape in the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is acting and bringing God's plans to completion. Similarly, our agape is an overflow of memory and logic/dialectic.

As a culmination of memory and logic/dialectic, where humans become free to express themselves, there lies an inherent danger due to the Fall. Our rhetoric could also be

⁵⁸ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 86.

⁵⁹ Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, 86.

⁶⁰ Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, 17.

⁶¹ Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*.

⁶² Augustine, *The Trinity*, 49.

⁶³ Anglican Church in North America, *The Book Of Common Prayer* (Colorado, CO: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 769.

⁶⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 436.

misdirected. Augustine contemplates this in his *Confessions*: “During those years, I taught rhetoric. I was consumed by a desire for gain, and I made a trade of the ability to speak persuasively. Yet, Lord, you know that I preferred students considered ‘honest’ by society’s standards. I taught them the tricks of rhetoric...”⁶⁵ He reflects on the dangers of rhetoric and how he used this tool to satisfy his desire for “gain.” As Augustine would say, his “ends” or “telos” was off; his rhetoric was not directed correctly. When considering rhetoric as an expression of the agape, let us focus our rhetoric on the highest Love, God. We should not use, or teach children to use, rhetoric for selfish ends, but to fulfil the will and agape of God.

Augustine offers a pivotal point here: The Trinity found in humanity (memory, understanding, and will/love [agape]) must be directed toward the highest purpose. Quintessential to his “Order of Loves,” he writes, “This Trinity of the mind is not really the image of God because the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is also able to remember and understand and love him by whom it was made. And when it does, it becomes wise.”⁶⁶ The highest “order” is the Love of God, who made us for himself. Though an educational model that reflects, to some degree, this triune nature of God and humanity is beneficial, it will still lack a fuller goodness until it is pointed to the Love of God. Keeping this complete view in mind will help us grow in *imago Dei*.

Considering rhetoric as the “art of persuasion,” we now explore if AI is enhancing or detracting from our humanity in its use of rhetoric. If we type a question into an AI chatbot, it may respond with lofty language that can be seen as an attempt to persuade us. Within the Augustinian framework, we are concerned with what the AI is attempting to point us to. The love of God? To tickle the ears of the user? Some corporations’ economic gain? If the user is not trained in the medieval Trivium to some degree, artificial rhetoric could take that person captive. Using the Kantian Categorical Imperative⁶⁷, imagine an entire society without recollection of the medieval Trivium in its education, and how an AI chatbot’s rhetoric could easily lead users astray. There are still some remnants of the medieval Trivium in our education system. However, we wonder how long these remnants will last, especially if the highest good in our education system is utility and skill acquisition. AI appears to be more efficient in memory, dialectic, and rhetoric, but as previously noted, these processes are artificial and are therefore fundamentally different from the way humans think. Kolta, in his research, notes that we do not fully understand all of the inner workings of the human brain; therefore, we cannot fully model our invention (AI) after that which we do not fully understand.⁶⁸ For instance, as previously mentioned, AI will never be able to empathize or express other emotions like a human. Therefore, we should consider how to collaborate with AI to enhance our human capabilities, while also being cautious about allowing AI to supplant our humanity.

⁶⁵ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine: A Modern Translation for Contemporary Readers. Inspired by Edward Bouverie Pusey’s Work*, trans. Michael Jay Jones, ed. Scriptaviva (Orlando, FL: Independently Published, 2024), 40.

⁶⁶ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 384.

⁶⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, narr. by John H. Fehskens (Eternal Echoes, 2023), Audiobook, <https://www.audiobooksnow.com/audiobook/groundwork-of-the-metaphysics-of-morals/8779234/>.

⁶⁸ Kolta, *Christian Ethics in Computers*, 87.

Conclusion

We set out to answer this question: What does the image of the triune God in humanity teach us about how we should educate in the digital age with the advent of AI? God created humankind in His image and after his likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). This image is Triune, since God is Triune. Augustine helped us locate this shadow of the Trinity within our memory, understanding, and will/love (agape), corresponding to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Lastly, with the help of Sayers and Caldecott, we connected the medieval Trivium to a similar pattern: Grammar (Memory), Logic/Dialectic (Understanding), and Rhetoric (Will/Love [agape]).

There are limitations to our discourse that must be acknowledged. First, not every theologian will agree with the many analogies we have made to the Trinity. Still, they are based on the works of respected authors such as Augustine of Hippo, Stratford Caldecott, and Dorothy Sayers, among others, making them reasonable connections. Second, we have not done an empirical study to test our theory, and that remains future research. Overall, our contribution is to connect the works of several authors, both old and new, in novel ways to employ an existing framework, the medieval Trivium, and to intentionally connect it to the Trinity and the triune human psyche, to guide us as we apply AI to education.

With an understanding of humanity's Fall, this imago Dei is corrupted. Although a person will never lose the image of God, they are either growing toward it or falling away from it. Jesus Christ, through His incarnation and resurrection, teaches us that God cares about His creation and is renewing it. Augustine articulates it this way: "The first stage of the cure is to remove the cause of the debility, and this is done by pardoning all sins; the second stage is the curing of the debility itself, and this is done gradually by making steady progress in the renewal of this image".⁶⁹

In the digital age, it follows that an educational model resembling the Trinity, like the Trivium, is a coherent approach to maintaining our humanity. If we are created in the image of the Triune God, then education that aligns with the grain of creation helps us grow into that image. AI and modern technology can be great collaborative tools to improve the trinity in humanity: memory, understanding, and agape. However, we must be cautious about allowing technology to take over these human faculties.

With utilitarianism as the primary goal in education today, AI is likely to continue making inroads. This leads to an important point: if the metric for our humanity is output, efficiency, or activity, then we are left on shaky ground when comparing ourselves to AI. However, the Triune God is not defined by output or activity. Much of this paper has focused on the distinct personal operations of the three hypostases of God. Yet, the doctrine that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share one divine being is of central importance in this discussion. Jesus, the eternal Son, is not God because of His incarnate mission or historical activity, but because He shares the divine essence eternally with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As humans, created in the imago Dei, our essence or 'being' is not grounded in activity or output, but in the divine imprint of our Creator. AI is created by humans and defined by its activity, output, and efficiency, and is devoid of the imago Dei. Therefore, AI will never possess the human capacity for consciousness, empathy, free will, and other divine traits. These traits are exclusive to beings created by the Triune God. Therefore, while AI may be a helpful tool, it

⁶⁹ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 391.

will never possess the spiritual dignity and relational capacity of human beings, created in God's image.

As we conclude this work, it is essential to note that this is not a call for complete abstinence from AI, but rather a call to not hand over our humanity to AI. We need an "AI Literacy"⁷⁰ that fosters healthy relationships with technology and prevents it from detracting from our humanity. Furthermore, we also need to design responsible AI, and to that end, Kolta posits the need to embed Judeo-Christian ethics into AI as a necessary step for us to keep our humanity.⁷¹ Modern education should contain instruction on how to use AI responsibly, and for some, on how to design AI responsibly. The framework presented in this paper to use the Trivium in education, which connects to both the Trinity and the triune human psyche, can guide us on this journey.

⁷⁰ Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education."

⁷¹ Kolta, *Christian Ethics in Computers*.

References

- Alter, Adam. *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*. New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2017.
- Anglican Church in North America. *The Book of Common Prayer*. Colorado, CO: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019.
- Aristotle. *The "Art" of Rhetoric*. Translated by John Henry Freese. London, UK: W. Heinemann, 1926.
- Augustine, Saint. *The City of God: De Civitate Dei*. Translated by William Babcock. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2013.
- Augustine, Saint. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine: A Modern Translation for Contemporary Readers. Inspired by Edward Bouverie Pusey's Work*. Translated by Michael Jay Jones, Edited by Scriptaviva. Orlando, FL: Independently Published, 2024.
- Augustine, Saint. *The Trinity: De Trinitate*. 2nd ed. Translated by Edmund Hill. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2015.
- Barth, Karl. *Dogmatics in Outline*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1959.
- Caldecott, Stratford. *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education*. Tacoma, WA: Angelico Press, 2012.
- Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.
- Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of the Christian Life (A Theology of Lordship)*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008.
- Haidt, Jonathan. *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2024.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Narrated by John H. Fehskens. Eternal Echoes, 2023. Audiobook.
<https://www.audiobooksnow.com/audiobook/groundwork-of-the-metaphysics-of-morals/8779234/>.
- Kolta, Michael. *Christian Ethics in Computers, Software and Artificial Intelligence*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2025.
- Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York, NY: Harper One, 1952.
- Owen-Ball, David T. "Rabbinic Rhetoric and the Tribute Passage (Mt. 22:15–22; Mk. 12:13–17; Lk. 20:20–26)." *Novum Testamentum* 35, no. 1 (January 1993): 1–14.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1561422>.
- Papakostas, Christos. "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education: Ethical, Pedagogical, and Theological Perspectives." *Religions* 16, no. 5 (April 2025): 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050563>.
- Reeves, Michael. *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.
- Smith, James K. A. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016.
- Swain, Scott R. *Trinity, Revelation and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and its Interpretation*. New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2011.
- Sayers, Dorothy L. *The Lost Tools of Learning: Paper Read at a Vacation Course in Education Oxford, 1947*. London, UK: Methuen, 1948.

- University of Dallas. "Classical vs Modern 'Progressive' Education: What's the Difference?" Last modified April 17, 2025. <https://blog.udallas.edu/tower-thoughts/classical-education-vs-modern-education-whats-the-difference>.
- University of San Diego MS-AAI Faculty. "39 Examples of Artificial Intelligence in Education." Accessed August 21, 2026. <https://onlinedegrees.sandiego.edu/artificial-intelligence-education/>.
- Vilcarino, Jennifer, and Lauraine Langreo. "Rising Use of AI in Schools Comes with Big Downsides for Students." Last modified October 8, 2025. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/rising-use-of-ai-in-schools-comes-with-big-downsides-for-students/2025/10>.