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"The Tending of God's Garden: The Coredeptrix and the Culture of Life (Part 1)"

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The following article is an excerpt of the talk given by Fr. Angelo M. Geiger, FI on the occasion of the Symposium on Marian Coredeptrix 2000 convened in England, February 21-26, 2000. This is the first of the three-part article of Fr. Geiger.

In the beginning God planted a garden of paradise. The Divine Gardener arranged His paradise in good order. With his own hands He planted a hedgerow around it, and without tilling its virgin earth or digging furrows, He planted, vineyards, fruit trees, the green herbs, and all kinds of vegetation to delight the eye. He channeled a river into his garden, that it might always have living water, and provided that the garden would always have enough sun, and fair weather. Then, in the middle of the Garden he planted the Tree of Life. Everything was organized around the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Life was the source of life. There He introduced the beasts of the earth, water and sky. And when the Gardener saw that all of this was good, he knew that it was a fitting home for the one whom He had made very good. And so the Lord God put man into the garden, but this only on the condition that he would dress and keep the garden. The Divine Gardener walked with man in the garden, and taught him to tend it well. But man, i.e., man and woman, the first family, dressed and kept the garden badly. Man and Woman reaped where they did not sow, and sowed the seeds of death, and so the Lord God cast them from their home and placed a cherubim with flaming sword before the garden of paradise to keep the way of the Tree of life, lest perhaps they should put forth their hands, eat of its fruit, and live forever.

For a long time man was left to plant and tend his own garden. He toiled greatly by the sweat of his brow only to reap thistles. All that was left for him to eat were the wild herbs of the earth. When he planted vineyards he would reap only wild grapes. Often his vines withered, and the walls which he built around his gardens and vineyards were broken down, and his crops trampled by wild beasts. Sometimes even God withheld the rain. But for this, man had only himself to blame, for he did not plant and tend his garden the way God had taught him, and he did not remember what the garden of paradise was like, and he did not have access to the Tree of Life. But he did remember the promise that God had made from of old: that someday God would plant a new garden in which access to the Tree of Life would be open, and where the garden would be tended by the Divine Gardener Himself. And so it happened. In the fullness of time man stumbled upon the New Garden of paradise, and found his way to the Tree of Life where he found the Gardener again, walking, not in the cool not of the evening, but of the dawn.

This is the story of man, male and female. It is the story of the human family called to be part of God's family. The garden represents the home, but in the wider context it represents culture in general. God's culture, his agriculture, is the Garden of Paradise. Man's culture, his agriculture, is the devastated vineyard. In the order of redemption God has reintroduced man into the garden of paradise, not with all its original pleasures, but certainly with more sure access to the Tree of Life, so that he might live forever. God himself is the Gardener in Jesus Christ. The Tree of Life is the Cross, and more specifically the Eucharist. Christ in His human nature taken from the New Woman, the Virgin Mary, has tended the garden well, and in Him we are able to dress and keep the garden. But have we? Is our garden organized carefully in all its details around the Tree of Life.

What is the culture of God's garden? It is man and woman, husband and wife, father mother and children, together bringing the created order to the foot of the Tree of Life. The culture of God's garden is the civilization of life which respects God's plan for the family. It is opposed to the culture of fallen man, i.e., the culture of death, which sets up the cult of self. Culture, then, is about the social order, in particular as it touches the

family.

In a certain sense the term "Culture of Life" coined by John Paul II has come to identify the current of Catholic orthodoxy that stands in the breach of secular ideology. The inclusivity of modern ideas has forced us to defend the tradition against the grossest social evils: divorce, contraception, homosexuality, abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, etc. And while we who are Catholics reject these practices, we sometimes neglect to scrutinize the underlying principles upon which the culture of death is built. We do not organize our garden around the Tree of Life, and so in spite of our best intentions we reap death. Advocacy for the culture of life is a repudiation of the culture of death, with its whole array of pragmatic solutions to social problems. Upon this point very few who wish to be known as "orthodox" Catholics would disagree. But whether the average "orthodox" Catholic has adequately assessed and modified the underlying principles of the present social order is a question open to discussion.

There are a number of contemporary social movements which have subordinated faith to secular interests in the name of Theology. Liberation Theology, in the sense censured by the Holy See is secular ideology dressed up in the trappings of the Gospel. It is only one form secularism takes in the Church. Radical feminism, e.g., is another. Liberation Theology is an advocacy for the culture of death, because it is committed to redemption through social change, not to social change through redemption. It is not the elevation of the social order to a supernatural level, but the measuring of God's kingdom by man's standards. In the name of social justice, Liberation Theology subordinates the supernatural dignity of man and the family to sociopolitical agendas. Good Catholics stand with the pope in condemning such secularist ideology, and the pragmatism associated with it. But do we always realize how much we are children of our culture of death, and how much that culture has infected family life? There are many ways in which we are tempted to subordinate our faith to secular interests, instead of transforming the temporal order by our faith. The Coredemption is a crucial dogma because of its implication regarding the whole social and cultural order. It is a first principle upon which a culture of life, a civilization of love can be built. Its power will be discovered at the heart of the social order: the family. We must examine, then, the culture of the Garden of God, as it has been transformed by the Redemption of Christ and the Coredemption of Mary.

This paper, then will develop as follows: (1) it will be necessary to define the meaning of culture, in general and in reference to Catholic life (The Meaning of Culture); (2) we will look for the metaphysical and theological significance of the family in the light of the Franciscan tradition, and John Paul II (The Family as the Basic Social Unit and its Significance); (3) we will show how the preceding bears upon and illumines the Tree of Life typology according to the original plan of creation (The Culture of Life as Liberation: The Tree of Life, Its Type and Fulfillment); (4) we will show how these mysteries are tended and kept within the Mass for the benefit of the soul and the family (The Tree of Life in the Garden of God, Tended by Man); and finally (5) we will demonstrate why it is necessary for the good of the soul and the family to organize culture at large around these mysteries (The Arrangement of the Garden around the Tree of Life). As we shall see the logic and golden thread of this way of thinking is the Coredemption of Mary.

1. The Meaning of Culture

What do we understand by the term culture? The etymological root of the word "culture" is the Latin *cultura*, which has its root in the word *colere*, which means "to till," as in "to till the soil." A modern definition of culture reads: "the ideas, customs, skills, arts, etc. of a people or group, that are transferred, communicated, or passed along as in or to succeeding generations." The moral and social garden is tilled, dressed and kept so as to be handed on. The garden is a tradition. But a tradition in view of what? The generations of gardeners till the garden in view of the harvesting the fruit. The tilling, is a taming, a subordination of the fields to the rule of the gardener for the sake of the harvest. The wild is subdued and ordered to achieve a specific end. This is why we refer to the liturgy and the life of devotion as cult: The cult of the Eucharist; the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We worship God according to a rule, which we call a rite, i.e. liturgical cult. Our worship of God is our submission to His rule for His glory and our salvation. Our consecration to Mary is the cult of hyperdulia, by which we submit ourselves to her reign for God's glory, Her honor and our salvation. So in the wide sense we connote by the word culture the whole moral and artistic environment with all its customs that we deliberately create around us in order sustain, nurture and direct human life toward its end. There is always some rule of life, and that is the culture, even if that rule is that there are no rules, to paraphrase the infamous remark of Bernard Shaw. And that rule always bears fruit, whether good or bad. Therefore, truly fruitful culture is the dignity and perfection of labor. We work according to some pattern to make a home, to plant a garden. The effort and result is culture.

A culture of life, then, one that is truly liberative both in practice and in principle, is committed to integrally create a moral and artistic environment which is ordered to the worship of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, it is a commitment to perfect our work by centering life in all its facets on the worship of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The Eucharist is the Tree of Life. The Holy Father's continued reference to the home as the domestic Church is apropos here. If the Worship of Jesus Christ, especially in the Eucharist and the social order are connected, then the sanctuary of the home, and of the Church should mirror one another. Therefore, above all when we speak of the social teaching of the Church our minds must first focus on the family, and its orientation to Eucharistic life. When we speak of the culture of life, before all else we mean the Catholic and Eucharistic culture of family life.

2. The Family as the Basic Social Unit and its Significance

So the question is: How do we create a culture which orients the family toward Eucharistic life? To answer this we must of course, understand what the family is in principle, not only in practice. We must, then, grasp the meaning of man, male and female, of marriage and family life, not only in themselves but as constitutive elements of Eucharistic culture. What does the placement of man and woman in the garden have to do with its overall arrangement?

When Our Blessed Lord was confronted with the problem of fidelity in marriage for life, He affirmed unambiguously God's intention "from the beginning." The Holy Father, John Paul II, in his discourses on the Theology of the Body continually makes reference to what was from "the beginning," as though the beginning is the hermeneutic for the rest of time. Indeed it is.

From the beginning man is the image of God. This is so because he is *capax Dei*, i.e., he is capable of sharing in the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has this capacity because of his immortal soul. Endowed with memory, intellect and will, he is called to order these faculties according the trinitarian pattern: a plurality of faculties integrated in a communion of knowledge and love, like the communion of persons which is the Blessed Trinity. Original sin, unfortunately has brought death to the soul and disorder to its faculties. Through the effects of original sin the intellect and will are no longer united in an ordered communion, i.e., the will subordinated to the intellect and the passions to the will; instead the passions reign over the will, and the intellect is subjugated by willfulness. The image of God in us is restored by sanctifying grace by which man's communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reorders his soul according to the Trinitarian archetype.

Further Man is the image of God in his creation as male and female, because he enters through marriage into a communion of knowledge and love which is ordered to fruition. John Paul II, in his discussion of the relation of man and woman in the apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, says the following:

It also means that man and woman, created as a "unity of the two" in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God through the unity of the divinity, exist as persons through the inscrutable divine relationship. Only in this way can we understand the truth that God in himself is love (7).

The differentiation of the sexes then, emphasizes a plurality of persons ordered toward unity. Here there is not only unity in differentiation, but also a complementarity, a gift by way of being male that is a support to the female, and the gift of femininity which is a support to the male. This complementarity is Trinitarian in origin. In the Blessed Trinity there are two processions: one in the intellectual order, viz., that of the Son; one in the affective order, viz., that of the Holy Spirit. The Father is first principle within God. The Father is the origin in respect to the generation of the Son, and with the Son He is the origin with respect to the procession of the Holy Spirit. The procession of the Son is in the intellectual order, because the Son is the Word or Image of the Father. The procession of the Holy Spirit is in the affective order, because He is the Love of the Father and the Son. The man is an image of God the Father, because he is the transcendent physical agent in the communication of life, and for this reason he is also an image of the transcendent principle of moral life which is reason. But does woman reflect God in some sense? Some go as far as to call the Holy Spirit Mother. This is an obvious aberration of Church teaching and a pragmatic justification for feminist ideology. In principle it is incorrect, because 1) the mother is the immanent principle of the transmission of life, while the Holy Spirit as God is transcendent, and 2) because no other person proceeds from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a she. But woman still is a reflection of the Holy Spirit because of Her receptivity of love and life. For this reason she is also an image of the interior life of love rooted in the will. In her essay on *The Ethos of Women's*

Professions, St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross, Edith Stein writes:

Woman naturally seeks to embrace that which is living, personal, and whole. To cherish, guard, protect, nourish and advance growth is her natural, maternal yearning. . . Relevant to this is another matter: abstraction in every sense is alien to the feminine nature. . . .

This non-abstract, personal and maternal function of woman is of the affective order. Woman, then is the exemplar of love in contradistinction to man who is the exemplar of knowledge. In *Mulieris dignitatem*, John Paul II identifies an "order of love" which is proper to the female:

In God's eternal plan, woman is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root. The order of love belongs to the intimate life of God himself, the life of the Trinity. . . . the dignity of women is measured by the order of love, which is essentially the order of justice and charity.

Together, then, man and woman complement each other, on a metaphysical level in terms of intellectual and affective life. This is not simply to say that man is intellectual and woman affective. The human soul is a unity of the two; however, man and woman with their distinctive gifts image the vocation of their race to integrate intellect and will in the oblation of love. Man's nuptial unity of the two reflects the marriage of the human to the divine. It does so in two ways: first, by being a type of the Incarnation; secondly, by reflecting the way of holiness, viz., the union of intellect and will in the act of obedience. The supreme archetype for this is the Blessed Trinity as the communion of knowledge and love, and expressed in the missions of the Son and Holy Spirit. Christ is the Mediator of all this, uniting the divine and human natures, in the hypostatic union, in His supreme act of obedience on the Cross, and in the Union of His Heart with the Heart of His Mother in that act.

Here we see the whole marriage theme of revelation recapitulated, and the deeper meaning of marriage revealed: Jesus the Head of the Church and the Immaculate its Heart. This is perfectly understandable in the context of Ephesians chapter 5 where St. Paul refers to Christ as the head of the Church in reference to marriage. A simple summary of the relationship of man and woman in marriage is this: Man is the head of the family, woman is its heart. Marriage, then, is a great mystery, a Sacrament by which our integration into the life of the Trinity is reflected: the human wedded to the divine perfectly fulfilled in the Alliance of the Two Hearts.

The Trinity, then, is a Sacred Order, a hierarchy, a pattern upon which everything created is formed and organized. The word hierarchy is a transliteration from the Greek of the term "sacred order." St. Bonaventure calls the Blessed Trinity the "Supercelestial Hierarchy," for it is the primal sacred order, the first principle of all things, especially as regards the origin of the intellectual and affective life of man. The plurality of faculties in man is directed toward unity, i.e., integrity within himself, and solidarity with others. The Trinitarian communion of knowledge and love is the basis for the unity of creation with God, and this communion uniquely impresses itself upon man, male and female, who as the image and likeness of God, freely maintains the unity or disrupts it according to his willingness or unwillingness to perfect the communion with God and each other.

Perfecting Trinitarian life is the purpose of culture and of family life. It is the purpose of the original order in the Garden. It is interesting to note that St. Bonaventure draws a clear analogy between agriculture and the spiritual life, as they both pertain to origins. Agriculture is the regulation of fields at their origin in the earth according to the first principles of the natural order. The spiritual life is the regulation of man at his center which is the soul, according to the first principle of supernatural life, viz., the Blessed Trinity. The cult by which we offer God worship is a return to the origin. In the words of St. Paul: "You are God's agriculture" (1 Cor. 3,9). In the garden of God, man and woman stand at either the foot of the Tree of Life or at the foot of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. When man actualizes his capacity for God through this reordering of his soul and of the family, he perfects the image which he is and becomes the likeness of God. This is the basis of his own liberation and for creating a civilization of love.

In the Franciscan tradition the relationship between man as the image and likeness of God, and the Blessed Trinity as the archetype, and further between man and Christ as mediator is one of exemplarism. By this we mean that we are constantly under the influence of the Blessed Trinity, i.e., illumined, so as to be capable of knowing and loving in a Trinitarian way. As we shall see, this effects us not only on the level of our personal effort to live in union with God, but also necessarily has cultural and social implications. The supernatural life of the soul and the social organization of society are connected. There is, to be sure, a rightful autonomy of natural reason and faith. But that autonomy is relative, i.e., reason must be subordinated to faith. John Paul II

in his recent encyclical *Fides et Ratio* does admit a place for a truly Christian philosophy. Metaphysics, then, can liberate us from the presumption of secularism and propose "certain truths which might never have been discovered by reason unaided, although they are not of themselves inaccessible to reason." In the light of this it must be clarified that exemplarism is not the theological virtue of faith by which reason is purified, nor does it provide an immanent form of divine revelation. It does, however ground the natural order, including social life, by subordinating it to the Christian dispensation, and illuminating it with mystical significance.

And so through this exemplarism God walks with us in the garden, teaching us how to dress and keep it well. The mediation of Christ is precisely the point at which we enter into the sacred order. Christ is in the middle as the one through whom the illumination descends into our minds and hearts, and the one through whom we ascend so as to perfect our incorporation into the hierarchy and union. The joint predestination of Jesus and Mary means that the descent of Christ and our ascent has as its nexus the mediation of the Immaculate, which in Her glorified state is exercised by her direct influence over our minds and hearts.

Thus we are drawing a metaphysical connection between the complementarity of the sexes, marriage and family life, the mediation of Christ, and the subordinate mediation of the Immaculate. This connection is also "from the beginning" as related in the account of creation in Genesis, where God originally plants the garden. The creation of man male and female points to a sacred order on which his likeness to God depends. Adam created on the sixth day from the slime of the earth represents Christ who is taken from Mary, the Terra Virgo, the Virgin Earth. On Friday, the sixth day of the week, Adam is cast into a deep sleep, as Christ is cast into the sleep of death on the Cross on Friday. Then just as Eve is formed from the rib of the first Adam in his deep sleep, so from the side of Christ is taken the New Eve, the Church, represented in the blood and water that flowed forth. The type Virgin Earth is an image of Mary as the Mother of Christ. Eve formed from the side of Adam is a type of the Church. But these two types, viz., the creation of Adam from the Virgin Earth, and Eve from the side of Adam, interpreted in the light of the Protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15, and the Woman in travail of Revelation 12, point to the union of Christ and Mary in the sacrifice of the Cross. Again in the context of Ephesians chapter 5 the union of the Two Hearts is the deeper meaning of marriage and family life. In other words, authentic family culture, is the cult of the Two Hearts. This the ultimate meaning of why God planted His garden in the Virgin Earth and organized it around the Tree of Life. ■