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An Analysis of Trinitarian Foundation of Catholic Teaching on Christian Marriage

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An Analysis of Trinitarian Foundation of Catholic Teaching on Christian Marriage

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I. INTRODUCTION

Various reasons led me to this type of interpretation. In the first place, it is authentic Christian belief that marriage and the marital act are good and even sacred realities created by God. Catholic traditional teaching holds further that all perfections in God's creation are a created participation in, and manifestation of God's own infinite excellence. Moreover, according to the Bible, man and woman were created in the likeness and image of God. For all their reasons, it is reasonable to seek in God's inner life done analogical parallels to human marital life. Up to the present moment, the theological interpretation of the trinity is predominantly the psychological explanation taken from human intellectual and volitional activities. This was started by St. Augustine and was continued and perfected by the scholastics especially St. Thomas. Contemporary theologians are proposing other kinds of interpretation. According to the prescription of Vatican II often reiterated by the present Pope, African theologians are asked for the purposes of inculturation to give other interpretations consonant with their traditional and contemporary socio-cultural contexts. In my view, the conjugal interpretation which is going to be presented here is more meaningful to the traditional African than the psychological explanation of the Trinity. This is confirmed by my own personal experience: It often happened that while I was explaining the Catholic faith on the trinity many of the African parishioners, particularly the old people were inclined to conceive the Trinitarian relations and persons in terms of human conjugal life. It appears to me that the conjugal interpretation would be more meaningful than the Western psychological theory.

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II. AFRICAN TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

For this reason, I undertook this kind of interpretation as an attempt to provide an African Trinitarian theology complementary to other similar theologies elaborated in terms of psychological and other categories.

The relevance of the conjugal Trinitarian interpretation for the subject of the sacrament of matrimony in the African context is self evident. Subsequently, such interpretation will consist of a short analytical description of the characteristics or qualities of the marital act and an effort to find out and to reflect on the theological implications of the similarities and differences between such qualities and those which exist in the immanent trinity. There after, the practical implications of such reflections for the sacrament of matrimony in the African context will be exposed.

III. ANALOGIES BETWEEN THE MARITAL ACT AND GOD'S IMMANENT TRINITARIAN LIFE

The human conjugal act includes the following characteristics:

a) *Intentionality*

Both the Father's generative act in the trinity and the human marital act are forms of knowledge (Gen. 41, 17, 25; Num. 31, 18, 35; Cr. 1, 34). Indeed, the Father begets the logos through an act of self-knowledge, as is affirmed by traditional Catholic theology.

The similarities and differences between the two forms of knowledge are evident: among other things the knowledge in marital intercourse is both spiritual and bodily; in God it is exclusively spiritual. Nor are the human progenitors identified with their procreative knowledge in the way according to which the Father is one being with his generative activity. What is useful to note is that the Trinity can help us to understand better the nature of the conjugal act as a cognitive activity. When knowledge is absent human sexual intercourse loses some of its fundamental characteristics e.g. personal character, love, joy, experiential connotation – and is immediately reduced to a purely biological level without the human dimension.

b) *Personal dimension*

The conjugal act involves mutual experience of persons in existential relationship. As Vatican II affirms, it is the expression of a love which is eminently human "since it is directed from one person to another through an affection of the will" (Gs. 49). Likewise, in begetting the logos, the Father knows himself not merely in a speculative manner, but confronts himself as subject and subject in intimacy of loving experience, including his most spontaneous volitional procreation activity. This is what is known as concomitant love as distinguished from antecedent love. As such it differs virtually from the love whereby the father (together with the son spirate the spirit and it is logically posterior to the act of generation. In human beings, however, the love accompanying the marital act is both antecedent and concomitant.

c) *Intimacy*

The conjugal act is characterised by familiarity and profundity in spiritual and bodily experience. The intimacy of the Father's generative knowledge in the Trinity resembles that of the marital act, in that such knowledge in the Trinity resembles that of the marital act, in that such knowledge is characterised by an infinite intensity of spontaneity, self-love and knowledge in absolute unity of the knower and known, lover and loved subject, i.e. the Father himself.

d) *Love*

Marital intercourse includes love in the sense that it is a unique incarnation and expression of conjugal profound joy in the mind and body. Similarly, the Father's begetting knowledge is accompanied by spontaneity, whose object is the procreative act and the procreating person qua procreating – Even in human beings the spontaneous love issuing immediately from the conjugal act is not directed to the procreating person simply as person, but also in as far as he/she is car-partner in the marital intercourse-together with the begotors's infinite joy consequential to the unlimited intimacy and absolute immediately of the possession of the object of infinite love.

e) *Experiential character*

This means that the knowledge in the conjugal act includes direct or immediate contact of the person thus known. Likewise the Father's generative knowledge is experiential in the sense that it involves immediate or direct experiment of the one who is known, i.e. the Father himself.

f) *Procreativity*

By this is not meant that sexual intercourse in marriage always effects production of offspring, but it means that it is essentially ordained towards procreation. This character is preserved even when conception is impossible (Gs. 48, 50, 51). What is also implied here is that through this act the married couple

know each other in their sexual differences as man and woman.

In like manner, the Father's knowledge through which he begets the logos is not any kind of intellectual activity, but procreative. As such it differs from the self-knowledge of the logos and the spirit which is not procreative. Hence, the parallel to the Father's procreative knowledge is the mutual knowledge of husband and wife in marital intercourse. This confirmed by the fact that in knowing himself procreatively, the Father knows himself both as Father and mother namely as the principle which first originates the act of generating the logos (i.e. as Father), and as the principle which terminates the generative act and conceives the logos (i.e. as mother). It should be well noted that in God this kind of knowledge is purely spiritual and does not include any sexual connotations. Moreover, as Father and Mother, the first divine person is absolutely one person or subject without any distinction of person is absolutely one person or subject without any distinction of person or subject without any distinction of person or being between father and mother. Besides, in knowing himself procreatively as Father and mother, the father does not fecundate himself in begetting the logos, Fecundation implies passivity, and as such has no place in God. Unlike human beings, the divine Father and Mother is his own Fatherhood and Motherhood absolutely identical with his eternity being and procreative activity.

IV. UNITIVE FUNCTION

The conjugal act has this function through the physical contact, it brings about between the married couple, and through the union of part of their bodily substance to form their offspring. It is also unitive because it is the incarnation and expression of love whereby man and woman exclusively and definitively give themselves totally to each other to become "one flesh" (Gen. 2: 24, Mt. 19⁶ GS: 49, 50, 51).

On the level of love, the Father's generative act is like marital intercourse-the incarnation or source of spontaneous love of the divine begetter qua begotter and of his generative activity – In this sense one can speak (unproperly) of union of the Father with himself and his generation act through spontaneous love – although the lover and the beloved as well as the spontaneous love is one and the same reality.

According to Wilson (1955) the traditional method love theory explains the production of the Holy Spirit as the spirative act issuing from the mutual love of the Father and the Son. One could compare this Trinitarian loving and spirative activity to human marital act as source and expression of simple love of friendship between husband and wife. The comparison which is made here between loving spirative activity of

the Father and the Son to the human marital act which is essentially generative) implies that aspiration is an inner moment in the Father's generative activity. This can be justified by pointing out that because God is a simple and necessary being, nothing can happen in him unless all his other qualities are actually present. This can also be justified in terms of African ancestral Trinitology. Indeed marital sexual intercourse produces and expresses simple love of friendship. This latter form of love does not in itself alone – include sexual genital love. For it can exist between two un married persons, and it can exist even between genuinely married persons, but without marital genital, love as was the case with the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph of course, in human true marriage the two forms of love (i.e. genital love and simple love of friendship) usually exist together, and the marital act produces and expresses both of them. Yet they are essentially different from one another. Accordingly as the source of the Holy Spirit, the Father's and Son's spirative act should not lead us to consider the Father and the Son as comparable – even analogically – to husband and wife in their sexual love or intercourse, but solely in their relationship of *simple love of friendship*. Indeed, by producing the Holy Spirit through an *act of love* the Father and Son do not beget the paraclete as their Son! Therefore, in its intimate link with the act of spiration, the Father's begetting activity is the perfect exemplar not only of conjugal intercourse but of marital relationship at large (e.g. that which excited between Mary and Joseph, or that which found between Christ and his Church).

Hastings (1967) notes that These considerations lead to the conclusion that on the sexual organital level, the conjugal act is analogous to the first divine procession (i.e. the generation of the son by the Father); but an expression of simple love of friendship it bears analogy to the second procession (i.e. the spiration of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the son as far as the sacrament of matrimony is concerned, this fact and the other previous considerations have important pastoral implications to which we shall now turn.

V. CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

By comparing the qualities of the marital act as taught by the Church with the immanent life in the Trinity we discovered that those qualities have parallels in the inner life of God. Since God is the highest exemplar of every being and activity, these parallels confirm the validity of the Church's teaching on those qualities and the marital relationship they imply. Moreover such parallels confirm the biblical teaching that man and woman were created in God's image. It is, indeed, clear from our foregoing analytical reflection that God the Father's immanent generative activity in its intimate link

with the spirative act is the perfect exemplar not only of marital intercourse but of conjugal relationship at large.

Kayongo et al (1984) notes that, marital relationship and sexual conduct – in so far as such conduct is indissolubly linked with marriage – must correspond to their ultimate prototype in the trinity. Any deviation from this ultimate model is bound to be morally evil. This awareness throws more light on the mobility of marriage. At the same time, it also becomes easier for us to appreciate the moral gravity of any deviation in marital relationship and sexual behaviour. Such deviation is clearly revealed as a form of practical denial of God's image in the human being and the latter's consequent unique dignity. And since men and women are in their inner most structure created in the image of God, since of impurity in their own way ultimately imply humanity's radical self-destination.

VI. THE LIFE OF GOD IN THE TRINITY IS THE MODEL OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Let us now see more in detail how the life of God in the Trinity is the model of Christian marriage and consequent sexual morality in accordance with the analysis we made on the analogies between conjugal intercourse and the divine immanent processions.

Just as God's procreative act is essentially intentional (i.e. a form of knowledge) the marital act must always be intentional. For this reason such an act cannot be performed meaningfully when one of the partners is unconscious as is sometimes the case in some African traditional customs. In that case the conjugal act loses not only its intentionality in the unconscious partner, but most of its other aspects as well.

Flannery (1975) in order to reflect the personal dimension of divine generative activity, human sexual intercourse should always preserve its personal characteristics. As such it requires loving mutual experience of the married persons in existential relationship. It has also to be directed from one person to another through an affection of the will (GS 49). Automatically, this excludes sexual intercourse performed for purely selfish motives or constraints, as in cases of rape.

Even in its aspect of intimacy marital intercourse should mirror the intimacy of God's generative activity. For this purpose the conjugal act should exclude all that can prevent or minimise such intimacy, e.g. the use of condoms.

According to Bujo (1992) Conjugal intercourse must be both the incarnation and expression of marital love both in its sexual (genital) dimension and that of simple love of friendship. It is only in this way that the marital act will be a faithful image of the God the Father's generative act considered in itself and in its infinite link with spiration of the Holy Spirit. This cannot

be fully realised except between partners with indissoluble conjugal union. In fact the marital act loses much of its basic meaning and god of it is simply intended to satisfy or express sexual desire without being at the same time a true manifestation of genuine definitive conjugal friendship, as is the case in extra-marital sexual intercourse.

In order to reflect more faithfully the Trinitarian exemplar conjugal love must include within itself the pneumatic connotation. Hence the sexual act of Christian marriage should include the incarnation and expression of the love of the divine spirit i.e. Christian charity between husband and wife – the same charity that unites Christ with his bride, the Church. It is only in this manner that marriage and the marital act will be, for the married couple, sources of perfect joy intended by the creator – a joy similar to God's own happiness, flowing from his immanent acts of generation and spiration.

According to Baur (1994) again, in order to conform to its divine Trinitarian model the knowledge of the marital act must be experiential, involving immediate contact of husband and wife. Naturally, this excludes such acts like artificial insemination, masturbation, onanism and other similar practices opposed not only to the natural structure and goal of sexual activity, but to its model in God as well.

According to Crollins (1986) the immediate consequences from the above is that the conjugal act must be procreative, in the sense that it should always be open to reproduction, and involve mutual experiential knowledge of the married couple as husband and wife. Both elements are demanded by the divine model in God whose generative act eternally includes the production of the son and the experiential knowledge of the first person as procreating Father and Mother as was noted previously. Naturally, this is directly opposed to such practices as homosexuality, lesbianism, use of contraceptives, masturbation, onanism and the like.

Likewise, the unitive function of the marital act has its divine prototype in the absolute oneness of the divine Father and Mother. Accordingly, just as God's Fatherhood and Motherhood are altogether inseparable the perfect copy of this divine oneness on the level of marriage is the one which excludes dissolubility. And just as there is only one Father and Mother in God, the best marital copy of this divine model is found in monogamous marriage. It is clear, therefore, that in dissolubility and unity (monogamy) of marriage are ultimately grounded on God's being and personhood. Besides, if in God Fatherhood and Motherhood are not only equal properties but one single reality, a marriage faithful to this divine exemplar will exclude personal inequality between the married couple. For as the divinity clearly shows, Fatherhood and Motherhood are in themselves absolute qualities.

It was shown earlier that on the sexual level the conjugal act is analogous to the first divine procession, but as an expression of simple love of friendship it bears analogy to the second procession. This fact has important practical implications. For indeed if God is the highest model of all created excellence, he is also the supreme dimensions. Consequently, since the ideal union of the married couple on the sexual plane has its prototype in the first divine person as Father and Mother of the logos in the first procession, the distinction of personality and being between husband and wife in the conjugal act is on the sexual level – a sign of imperfection. Such union, therefore, naturally tends towards its divine ideal, namely towards the fusing of husband and wife into one person and being. In other words, on the sexual procreative plane, the marital act demands total self-giving or surrender of husband and wife to each other. Indeed, on this level each partner belongs not to himself/herself, but to the other (1Cor. 7 3-4).

VII. CONCLUSION

On the other hand, since in its manifestation of simple love of friendship the conjugal act has its model in the union of the Father and Son in the second procession, the distinction of persons in the sexual act reflects the distinctions of persons between Father and Son in separating the Holy Spirit. As such, the distinction of persons in sexual intercourse is a sign of perfection – although even in this case such intercourse tends toward oneness in the being of husband and wife, in accordance with the unity of being of the divine model, i.e. the Father and the Son separating the Holy Spirit. Therefore, since as expression of simple love of friendship conjugal activity tends towards suppression of difference in personhood and towards realisation of oneness in being between the marital couple, it requires from these two by virtue of their friendship – to have reciprocal respect for personal differences and freedom, together with ultimate union of being. Hence, the more one respects and promotes the personal distantiatio and independence of the other, the better becomes the loving union and friendship of both – in this case, however just as in the previous case – the unity of being should be promoted and deepened, so as to conform as closely as possible to the Trinitarian model, and to fulfil the love's command that the married couple should regard each other as "one flesh (Mt. 19, 6; Gen. 2²⁴).

One could express all this by saying that in virtue of its sexual dimension, sexual intercourse tends to suppress distinction of personality and being between husband and wife; whereas as an expression of simple mutual love of friendship it tends to emphasize the difference in their personalities and identity of their beings.

In accordance with its exemplar in the Trinity, the marital act and marriage itself require on the part of husband and wife personal self-entertainment for each other, as well as mutual respect and personal instantiation for the sake of the other, in intimate union of being (flesh).

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