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"The Tending of God's Garden: The Coredemption and the Culture of Life (Part 3)"

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 Coredemption 2000 convened in England, February 21-26, 2000. This is the conclusion of the three-part article of Fr. Geiger.

5 . The Arrangement of the Garden around the Tree of Life

The garden of the soul, the home, the Church all have to be organized in the same way. The natural order is preordained to be woven into the sacred order. There is a parallelism and unity, though real distinction, between nature and grace. At the heart of it all is the coredemptive mediation of Mary. The moral and artistic environment which we must surround ourselves with is the Immaculate. Catholic culture, as it developed over the ages into Christendom, and unraveled as it has been by the growing tide of secularism, is fundamentally Marian. The heart of culture is the Eucharist and organized around it as a garden enclosed or sanctuary is Mary. The sacred liturgy of the western rite has always recognized the primary importance of the cult of Mary:

In communion with and venerating the memory, in the first place, of the glorious and ever Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and all Your saints, by whose merits and prayers grant we may be armed with the help of Thy protection.

This "memory" of the Church is a cosmic and perennial key to interpreting human history and the ultimate meaning of the social order. If at the center of human history is the sacrifice of Christ, and there the Immaculate stands as Coredemptrix, then the perfection of labor necessitates that labor be marianized.

The Liturgical chaos of our day is indicative of and contributive to the social disintegration of our times. Whatever may be said in favor of the liturgical renewal, the soft pedaling of the rubrics and tradition has left many souls without the ability to discern the fundamental truths which the liturgy is meant to exemplify and incarnate. At times the Mass has all the appearances of a secular social event, sterilized of its mystical significance. In this form it may appeal to popular sensibilities, but it is devoid of the power to cultivate the human mind and heart in a Catholic way. Certainly, as long as the Mass is celebrated validly, the power of the sacrifice is present, but the secondary aspects of the rite, nevertheless belong to its essence, and arbitrarily changing the rite always brings some harm.

If culture is a moral and artistic environment, and the perfection of our labor, then the reengineering of our temples from churches to worship spaces is indicative of how far secular ideology has affected us. The great architectural and artistic forms of the centuries which have been built up around the altar of sacrifice are a testimony to the tradition of Catholic culture which we have lost. The best of what men had to offer, the perfection of their work was given over to the keeping of the garden. If we wish to repair the trampled walls of our vineyards we will have to begin with the walls of our churches.

The link between the Immaculate-Coredemptrix and the liturgical order needs to be strengthened. The ancient Judeo-Christian tradition, by way of type and fulfillment, places the ritual of life within the protection of Mary's womb. Much could be said here, about music and fine art, but for a moment I wish to concentrate on Church architecture, because of its special relationship to Mary. It is well known that the Old Testament Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant are both Marian types. According to Klaus Gamber an early practice of

reservation of the Eucharist in the Western Rite was to use "a small box, fashioned after the Ark of the Covenant of the Old Testament," called an arca. The Temple and Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament, and the Sanctuary and Tabernacle in the Catholic Church are sacred spaces hierarchically ordered and separated after the fashion of the garden of paradise. Both point to the Immaculate, the first by way of typology, and the second by way of fulfillment. The Immaculate is the liturgical environment in which the ritual of life is celebrated. John Saward notes that the greatest Cathedrals of Europe are dedicated to Her, like those at Paris, and Chartres, that by the thirteenth century every Church of the West would have a Lady Chapel, and that in your own Cathedral in Durham Our Lady "pervaded every stone."

The Church building is one of the most fundamental and important instruments of culture. It is the moral and artistic environment at the heart of civilized life. For this reason in Christendom the Church was at the heart of every city, town or village. And so, a church sanctuary clearly delineated and well organized and around the altar, with the Marian ornamentation so typical of the western rite in the middle ages is a microcosm of civilization. The ancient chancel screens which in the East developed into the iconostasis, in the West developed into the Rood Screen, as is well documented by what survives here in England. Above the screen on a transeam beam was erected the Holy Rood, flanked on either side by Mary and John, the Coredemptrix and priest. Below the beam on the screen where painted wood panels of angels and saints, often the apostles and evangelists with the patrons of the Church. The screen was carefully arranged according to ecclesiastical norms in a hierarchical fashion as just described, and although it sometimes made liturgical functions more remote and less visible, it nevertheless visibly arranged the social order in a hierarchical fashion, preserving the concept of mediation, and acting more as a theological frame for one's participation in the liturgy, than as an obstruction to one's view. Marian culture in general is precisely that hierarchical framework in which we situate life and activity, one that preserves the concept of subordinate mediation intact.

If culture is to assimilate what is exemplified by the Mass, then liturgical life must radiate from the center, from the heart of supernatural life to the heart of natural life, from the Church to the home, from the larger Church to the domestic Church. Through the home, and only through there can it spread to the circumference of civilization. The home has walls windows and doors, organized so as to provide a sanctuary of life, into which that which nourishes may enter, and that which destroys may be kept out. The distinction between family and friends, between private interests and family interests should be clear, and the latter should be subordinated to the former. We must treat the sanctuary of the home with a respect which is parallel to that of the Church sanctuary, and to Catholic family tradition as the rubrics of common sense.

The family is a sacred reality, and its form is a sacred order that cannot be arbitrarily changed without harm to its members. The father is the head, the mother is the heart. The unity of the two is indissoluble. The fruit of the union and the primary purpose of the union is life, ultimately leading to eternal life. The mode of the union is sacrifice. Sacrifice brings man and woman together, and their sacrifice is for the sake of life. Many parents struggle under immensely difficult circumstances, as single parents and step parents. For this they and deserve the support of their families and the Church, but in principle we must support and promote traditional marriage and its sacrificial nature. Fathers must take responsibility for their families by their presence, involvement, and headship. Mothers must preserve chaste love by their modesty and insistence on being respected. There is no substitute for respect and true friendship among spouses. There is no substitute for both natural parents bonded until death and committed unconditionally to the welfare of their children. There certainly is no substitute for the direct involvement of both parents in every aspect of their children's formation.

Families need to be Catholic through and through. We need to be reminded that "by its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory." This is the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church reaffirming the constant tradition. I note this because the contraceptive mentality runs deep. I have heard a promoter of NFP say: "Everyone of my children was a wanted child." Is not the "wanted child" syndrome the cultural Frankenstein of Planned Parenthood International? Under the right circumstances NFP is a perfectly legitimate practice, but without the right metaphysics, seemingly good practices, even in the hands of the ostensibly orthodox, can become an instrument of prevailing secularist attitudes. The primacy of life in the communion of knowledge and love to precious a gift is too be lost. With it is lost the, not only the generosity of spouses, but also the innocence of children. Through the same logic by which spouses have surrendered to the contraceptive mentality, children have been entrusted to the secularist educational and social system. Custom and economic attitudes make it tremendously difficult for parents to spend enough time with their children. Whatever may be said about quality time, statistics show that parents have less and less influence over their children, while the influence of peers and the media grow and grow. In this milieu we are constantly tempted to compromise. For the sake of their being well adjusted socially we are constantly exposing children to the occasion of sin, while more and more young people look outside the home for love and attention. As we

see them drift away, instead of fighting for a truly Catholic culture, we feel we have no alternative but to evangelize them within the existing culture. Hence the emergence of art forms that are compromised, like Christian punk and rap music. Our view of Catholic family life needs to be radically independent of secularist culture. Our culture must be the Cross. Marriage is a communion of knowledge and love that bears fruit by way of Sacrifice. Just as the Sacrifice of the Two Hearts, has its essence in the oblation of intellect and will, so the subordination of the faculties within the soul, and persons within the family, according to the pattern revealed in Christ and Our Lady is where family life is to bear good fruit.

In the spheres of social life outside the centers of the Church and home there are also hierarchic structures whose forms cannot be treated arbitrarily. Labor, the economic system at large, science, technology and the arts are the support structures which should lead us back to the center. G. K. Chesterton was a prophet of the cultural disintegration of our times. In 1927 he delivered lucid address entitled *Culture and the Coming Peril*. "Vulgarity" was the term he used to describe the peril into which culture was falling. He defined vulgarity in relation to culture as "standardization at a lower standard." Indeed, he complained about the enormous importance given in culture to trivialities and neglect of the fundamentals. He pointed to a "gross familiarity," and at the same time an "insensibility" with the "materials of culture" that would lead to ". . . a flattening, a repetition, a staleness, a lack of dignity and distinction. . ." in culture. He said that "there never was a time in the whole history of the human race when it was more necessary to defend the intellectual independence of man than this hour in which we live. If this was true some seventy years ago, what are we to say as we reap the fruit of our intellectual slavery to secularist culture. Our gross familiarity and insensibility with the materials of common life have led us to forget the irreplaceable role of the family meal, and to institutionalize nightly television as a sacred rite. One of the reasons that even Catholic families have so much trouble is because they do not communicate well. Have you ever tried talking to someone who is watching T.V.?"

The intellectual independence of man, i.e., his liberation, depends on the subordination of his freedom to the truth. For this reason the metaphysical question as to the ultimate meaning of the social order is most fundamental and necessary. To paraphrase Chesterton, the most practical thing to do is to begin with theory. The slogan "be practical," which translates into the avoidance of metaphysics is idealistic and misleading. The intellect, informed and enlightened by Christ, directs the will to subordinate the passions and imagination to the faith. The intellectual independence of man does not mean a commitment to a constant creation of new cultural forms, but neither does it mean slavish imitation either. The balance between on the one hand the dogmatic and metaphysical rubrics of life and culture and on the other the imaginative genius of personal holiness and creativity needs to be rediscovered and applied across the whole cultural spectrum. The Immaculate Coredemptrix is the key, the Mass and home are the sanctuaries and schools, the arts are the support structures which should always lead us back to the most important realities.

To fully appreciate the importance of the Coredemption and its incorporation into life by way of our consecration to the Immaculate, we need to understand that consecration as a commitment to the restoration of Catholic culture. Catholic life is superior to any other ipso facto. We need to refine our artistic sensibilities, and this not only in reference to fine art, music, literature and architecture, but first of all by way of Catholic metaphysics. In the Bonaventurian sense the arts referred to those disciplines by which man uses a right knowledge for the purpose of right making. This would include works like agriculture and manufacturing. Christ as the exemplar is referred to as Eternal Art, the first principle of all that is made, of all that man makes. Created art, therefore, is dependent on Christ. This illustrates St. Bonaventure's exemplarism and the centrality of Christ to culture. If we truly think like Catholics we will create a Catholic culture.

Artistic sensibilities under the influence of scholastic metaphysics can indeed be refined to produce a Catholic culture. For instance, a survey of sacred art from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance reveals a link between the canonical tradition of the East and the imaginative freedom of the West that has profound metaphysical significance. The iconographical simplicity, symbolism and stylization of the East was maintained, for example, in the Western frescoes of Giotto and Cimabue, even while being softened by a gentle naturalism. This unity of tradition and imagination was further perfected by the holy genius of Blessed Angelico. In such representations there is a definite canonical tradition which remains always preeminent and respected even as the imagination is given room to operate within its rightful domain, mortified and subdued by the intellect and ordered to love. In fact, in the East, the exercise of iconography is considered a form of asceticism, by which the soul of the iconographer is by stages conformed to the heavenly image. The icon is conceived of as a radiant image of God or of the Saint portrayed that illumines the artist and onlooker, and therefore its form can never be arbitrarily contrived, but must be canonical, i.e., they must conform to the tradition received from the apostles. As a visual tradition the icon is closely related to the Word. If Eternal Art, who is the Word, is the exemplar, then art is a visual image that speaks. For this reason, in the East, icons are said to be written, not painted.

While the more sedentary tradition of the East has continually emphasized the dogmatic truth contained within the image, the Western Church developed culturally along lines which were flexible to the demands of classical humanism. Under the influence of the Renaissance, sacred art went through a transition from a metaphor of theological symbolism to naturalistic representation. While the older approach tended to emphasize the supernatural reality of the Incarnation and Redemption and its objective determination, the newer approach tended to emphasize the historical influence of that theology and its subjective effect on man. A good example of this development could be seen by comparing the San Damiano Crucifix, a first millennium Byzantine image, with a crucifix of the Italian Renaissance. The living upright and standing Christ of the San Damiano Crucifix proclaims the dogmatic and mysterious nature of Redemption, while the realistic wounds of the dead Christ of the later crucifix, speaks to the heart. Both approaches, therefore, have assets and liabilities. Positively, the first upholds principle and proclaims the word of truth, while the second is open to adapt to circumstances and appeals to the heart of man. In terms of deficits, while the older approach tended to minimize the role of the imagination, the newer seemed to adapt too easily to the voluptuousness of unmortified passion. Both approaches have their place, but clearly the second must be subordinated to the first, as the imagination and affections must be subordinated to the intellect, and as praxis must be subordinated to truth. Sacred art then can never merely be a representation that appeals, then, but an icon that radiates truth such wise that penetrates not only the mind but also the heart.

In an analogous sense the whole of civilized life is meant to be an icon. Created things reflect God in various degrees. In scholastic terminology, the lower levels of creation are vestiges of God, that reflect Him according to their nature. Man possesses a mode of being as an intellectual agent that makes him capable of sharing God's life. Thus he is not only a vestige, but the image of God. The saint who actually participates in God's life is not only an image, but the very likeness of God. The image of God, man, as a mediator is able to elevate the lower elements of creation, the vestiges, so that they give greater glory to God, and in their turn they serve as the necessary support structures—natural signs, and instruments of actual grace—upon which sanctifying grace builds to raise man, the image, to the level of the similitude, the unique icon of God, i.e., the saint. The way by which man elevates the vestige and by which the vestige serves as a support to man is a form of asceticism. In reality, while we might be able to imagine virtually an infinite number of cultural forms, there is a far more limited number of forms that the imagination can create which will actually contribute to God's glory and the sanctification of man. Only when the cultural forms correspond to the original pattern, viz. the Incarnation and Redemption, and therefore also, the Coredemption, are they capable of elevating the created order, and thus provide a valid basis upon which to organize society.

To summarize this paper, then, (1) we first defined culture in general terms as the moral and artistic environment ordered according to a rule toward a specific end. The immediate implication is that not only individuals qua individuals are involved here, but the social order as such. In terms of Catholic life the rule is the faith, and the end is the glorification of God and the salvation of man. In the light of this Catholic culture must be understood as Eucharistic and familial. (2) We then described the family in terms of its being a reflection of the Most Blessed Trinity, and the respective complementary roles of man and woman paralleling the life of knowledge and love within the communion of persons which is the Trinity. These relationships reveal a set of first principles or a metaphysics of exemplarism, which revelation is defined by the mediation of Christ and the Immaculate, though not the first man and woman in time, first in principle, and therefore the hermeneutic for the familial, social and cultural order. This is the culture of the Garden of God organized around the Tree of Life. (3) Next we underscored the crucial importance of the subordinated mediation which is exemplified by the relationship of Christ and the Immaculate and exactly how it defines the relationship of intellect and will within the soul, man and woman within the family, and the priesthood and the faithful within the Church. There is a fundamental sacred order which is rooted in the Alliance of the two hearts and repeated in the orders of nature and grace. The typology of the Garden of Paradise and the Tree of Life, fulfilled in the Redemption and Coredemption, is the basis for the culture of life. (4) The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is where the sacred order is synthesized for the good of the soul, the family and of the Church. As the perpetuation and ritualization of the one great sacrifice, the Mass unites the key participants in Christian life: Christ, the Immaculate, the priest (St. John), and the laity (St. Mary Magdalen). As the role of Mary Coredempratrix is complementary to that of Christ in the objective redemption, so the role of the baptismal priesthood is complementary to that of the ministerial priesthood. The common priesthood is an incorporation, not only in the priesthood of Christ, but into the Coredemption of Mary. In the light of this total consecration to Mary takes on new significance in terms of family life and active participation in the liturgy: active participation in the liturgy nurtures family life, and maternal mediation is a key element of active participation in liturgical life. Therefore, the tending of God's garden is never more critical than at its heart, the Tree of Life, i.e., the Mass. (5) Finally the parallelism of personal, familial and liturgical life in the exemplarism of the Coredemption must be extended to culture at large. Catholic culture must be Eucharistic, and therefore also liturgical and Marian. The sacred order which preserves and upholds civilized life is Marian and coredemptive, because of the ranking of subordinated mediation as a first principle of both the created order and the order of grace. The

Mass is the Tree of life at the center of the garden. Organized around it must be the family and the whole social order. The rest of culture, the hedgerows and fields of the moral and artistic environment, are the support structures of common sense. The Coredemption is essential to the whole cultural organism. Only when the imagination is used creatively within the bounds of this mystery will we be able to cultivate the civilization of love. Unless the Garden is deliberately organized in all its facets around the Tree of Life we continue to follow the example of our first parents, not that of the Head and Heart of the Church.

Conclusion

It seems to me, that an implicit, unspoken objection to the Coredemption, related to but distinct from the Theological and Ecumenical objections, is the cultural objection. The dogma is judged to be incompatible with the premises and mores of secular culture. Like the Immaculate Conception, it is a dogma to be incorporated into life, by way of unconditional consecration to Mary. I have heard one leading Theologian object to the dogma of the Coredemption on the ground that so little fruit has been born in the life of the Church as a result of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. When questioned as to the impact of St. Maximilian and his cities of the Immaculate, he did not consider them so significant as to modify his judgment. Dare I say that he was half right? St. Maximilian was a saint and mystic of rare theological and practical ability who has left the Church a legacy of insight and methodology that his life and death proves is capable of transforming the world. If his impact seems somewhat eclipsed by more contemporary and popularized movements, is it not perhaps because we have failed to plumb the depths of what he was all about, viz. a gift to the Church to clarify the meaning and import of Marian dogma in the long line of Franciscan tradition, recapturing and reinvigorating the ancient metaphysics, and putting it into practice? And so I dare say that the objector was half right: too little fruit has been born by Marian dogma. But the fruit is to be derived from the first principles. Perhaps if we were willing to accept a integral and synthetic metaphysic which proclaimed the whole truth about Mary we would understand more clearly the nature of the fruit desired and be more willing to accept the means to acquire it. I believe that to be consistent, the promotion of the dogma requires a commitment to the restoration of Catholic culture across the board. St. Maximilian was committed to the entire transformation of human life through the Immaculate. Her life has to be the direct inspiration for the civilization of love.

Subordinated mediation, then, is the dynamic of Christian life. Its basis is the metaphysics of exemplarism. Its ideal is the Alliance of the Two Hearts, understood in the context of the Coredemption. The union of intellect and will in the act of sacrificial oblation, exemplified in the icon of the Twelfth station of the Cross is the ideal of Catholic life. This is a mystery worthy of human labor, which has such a great dignity. In the light of this mystery perhaps we will repudiate the vulgarity of secular culture, and work toward building a civilization of love, centered on the Eucharist and radiating from our homes.

Consecration to the Immaculate-Coredemptrix is a return to the Garden, to the sanity of its order, and to good common sense. Under Her guidance we will return with Her to the foot of the altar, and protect the sanctuaries of our Churches and our homes. We will have a greater appreciation for the simple realities of life and an understanding of what they mean. First of all for what it means to be a man or a woman, a father or a mother. We will have more respect for rural life, for large families, for spouses who cultivate true friendship, mutual honor and respect, for mothers who stay at home, for fathers who are not afraid to be the head of their families, and for parents who refuse to have the innocence of their children destroyed by shallow culture. Holy families will be the school of holiness and the nurseries of vocations to priestly and religious life. The whole moral and artistic environment will be guided by truth and impelled by a healthy imagination and generous creativity. In the Mass, in the home and in society at large we will learn to do our part in the mediatorial work of Christ, in subordination to Him. We will offer our sacrifice, to be purified by the holiness of the Immaculate-Coredemptrix, to be informed by Her wisdom, united to the Heart of Her Son, through Her own Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart. Then we will know that liberation is ours, that the truth has set us free. ■