

THREE “ORIGINAL EXPERIENCES”

1. Original Solitude: “The man was alone” (cf. Gen 2:18). There is in each one of us an interior world of depth and beauty that is not directly accessible to other persons. We speak of this as our “heart” or our “subjectivity;” it is the center of our personhood—in a sense what we refer to when we say “I.” We have an “interiority” where we are alone with ourselves, or better, alone before God. It is in this solitude that I truly discover who I am: a beloved child of God. However, solitude, in its deepest sense, is not isolation, but rather dwelling “within” myself, and precisely in this way being able to open myself out to others—to welcome them into my solitude and to make a gift of my solitude to them.

2. Original Nakedness: “The man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25). Nakedness, in this respect, is an extension of solitude—it is the inner mystery of a person being totally disclosed before the other. This is an openness in which the body of each is seen as an expression of the whole person of the other, and not merely as an object. In this nakedness, further, man and woman also realize a complementarity between themselves, physically and spiritually. They discover that they are given to one another by God, given first as brother and sister (as children of the same Father), but also as spouses, as husband and wife.

3. Original Unity: “Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived” (Gen 4:1). The unity of Adam and Eve in the garden is first of all the harmony that they know through their openness and transparency before one another, which is possible only on the basis of their primary openness before God the Father. They can love one another as spouses only because they first allow themselves to be loved by God as children, and recognize this mystery of childhood in the other person. They live in a complete personal harmony with one another, with themselves, and with the whole creation, precisely through their harmony with God and his will. Yet this unity is also expressed bodily, in conjugal union—and the fruit of such a union is their cooperation in the creation of another person (pro-creation). Thus, they become father and mother. (It is important to note that the “highest” form of unity is expressed better through the idea of “interpenetration” than merely through “harmony.” It is when lover and beloved live within one another through their mutual self-giving.)

From these three original experiences, we can discern three primary relationships—as we have already noted in our descriptions—the whole reason that these experiences themselves exist:

THREE “PRIMARY RELATIONSHIPS”

1. Childhood: It is in childhood that each person truly is who he or she is. We are defined, in our inmost being, by the Father’s love for us. It is not exaggeration to say: *I am, in my deepest truth, one who is known, loved, and accepted by the Father.* In childhood, we experience our whole existence, our very self, as a gift from the hands of the Father, and our life is one of joy and gratitude precisely because we live in this “realm of gift.”

A secondary aspect of our childhood is also fraternity (**brotherhood and sisterhood**) with one another, for we are all children of God, and recognize one another as loved by him as we ourselves are loved. This is indeed the most important truth in our relationships with others: to recognize them as beloved children of God, and therefore to approach them with reverence as belonging to God, striving to see them in some way as God himself sees them.

2. Spousehood (or Nuptiality): This is an element of our openness to ever deepening and more intimate communion with others. The fullest human expression of this is most clearly the union between man and woman. Their love bears a special character, a special depth, intensity, and intimacy. However, this “nuptial” character of love, in its broadest sense, applies to every close human love. By “nuptial” we mean here simply that *love desires union with the beloved:* it seeks the “interpenetration of solitudes” that is communion. Another aspect of authentic love, on the other hand, is *the desire for the well-being and happiness of the beloved.* This, indeed, takes priority over the desire for union, but both aspects are essential for a full and completely developed love.

We should also note that, even in the union of human persons with one another—and even in conjugal union of man and woman—there remains a kind of “virginity of heart” in which the deep personal solitude in the heart of each person remains, as it were, untouched by the other. This is because each person is such a profound mystery that God alone can know them and love them in the very depth of who they are. Only in heaven will we be fully granted access into this interior place, both in ourselves and in others. (And there we shall do so in a wholly “virginal” way.) Here we also see that “spousehood” is directed, ultimately, to God himself. Only union with him, the Divine Bridegroom, can fulfill the deepest

nuptial desires in our hearts, the desire to live entirely in the Beloved and to allow him to live in us. Only God can love us with the love that we most deeply need and desire, and all human relationships will ultimately find their fulfillment within the nuptial relationship of all humanity with Christ. (In this sense we can speak of “nuptiality” as the full blossoming of “childhood,” since it unfolds in a yet more intimate form of reciprocal surrender that complements and perfects our childhood before the Father: being nuptially united to Jesus Christ.)

3. Fatherhood or Motherhood: Man and woman were created by God, not only to share in the intimacy of his own life, but also to share in his radiant fruitfulness, in the beautiful creativity of his own love. They do this, in the most profound way, through parenthood, in which they “cooperate” with God in the birth of a child. However, this also includes personal fruitfulness in a wider sense—i.e. education, evangelization, spiritual paternity and maternity—and, in a lesser way, “stewardship” of creation in the non-personal realm. The ultimate purpose of this fruitfulness, however, does not lie in itself alone, but precisely in “coming full circle,” as God’s love flows out into creation, gathers creation up into itself, and draws it back into the heart of God’s embrace, into the truth of childhood and nuptial intimacy with him.

In this sense, childhood is the beginning and the end, and the reality that envelops and gives meaning to all the others. We can see it as the outermost circle in a series of concentric circles; or, in the same image understood differently, as the innermost point from which all the other circles “expand” and from which they derive their meaning.

TEMPTATION

When the serpent comes and tempts Adam and Eve, what does he do?

+ He attacks the primary reality of childhood by insinuating doubt into their minds about the goodness and love of God. They come to see God no longer as a generous and loving Father, but as a stingy and dominating “Master” who is holding things from them and subjecting them to arbitrary laws.

+ The serpent then presents them with the possibility of grasping for things apart from God—with the supposed “desirability” of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

+ Their response to this is to rebel: they turn away from God and grasp for independence, for a life of freedom and a meaning coming from within themselves and not from him, and for the possessiveness of creation apart from him.

+ What happens as a result? They lose the joy of living in their deepest identity as *loved by God and belonging to him*. And therefore, their openness before one another and before the whole creation itself is fractured, and their fruitfulness, too, is subject to difficulty and pain. (Of course, they are still loved by God, and still belong to him, but they have severed the relationship and turned away from him, grasping for “nothingness” apart from him, grasping for a lie.)

We discern **two aspects** of the movement into sin:

1. Turning away from the face of the Father, from the gift of his love.
2. Turning toward oneself or toward created things apart from him and his intention.

From this turning-away and turning-toward, we see arising the “threefold concupiscence” by which our human desire, rather than being directed to God and to the true value of each created thing, is directed away from him in a disordered way.

THE “THREEFOLD CONCUPISCENCE”

+ This is what Eve saw in the seductive fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil: “that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). Saint John also writes of it in his first Letter, in 2:15-17.

1. “The lust of the flesh.” This is the desire for pleasure divorced from the deeper meaning of created things, and from a healthy vision of deeper personal well-being, both for oneself and for others. This is seen clearly in gluttony and sloth, for

example, but most pointedly in lust properly speaking, in which another person becomes a mere means for giving me pleasure.

2. “The lust of the eyes.” This is the desire to possess and to control. This is manifest in our relationship toward created things, toward “owning” in the basic sense, but also in our relationship toward persons, toward ideas, and toward our own life. We want to “grasp” things, rather than receiving them freely as gifts from the Father and possessing them only as gifts.

3. “The pride of life.” This is the desire to dominate others, or the need to see oneself as superior, precisely to compensate for the great void that turning away from God has left in the human heart. When we no longer know ourselves as beloved children, then the “likeness to God” that we knew through intimacy with him gives way to the desire to be “like God” through being our own “god” and creating meaning for ourselves from within our own narrow isolation.

THE RESULT OF SIN

After original sin, what happens to these realities?

The “original experiences” are broken and corrupted:

+ **Solitude** becomes isolation and estrangement, not only from others and from God, but also from one’s own authentic self.

+ **Nakedness** is now burdened by fear and shame, which is a response to the disordered desires that awaken in the human heart through sin. We now hide from one another, from ourselves, and from God himself.

+ **Unity** is broken apart, and we no longer experience the joy of mutual self-giving with one another, nor the joy of belonging totally to God. Rather, our hearts are burdened by the inability to “build a bridge” to make deep and lasting contact with another person, and we struggle to understand and embrace one another as we both need and desire.

HEALING AND RECONCILIATION—THE THREEFOLD FORM OF LOVE

What is the “way back” into the reality of love from which we have fallen?

+ Ultimately, redemption comes only through the new Adam and the new Eve, through the “Yes” of Jesus and Mary to perfect love—in a new garden, at the foot of a new Tree, healing the wound inflicted in the first garden and at the foot of the first tree.

+ This “perfect love” bears a particular form, which is directly contrary to the “threefold concupiscence.” It is the spirit of the “evangelical counsels,” which I prefer to refer to as “**the threefold form of love**,” since it applies to all persons in every vocation. These are:

1. Obedience. This heals our prideful desire to grasp for life and autonomy apart from God, and is the way in which we return into the “realm of God’s gift,” into the truth of childhood. To obey is, much more deeply than a mere “task” or “service,” to accept the gift of love given to me from God, in the radiance and fullness with which he gives it. This “acceptance of gift” is the inmost heart of obedience, and what gives meaning to everything else in our lives. In obedience I return to that state in which I know myself as one who is loved into existence by God, and I also recognize the whole of creation—and every moment of my life—as a gift from his loving hands. Finally, within this gift, I myself become a gift back to God and a gift for my brothers and sisters. *To live, at every moment, in acceptance of this gift—that is the deepest meaning of Christian and human life.*

2. Poverty. This heals our possessiveness and need for “ownership” and “control.” In authentic poverty we realize that sharing is indeed the best reality, for, in sharing, we actually lose nothing, but rather possess everything together because all is shared. It is only through selfish “grasping” that we do not have enough, and also cause our neighbor to have too little. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, for example, possessed everything, precisely because they possessed nothing, with open and upraised hands. Ultimately, however, external possessions are only secondary to and expressions of the interior person, and so poverty, in its deepest sense, means our openness before one another, in which we are free to accept the gift of others and to give ourselves in return, without the need to possess or control.

3. Chastity. This heals the disorder that has marked our human relationships in sin. The basis of this disorder is this: we no longer see the other person bathed in the light of God’s love, in their deep personal mystery as a child of God. Chastity is in its essence something wholly positive: seeing others in truth, in the truth of God’s own love. In this perspective, I can truly love them as they are, and relate to them in authentic charity, welcoming them and giving myself to them. Chastity allows the two aspects of authentic love to develop to maturity in a healthy way: the desire for union with the beloved, and the desire for the well-being and happiness of the beloved.

+ Jesus himself entered into the brokenness of our human existence. Though sinless and free from concupiscence himself, he allowed himself to be tempted by Satan. His three temptations in the desert (cf. Mt 4:1-11) correspond to the threefold concupiscence and the three “counsels.” Further, his agony in Gethsemane, and ultimately the Cross, express his own obedient, poor, and chaste love for God and for each of us. It is precisely this love which saves us and redeems us—for he takes us up into himself and draws us back to the Father.

+ Our own deep personal healing and transformation, therefore, lies in our “returning to the wellspring of gift,” returning to the bosom of the Father and to the depth of our childhood before him—and, we might add, allowing ourselves to be drawn into an intimate nuptial relationship with Christ). Jesus takes us up into himself and, espousing us to himself, allows us to share in his own childhood, his own sonship, and we find transformation in being “conformed to the image of the Son.” In Jesus, we discover again who we truly are, and we can then open out to others to love them as we ourselves have been loved by God.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION

+ The Song of Songs, in a beautiful way, connects the book of Genesis with the redemption that occurs in the Gospel. And the Gospel itself will reach its full blossoming in the new creation (manifested in Revelation). The images that tie all of these together are: a garden, a tree, streams of water, a man and woman (bridegroom and bride).

Gen 3:15: The *Proto-Evangelium*, the “First-Gospel,” in which, immediately after their sin, God promises redemption: the “crushing of the serpent’s head” by the “seed of the woman.”

“Reborn at the Foot of the Cross.” Gen 3:15, 22-24 – Song 8:1-6 – John 19:23-30

“My sister, my bride.” Gen 2:21-25 – Song 2:3-4; 5:1 – John 19:23-30

“Hide and Seek.” Gen 3:8-10 – Song 3:1-4b – John 20:1, 11-18

“River of Life and Trees of Life.” Gen 2:9-10 – Ezek 47:12 – John 7:37; 19:34 – Rev 19:7-8; 21:1-6; 22:1-5, 17

+ + + In the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection we encounter the mystery of childhood, spousehood, and fruitfulness reaching its greatest and most perfect fulfillment, anticipating the full blossoming of the new creation. Jesus and Mary are totally open to God as Son and daughter, abiding wholly in the realm of the Father’s gift. And in this they give themselves, body and spirit, in the most profound and total way, realizing truly the “nuptial” meaning of the body through their virginal self-giving. Finally, this self-giving, which binds them together in unbreakable intimacy, is immensely fruitful, begetting and giving birth to the “new creation,” pouring forth from the Passion of Christ and the com-passion of Mary. The Resurrection is the manifestation and the mature fruit of this radical newness—in which Jesus is the “first-born from the dead” (Col 1:18), the “first-born of many brethren” (Rom 8:29) who will be born from the womb of the Church throughout history.