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## INTRODUCTION

### Entering the Spiritual World

Due to Original Sin, we have lost our capacity to readily distinguish truth from falsehood. To enter the path of discernment, to enter the spiritual world, we need to understand God and the universe God created. It is a universe that is both physical and spiritual. To help you attune your spiritual radar and enter the school of discernment, let me propose a relational model (or paradigm) for God, human persons, and the created universe. Let us take a few moments to explore this relational paradigm.<sup>1</sup>

First, we affirm God is Three Persons but One. We also affirm that God is Love. If God is Three Persons but One God and God is Love, we can affirm that God is Relationship made perfect by Love. God is a Trinity of perfect, loving relationships. The Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit—are three totally distinct, unique persons with no boundaries to their giving and receiving love. God is Love. God is One.

In classic Trinitarian theology, the reciprocal love of the Father and the Son for each other is the Holy Spirit. The “three in one and one in three” however is not a scientific formula but a Love without beginning or end. God is Perfect Relationship.

Love is always about relationship. The loss of love is always about the breaking of relationship. So everything not of God is anti-relationship, what Scripture calls the spirit of anti-Christ, “which is to come, but is already in the world” (1 Jn 4: 3).

Second, we affirm that God “created mankind in his image; in the image of God He created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). God *willed* human nature's form, freely creating persons as a perfect relationship of body and spirit.<sup>2</sup> The *human nature* God willed is the person as an *embodied spirit*. Human nature as *embodied spirit* is fashioned in God's own image. Consequently, persons are made to share in our own way in the Love that the Trinity enjoys. We are unique beings created to freely *give* and *receive* love with no boundaries.

#### Covering Their Nakedness

In Genesis 3: 7, Adam and Eve “see” their nakedness and “cover” themselves. Their *seeing* and *covering* demonstrates that their separation from God awakens them to know and feel that they no longer have control over their physical nature. They can objectify each other—use each other—and in their loss of innocence, are shamed by this discovery. Now begins the history of psychological and physical exploitation linked to the very gift God created to give life: human sexuality. The enemy of human nature knew this tragedy would result and relishes the agony it causes. The perfect complementarity of human nature created in the Divine image, male and female, is shattered by narcissism. But God has a plan to rescue us and make all things new. It begins with the miracle of the wine at the Wedding at Cana that signifies the super abundance of grace that God pours out upon the covenant of marriage through Christ's life. (Jn 2: 1-12).

Perfectly transparent in the *giving* and *receiving* of love: perfectly giving; perfectly accepted; perfectly loved; perfectly loving; and eternally cherished. This *giving and receiving* of love, with no boundaries, was intended in God's plan to be realized between the persons and their Creator, and between the persons themselves. The Trinity's free gift of the creation has as its apex the creation of persons crafted in the Divine image.

Third, the story of Paradise in the Book of Genesis reveals the state of *perfect relationship* between our first parents and God. This state of intimacy with God enabled a state of perfect justice and righteousness—a paradise! As long as our first parents remained in this state of spiritual intimacy with the Divine—as long as the state of perfect justice held—they were free from sickness and death.<sup>3</sup> This state of immortality was possible as long as they allowed God to be the very center of their lives—as long as they stayed in perfect,

intimate relationship with God. In this state of perfect intimacy—their hearts undivided—they *knew themselves*. They had perfect interior harmony between their body and spirit.

Because they were innocent and radically transparent to their Creator, they cherished each *through God's eyes* as sacred. As incarnate spirits they shared intimate knowledge, respect, trust, complementarity, uniqueness, separateness and transcendent love. And they understood the creation because they were intimate with the Creator. They had perfect relationship with creation because they understood it as God's gift. God gifts the human persons with the *power to name* the plants and animals.

We can understand that this gift of naming includes the knowledge of creation's rhythms. They would understand *how* creation works to their benefit and their delight and for their enjoyment. The gift of love freely given to our first parents by God was to expand in cosmic harmony.



Garden of Eden 1624 Dutch Textile Artist Unknown

Free will, essential for love, also allows persons to sever their relationship with Love, with God. The tragedy of Original Sin severs the perfect relationship between the incarnate spirits made in the Divine image and the Creator:

*When they heard the sound of the Lord God walking about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (Gen 3:8)*

Relationship violated and severed is the *true face of sin*. The perfect relationship they had enjoyed now becomes filled with blame and grief. They will fight each other and their offspring will fight them. Their perfect relationship with creation is now also cursed (Gen 3:17-19) and they lose immortality. They are vulnerable to sickness and disease that God never intended (Ps 1: 13-15). *For God formed us to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made us. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are allied with him experience it. (Wis 2:23-4).*

With death and broken relationships on all sides, abandonment and loneliness are the heart's deepest fears. As the most profound misery caused by sin, it is what Christ suffered on the cross, for all of humanity for all time, to a degree unimaginable: *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* Love itself, suffered love's complete absence (Ps 22: 1; Mt 27: 45-46).



Garden of Eden Genesis – Mosaic Artist Unknown

But God's work in creation cannot be undone by sin. The *original* unity is lost forever, but out of this tragedy God creates an even more astonishing good. God would not create such beauty without a way to rectify the tragedy of Original Sin with something more glorious.<sup>4</sup>

We understand the glorious plan in the joyful Easter proclamation: "O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam which gained for us so great a Redeemer!" "Instead of restoring man to what he had been, God has bent down from His eternity, taking him into His arms

and pressing him to His heart in an embrace so close that the gulf between Creator and creature has been bridged, God and man henceforth forming in the order of grace a single being, 'the whole Christ.'"<sup>5</sup>

Human nature, broken and lost, is now united with the second person of the Trinity and made friends once again through Christ Jesus with God. We are now invited to accept the mission of participating with Christ in His grand work of Reconciliation. We do this by opening to life as *Sacred Story*. We allow God to work His miracle of healing and forgiveness for the hope that we, as brothers and sisters of Christ and children of God, are destined to share:

#### Human Nature and Authentic Identity

Films, songs, books and newspapers often define *human nature* positively *and solely* as our lower appetites. How these lower appetites might be divided from our spiritual nature and from Divine influence is usually ignored. Today, many definitions of human nature are influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud. Freud believed that sexual drives/desires are the root of all human psychological activity. *Being authentic* often means discerning one's identity mainly by expressing one's sensual appetites. Yet to discern one's *authentic identity* requires being spiritually grafted to Christ. Only then can one discern both the higher calling we have as daughters and sons of God, and our true human nature. This "being born from above" reveals the truth about God, our authentic identity and our mission to love as Christ loved.

*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance. In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will. (Rm 8: 18-27)*

Your discernment and journey in the spiritual world are made easier if you can see everything in light of the *paradigm of perfect relationship*—given, lost, and being restored in Christ:

- 1) Perfect relationship of incarnate spirits in our unity of body and spirit.
- 2) Perfect relationship of created, incarnate spirits with our Creator God.
- 3) Perfect relationship of incarnate spirits with each other as unique individuals.
- 4) Perfect relationship between incarnate spirits as male and female called to fruitful, respectful, loving and joyful reverence.
- 5) Perfect relationship between created, incarnate spirits with the earth given for our delight, refreshment and sustenance.
- 6) Perfect relationship with the Church, the *Body of Christ*, as the community formed by Him for the work of Reconciliation, leading to a new heaven and a new earth.



Every thought, word and deed that seeks to *affirm the meaning* of perfect relationship and the human nature *willed* by God, everything that is working to heal damaged

relationships, is a work of the Divine-Inspirer; God the Creator.

Every thought, word and deed that moves to *alter the meaning* of perfect relationship and the human nature *willed* by God, everything that is further undermining damaged relationships, is a work of the counter-inspirer; "the enemy of human nature," *who from the beginning, is a murderer and a liar—the father of lies* (Jn 8: 43-45).<sup>6</sup>

As you enter the journey into the spiritual world, keep your heart and mind focused on the *relational paradigm*. You are seeking the knowledge of your identity as a child of God, but informed by the truth of perfect relationship. Your authentic identity is a human nature, *willed* by God, as *unity* of body and spirit. You seek also the knowledge of your authentic God-given human nature as it has been violated and broken by Original Sin. And you seek this knowledge in light of what Christ is offering: by His life, death and resurrection, you are offered *the beginning* of the full healing that will be completed in the world and the life to come.

#### What is Truth?

"For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

Jn 18: 37-8

At the beginning of the Third Millennium, many believe truth is relative. Even before the Third Millennium commenced, many pointed out that the greatest threat to the Faith is not atheism but relativism. Jesus tells Pilate that he was born and came into the world to testify to the truth—the truth about God, the truth about human nature, and the truth about salvation. Truth does exist and discernment's goal is to help us distinguish truth from falsehood in our *Sacred Story*.

In short, you are seeking the knowledge of perfect relationship and how in your own life and the world, that perfection has been broken but can also be restored, healed and redeemed by the Divine Physician. You are also seeking knowledge of the thief and the robber—the *enemy of human nature*—who seeks to distort what authentic relationship is, and to hide from you the Truth of God and your authentic human nature.

You are seeking to discern the two plot-lines in your story: the one that leads to curse and death and the one that leads to life and blessings. Ultimately, you are seeking to know truth from falsehood in *all* of your thoughts, words and deeds.

So, Jesus said again, "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came [before me] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate.

Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd.

A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

(Jn 10: 7-11)

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<sup>1</sup> William M. Watson, SJ, *Forty Weeks: An Ignatian Path to Christ* (Seattle: Sacred Story Press, 2013), 196-200.

<sup>2</sup> GOD WILLED HUMAN NATURE [Catechism of the Catholic Church from here forward-"CCC" #362-8].

The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. The biblical account expresses this reality in symbolic language when it affirms that "then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." [Gen 2:7.] **Man, whole and entire, is therefore willed by God (emphasis supplied).** In Sacred Scripture the term "soul" often refers to human *life* or the entire human *person*. [Cf. Mt 16:25-26; Jn 15:13; Acts 2:41.] But "soul" also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, [Cf. Mt 10:28; 26:38; Jn 12:27; 2 Macc 6:30.] that by which he is most especially in God's image: "soul" signifies the *spiritual principle* in man.

The human body shares in the dignity of "the image of God": it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit: [Cf. 1 Cor 6:19-20; 15:44-45.]

*Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day. [GS 14 § 1; cf. Dan 3:57-80.]*

The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the "form" of the body: [Cf. Council of Vienne (1312): DS 902.] i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.

The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God - it is not "produced" by the parents - and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection. [Cf. Pius XII, *Humani Generis*: DS 3896; Paul VI, *CPG* § 8; Lateran Council V (1513): DS 1440.]

Sometimes the soul is distinguished from the spirit: St. Paul for instance prays that God may sanctify his people "wholly", with "spirit and soul and body" kept sound and blameless at the Lord's coming. [1 Thess 5:23.] The Church teaches that this distinction does not introduce a duality into the soul. [Cf. Council of Constantinople IV (870): DS 657.] "Spirit" signifies that from creation man is ordered to a supernatural end and that his soul can gratuitously be raised beyond all it deserves to communion with God. [Cf. Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*: DS 3005; GS 22 § 5; *Humani Generis*: DS 3891.]

The spiritual tradition of the Church also emphasizes the *heart*, in the biblical sense of the depths of one's being, where the person decides for or against God. [Cf. Jer 31:33; Deut 6:5; 29:3; Isa 29:13; Ezek 36:26; Mt 6:21; Lk 8:15; Rom.5:5.]

<sup>3</sup> MAN IN PARADISE [CCC #374-9]



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The first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him, in a state that would be surpassed only by the glory of the new creation in Christ.

The Church, interpreting the symbolism of biblical language in an authentic way, in the light of the New Testament and Tradition, teaches that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in an original "state of holiness and justice". [Cf. Council of Trent (1546): DS 1511.] This grace of original holiness was "to share in divine life". [Cf. *LG* 2.]

By the radiance of this grace all dimensions of man's life were confirmed. As long as he remained in the divine intimacy, man would not have to suffer or die. [Cf. *Gen* 2:17; 3:16,19.] The inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, [Cf. *Gen* 2:25.] and finally the harmony between the first couple and all creation, comprised the state called "original justice."

The "mastery" over the world that God offered man from the beginning was realized above all within man himself: *mastery of self*. The first man was unimpaired and ordered in his whole being because he was free from the triple concupiscence [Cf. *1 Jn* 2:16.] that subjugates him to the pleasures of the senses, covetousness for earthly goods, and self-assertion, contrary to the dictates of reason.

The sign of man's familiarity with God is that God places him in the garden. [Cf. *Gen* 2:8.] There he lives "to till it and keep it." Work is not yet a burden [*Gen* 2:15; cf. 3:17-19] but rather the collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation. This entire harmony of original justice, foreseen for man in God's plan, will be lost by the sin of our first parents.

<sup>4</sup> A poetic way to describe the creation of human nature, Original Sin and God's work of redemption in Christ comes from a revelation on Divine Providence given to Saint Catherine of Sienna:

"With a look of mercy that revealed his indescribable kindness, God the Father spoke to Catherine: Beloved daughter, everything I give to man comes from the love and care I have for him. I desire to show my mercy to the whole world and my protective love to all those who want it. But in his ignorance man treats himself very cruelly. My care is constant, but he turns my life-giving gifts into a source of death. Yes, I created him with loving care and formed him in my image and likeness. I pondered, and I was moved by the beauty of my creation. I gave him a memory to recall my goodness, for I wanted him to share in my own power. I gave him an intellect to know and understand my will through the wisdom of my Son, for I am the giver of every good gift and I love him with a father's constant love. Through the Holy Spirit I gave him a will to love what he would come to know with his intellect.

In my loving care I did all this, so that he could know me and perceive my goodness and rejoice to see me for ever. But as I have recounted elsewhere, heaven had been closed off because of Adam's disobedience. Immediately after his sin all manner of evil made its advance throughout the world.

So that I might commute the death consequent upon this disobedience, I attended to you with loving care—out of provident concern I handed over my only-begotten Son to make satisfaction for your needs. I demanded supreme obedience from him so that the human race might be freed of the poison which had infected the entire earth because of Adam's disobedience. With eager love he submitted to a shameful death on the cross and by that death he gave you life, not merely human but divine. (Cap. 134, ed. Latina, Ingolstadii 1583, ff<sup>o</sup> 215v-216).

<sup>5</sup> Dom Bruno Webb, *Why Does God Permit Evil* (Manchester, Sophia Institute Press, 2004), 70.

<sup>6</sup> On July 27, 2016, Pope Francis met with the Polish bishops during his time at World Youth Day. Pope Francis addressed the issue of human nature and persons created in God's image by saying we are living in times that seek to change this reality. In the published transcript of the meeting Francis said: "We are living a moment of the annihilation of man as image of God. And I would like to end here with this aspect, because behind this are ideologies. In Europe, in America, in Latin America, in Africa, in some countries of Asia, there are ideological colonizations. And one of these – I say it clearly with name and surname "is *gender!* Today children, children are taught this in school that one can choose one's sex! And why do they teach this? Because the books <used>

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are those of individuals and institutions that give money. They are ideological colonizations, supported also by very influential countries. And this is terrible. Speaking with Pope Benedict, who is well and has clear thinking, he said to me: "Holiness, this is the time of the sin against God the Creator!" He is intelligent! God has created man and woman; God created the world thus, and thus, and thus..., and we are doing the opposite. God has given us an "untilled" state, so that we can till it; and then, with this tilling, we are doing things that are taking us back to the "untilled" state! We must think about what Pope Benedict said: It's the time of the sin against God the Creator!" And this will help us."