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## "The Tending of God's Garden: The Coredeptrix and the Culture of Life (Part 2)"

by Fr. Angelo Geiger, FI

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 second of the three-part article of Fr. Geiger.

### 3. The Culture of Life as Liberation: The Tree of Life, Its Type and Fulfillment

Having established the respective places of man and woman, marriage and family within the garden, it is necessary to draw out more clearly the link between this metaphysics and the social order. A social order which is truly liberative is also respectful to the sacred order established by God. Chesterton once defined liberty as "the power of a thing to be itself." Liberty is exercised by living a communion of knowledge and love with God and neighbor. That is the nature of man raised to the supernatural order by grace. Gerard Manley Hopkins captures the power and exemplarism of creation to be what God made it:

*Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,  
Crying What I do is me: for that I came.*

The power of man to be himself, his liberty is to live in communion with God and neighbor. This is done through the mediation of Christ. Hopkins goes on:

*I say more: the just man justices;  
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—  
Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces.*

Living according to the metaphysics of the garden of God is man's liberation, and the basis for true social justice. The sacred order of the garden is organized around a center, the Tree of Life. It is so organized because in the hierarchy of God's creation, mediation is the dynamic by which the communion flows up and down. In other words the divine life of knowledge and love flows down from God through the mediation of Christ, and returns to Him through the mediation of Christ. Mediation, therefore, means subordination of the lower levels of being under the mediator in order to ascend to a participation in the life of the higher. Liberty, then, in this communion of knowledge and love involves a subordination to a head who is a mediator, in the garden, in the family, and in the Church. St. Bonaventure calls the Word of God, i.e., the Second Person the Blessed Trinity, the "Hierarch," and "Middle Person" in the Supreme Hierarchy, the Trinity. As the Uncreated Word, He is the Mediator between the Father and the Holy Spirit. As the Incarnate Word, He is the mediator between the Heavenly Father and man. But the exemplarism of the Incarnation trickles down through the hierarchy of creation and the Church. Man as father of the family is mediator between God and woman in the conception of new life. The priest, especially the pope and all the bishops, as fathers in the family of the Church mediate between God and the faithful in the conception of new spiritual life. All of these are

subordinated in their own proper place within the sacred order. But Woman also has a place within the hierarchy of creation in a mediatorial role. In the order of love, just as the Holy Spirit is the conception of the love of the Father and the Son, so woman in a role which is active, but receptive, mediates between man and new life, conceiving, nurturing, nourishing, cherishing and protecting it. In the Church, organized as it is around the Tree of Life in a sacred order whose dynamic is subordinated mediation, the Woman, Mary, mediates between the new man, Christ, and the new life of grace. Therefore the arrangement of the family with the Father as its head, and mother as its heart—i.e., the whole structure of the family, specifically the father subordinated to Christ, the mother subordinated to the father, and the children subordinated to the mother, and to the father through the mother—is not an arbitrary arrangement governed by changeable social mores, but the original sacred order, and meaning of the garden organized around the Tree of Life.

Whenever men and women treat this social and cultural arrangement as arbitrary and essentially changeable they have imitated the first man and woman who threw off their subordinated roles, and have embraced a false autonomy from God, i.e., false liberation. The taking of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, is a harvest of death, because it is bad gardening. The promise of the serpent that they would be like Gods is confirmed gravely by the Lord himself: Behold Adam is become as one of us, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:22). But the result is death and disorder. Man has the fruit he wanted, but not the fruit of the Tree of Life. Consequently, the complementarity of the sexes, becomes a disordered subordination, where man's brutal domineering, and woman's subjection in a man's world, leads to a cat and mouse of mutual manipulation.

Let us trace this carefully. Man through sin proclaims his radical autonomy from God. His insertion into the Trinitarian hierarchy is thereby disabled, and the communion of knowledge and love broken. Within, the garden of man's soul is devastated and disordered. No longer is it organized around the Trinitarian communion, with the passions subordinated to the will, and the will to the intellect. The family of the soul, with all its faculties is thrown into a state of dysfunction. This loss of supernatural life has immediate consequences in the social order. Man and woman no longer perfectly complement each other, but are in constant danger of using each other for selfish purposes. In this context, taken to its logical terminus, children become, not a blessing to be cherished and protected, but a burden to be tolerated when necessary. The logical consequence, therefore, of the cultural autonomy of man from God is the destruction of the family.

True Liberation, i.e. Redemption, therefore, involves the acknowledgment of an order, a hierarchy, and a subordination of the soul, the family and the whole social order to the rule originally established by God. There is a subordination of the soul to God, that is not contrary to true human liberty. There is a subordination of the will to the intellect, i.e., freedom to truth, which is not contrary to human dignity. There is a subordination of a wife to her husband which is not contrary to her liberty and dignity. There is a subordination of the social order to a patriarchy which is not contrary to the dignity of the whole human family.

The Garden of Paradise, therefore, so arranged with the Tree of Life at its center, with Adam as the tender of God's garden, and Eve as his helpmate, represents for us by way of typology the Culture of Life, that Catholic environment carefully arranged to facilitate our growth in Christ, and the perfection of our labors for His kingdom. The fundamental fulfillment of this Tree of Life typology is of course the Cross. The perfection of this fulfillment depends not only on the moral headship of the New Adam, but also on that of the New Eve. The Old Eve as the mistress of history in the order of creation leads her husband into sin. The New Eve, Mary, as mistress of history in the order of grace is the instrument by which the Son of God is able to obey His father with a human will, and by which his obedience is made perfect through suffering. Her virginal maternity prepares the oblation by way of carnal integrity: She is perfect and perpetual virgin, while He is still flesh of Her flesh. Further Her virginal maternity is integral with His oblation by way of moral unity. The Immaculate shares in the moral headship of Christ, not only by way of Her cooperation in the Incarnation, but also more directly in the crushing of the serpent's head, which is effected only on the Cross. The culture of life in the present economy of grace, i.e., redemption, involves a reordering, a hierarchization of life according to the exemplification of the Cross. What brought disorder to the family in the culture Garden of Eden, is reordered in the Garden of the Cross and Resurrection, and in the same way, viz., through man and woman, i.e., through marriage and its archetype the wedding feast of the Lamb and His Bride.

Liberation, then is not an anarchic throwing off of traditional social structures, or an arbitrary reordering of those structures according to strictly democratic principles. Liberation is an identification of, and conformation to the foundational principles upon which the social tradition rests, viz., the metaphysics of marriage, and ultimately the union of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

#### 4. The Tree of Life in the Garden of God, Tended by Man

But how is it that we now have free access in the Church to the Tree of Life. Of course, above all else it is in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, where the New Adam, and the New Eve consummate the rite of the sacred order. In all that has been said up to now about the original order that holds marriage and family life as a type of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, and the Alliance of the Two Hearts as the ultimate meaning of marriage, we are assuming a perpetual exemplarism, an action on the part of Christ, and a reaction on the part of His Bride the Church. The Mass is the focal point of this exchange.

The Mass at the center of culture is a ritual in which we are all called to participate so that we may understand and have the strength to live what it ritualizes. The Mass is the synthesis of life: the communion of knowledge and love which is the substance what it means to be a family. If culture is the physical and moral environment we create around us in order to sustain and nourish human life, then the liturgy is the culture par excellence by which we sustain and nourish a life that is truly Catholic. The Sacred Liturgy encapsulates the rationale and discipline of the Garden. The ancient axiom *lex orandi lex credendi* (As the Church prays, so She believes) underscores how the Mass is the principle instrument of Catholic culture. Catholic life, and especially Catholic family life must be organized around the Mass, because it is divinely instituted and designed to symbolize and effect the life of communion with God and one another. As a sacrament and ritual the Mass uses visible realities to symbolize the mystery of divine life as we are called to live it. By it the whole natural order is consecrated and elevated into the sacred order. Through its repetition, the divine power is effective in the here and now, so as to restore and sustain supernatural life. And by the commemoration which the rite constitutes, we receive the unbroken tradition, we are linked to the historical Sacrifice of Christ on the Tree of Life, and to the original order as it was established from the beginning.

So The Mass is about family life, and effects family life. The Mass is about man and woman, it is about marriage and its fruit which is life. A poignant icon of this Tree of Life arrangement is the Twelfth Station of the Cross, The Crucifixion. Many depictions include four key elements organized around the Tree of Life, the first two of which are obvious: Christ Crucified and the Immaculate standing at the foot of the Cross. The other two are also extremely important to the image: St. John the Priest, standing opposite Our Lady; and St. Mary Magdalen, the Penitent, prostrate at the foot of the Cross. Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church who as a good husband lays down life for His Bride and family. Our Lady is the Church, the Bride, who is obedient to Christ, and who in compassion is presented to Christ holy and immaculate to fulfill the prophecy: "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce" (cf. Eph. 5:27; Luke 2:35). Christ is the High Priest, and Mary the Mother of the Priest. Together, by His passion, and Her compassion they restore the sacred order of the garden. By His mediation as head of the family, and Her maternal mediation in subordination to His, the redemption is objectively won for us. The demerit of the first parents of the human family is reversed by the merit of the new Head and Heart of the Church.

Now, what is graphically depicted in the twelfth station is liturgically symbolized and really effected in the Mass. In fact Our Lord ritualizes His sacrifice on the night before He dies. He institutes the mystical celebration of the sacrifice before He offers it historically, and when He does actually offer the bloody sacrifice, one his priests, newly ordained, is there to witness it. The figure of St. John beneath the cross illustrates that from the beginning Christ intends to ritualize and perpetuate the Tree of Life scenario.

The Coredemption is part of the objective redemption, and the priesthood of Christ is complemented by the maternal mediation of Mary. But if this complementarity is present in the objective redemption, it is also present in the subjective, that redemption whereby grace is distributed in the Church. As Christ is high priest in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Our Lady continues to stand at the foot of the altar as Mediatrix of All Grace. The Mass involves both man and woman in the formation of the supernatural family of the Church. But if the mediation of Christ the Priest, Bridegroom of the Church is extended through the instrumentality of the ministerial priest, does the maternal mediation of Mary, Mother of the Church, which complements the priesthood of Christ have its extension in the Church? Is the ministerial priesthood complemented in the Church by some form of mediation, maternal in character? Or who is there to match with St. John in the Twelfth Station? The answer is Mary Magdalen, the Penitent. Magdalen represents the faithful who by virtue of their baptism share in the one priesthood of Christ, and although it differs from the ministerial priesthood, not only by degree, but also essentially, the baptismal priesthood still is very real and efficacious in the Church. This is the priesthood of ordinary sacrifice, fidelity, compassion, and contemplative love. The Coredemption, then, especially as it touches the Mass, has far reaching implications.

The Second Vatican Council emphasizes very much the universal priesthood of all the faithful as the essential

means by which all the baptized participate in the work of the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church touches upon this in chapter 2, "The People of God":

*The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity.*

Further in chapter 4, "The Laity," we read:

*To those whom he intimately joins to his life and mission he also gives a share in his priestly office, to offer spiritual worship for the glory of the Father and the salvation of man. . . For all their works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit—indeed even the hardships of life if patiently borne—all these become "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (cf. Pet. 2:5). In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord.*

This is extraordinarily important in the light of axiom *lex orandi lex credendi*. One of the basic norms for the reform of the Roman Rite through Vatican II has been active participation. It is generally assumed that this involves the insertion of all the faithful in "ministerial" roles, if only as lectors and cantors. It is clear that the Council did intend to foster active participation by means of the more liberal use of the vernacular and responses of the congregation, and other involvement as well. However, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy links active participation to the baptismal priesthood:

*Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people" (1 Pet. 2,9, 4-5) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism.*

Later in the same document the Council implies that the active roles in the liturgy are meant to promote active participation, and do not in themselves constitute it. In fact, the document of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, says that it is necessary for the faithful to understand the place they occupy in the "liturgical community" in order for them to actively participate consciously and fruitfully. In the same section, in order to assure that this aim is accomplished, the Congregation mandates a full catechetical explanation of the royal priesthood of all the faithful. So all the faithful, both priests and laity participate in the consecration and espousal of this great sacrifice by their own prayer and sacrifice for the sake of the whole Church. The priest as he recites the Roman Canon bows profoundly, indicating that like everyone else he must also conform to this mystery, and as he does this he says:

*Almighty God, we most humbly beg Thee that through the hands of Thy holy Angel this sacrifice may be taken to Thy altar on high, before the face of Thy divine majesty, **that as many as participate in this altar**, shall receive the most sacred Body and Blood of Thy Son, may be filled with every heavenly grace and blessings.*

By participating in the altar, i.e., in Holy Communion, the faithful provide the necessary coefficient to the ministerial priesthood, just as the Coredemption of Mary is coefficient to the Redemption of Christ. This necessity is made even clearer in a passage from Pius XI's encyclical *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, on reparation to the Sacred Heart, a passage referenced in a footnote to the famous text of *Lumen Gentium* 10 (referenced and quoted above) which compares and contrasts the ministerial and common priesthood:

*Wherefore with this most august Eucharistic Sacrifice there ought to be joined an oblation both of the ministers and of all the faithful, so that they also may "present themselves living sacrifices, holy, pleasing unto God" (Rom. 12:1). Nay more, St. Cyprian does not hesitate to affirm that "the Lord's sacrifice is not celebrated with legitimate sanctification, unless our oblation and sacrifice correspond to His passion" (Eph. 63). . . . Nor do those only enjoy a participation in this mystic priesthood and in the office of satisfying and sacrificing, whom our Pontiff Christ Jesus uses as His ministers to offer up the clean oblation to God's Name in every place from the rising of the sun to the going down (Mal. 1:11), but the whole Christian people rightly called by the Prince of the Apostles "a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood" (1 Pet. 2,9), ought to offer for sins both for itself and for all mankind (Cf. Heb. 5:3), in much the same manner as every priest and pontiff*

*"taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God" (Heb. 5:1).*

This baptismal priesthood lived out through the Mass and especially Holy Communion is ordered to sacrificial and contemplative love. The Immaculate Coredemptrix is the archetype, and every woman exemplifies its true nature. In his apostolic letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women, John Paul II links this royal priesthood to woman, because She is the sign by which we identify Christ's spousal relationship with the Church. This he does in the context of commenting on Ephesians chapter 5 and Revelations 12, where he links the vocation of woman to Mary and the concept of spouse:

*If the human being is entrusted by God to women in a particular way, does not this mean that Christ looks to them for the accomplishment of the "royal priesthood" (1 Pt 2,9), which is the treasure he has given to every individual? Christ, as the supreme and only priest of the New and Eternal Covenant, and as the Bridegroom of the Church, does not cease to submit this same inheritance to the Father through the Spirit, so that God may be "everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:28). Then the truth that "the greatest of these is love" (cf. 1 Cor 13:13) will have its definitive fulfillment.*

Again, John Paul II makes the typology clear. In the same apostolic letter the pope says that the "very heart of the Paschal Mystery" reveals "the spousal love of God." "The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our Redemption. It is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride." The holy father states clearly that in reserving priestly service to men, Jesus wished to express the relationship between man and woman, between what is "feminine" and what is "masculine." In other words, our active participation in the Mass, especially by way of Holy Communion, is exemplified by spousal-maternal love, most perfectly in the Blessed Virgin, and this love is the necessary coefficient to the ministerial priesthood in the subjective redemption. Its archetype is the Coredemption in the objective redemption. The universal priesthood of all the baptized is the Marian coefficient to the high priesthood of Christ extended through the sacrament of Holy Orders. The traditional theological connection between total consecration to Mary and baptism is brought into new light, by the connection between the Coredemption and the baptismal priesthood of all the faithful.

The Gardener has taught us, then, how to tend the garden. He has taught us the first principles: The headship of Christ in the Redemption; the mediation of Mary in the Coredemption; the necessity of a hierarchical priesthood; the necessity of the baptismal priesthood of all the faithful. All of this is ritualized in the Mass, and God intends that it should be extended into family life.

What the Mass exemplifies, viz. supernatural life and family life is made effective through its ritual, and this is so because it sustains the communion of knowledge and love. Family life mirrors the Trinitarian communion of knowledge and love, and it is the social dimension of the life of the soul in union with God. In fact the traditional analysis of the divine life of the soul into the so called purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways has a dimension which is both liturgical and social. First, at the basis of our relationship to God primarily, and with each other secondarily, is friendship, which precludes any activity or disposition which is inimical to our love for our friend. In the soul the mode of spiritual life that purifies it of what offends the Beloved is the purgative way. In the Mass, it is the penitential rite. In the family, it is humility, reconciliation, forgiveness, and a willingness to repair the damage done by broken promises. Secondly, communion with the one we love requires, not only reformation, but also knowledge. We do not love what we do not know, and conversely love brings us to deeper knowledge and desire for knowledge. In our relationship with God, this is the Illuminative way. In the Mass it is the Liturgy of the Word. In the family it is communication, time spent together, family prayer, family meals, family Sundays, and the primacy of home life over secondary interests. Finally, the communion of knowledge leads to the communion of love and inflammation of the will. The lover is committed to the good of the beloved. In our relationship with God, this the unitive way. In the Mass, it is the Liturgy of the Eucharist, especially Holy Communion. In the family it is chaste love, fidelity, the procreation and education of children, modesty, the protection of the innocence of children. The liturgical structure, then, reorders the soul in a threefold way so that memory, intellect and will act in harmony so that man can live the communion of knowledge and love with God and with his brethren.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass enshrines and solemnizes—not only the interior life of the soul, but also of the social life of man, especially within the family. I would have to say, then, that the liturgical chaos of our day, not only prejudices the faith, but also the family; and this not only because without the faith, the family does not know what it is supposed to be, but also because without the ritualization of the reality through the Mass, the meaning of the family is not symbolically and efficaciously lived. ■