

LIVING AND THINKING
REALITY IN ITS INTEGRITY:
ORIGINARY EXPERIENCE, GOD,
AND THE TASK OF EDUCATION

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“Originary experience embeds a desire of man to say forever: to give the whole of himself irrevocably to the whole of God, in a way that involves the whole of creation.”

Genuine thinking in today’s culture occurs mostly *per accidens*. Contemporary thought, for example, theology, is often criticized for its uncritical appeal to experience. But this criticism is misguided insofar as it implies that thought today roots itself too deeply in experience. The problem, rather, is that contemporary thought presupposes too little experience: it is forgetful of experience in its original, or most basic and catholic meaning, and needs to be criticized above all for just this forgetfulness.

My purpose is to discuss what is meant by original, or “originary,” experience and how it is bound up with thinking and living reality in its integrity, with a word about what this implies for education. The task is a daunting one. For originary experience, rightly understood, must be seen as open from its roots to the whole of reality, in terms not merely of the *sum* of things in their singularity, but also of the *integrated relation* among things that establishes them as an ordered whole and hence as a cosmos. Any essential aspect of experience that is ignored or left unaccounted for at the

outset cannot simply be added later without risk of diminishing reality. Such ignorance or omission, in other words, disposes us toward, even as it presupposes, what is already a fragmented and reductive sense of reality, at once as a whole and in each of its “parts.”

My argument is that the idea of originary experience implies engagement of the whole of our being with the whole of reality, with God at its center. More specifically, originary experience embeds a desire of man to say forever: to give the whole of himself irrevocably to the whole of God, in a way that involves the whole of creation.

I will begin by offering some preliminary observations and premises regarding the nature of experience, and follow this with an outline of the main philosophical and theological presuppositions operative in originary experience. I will then discuss the main terms of my argument. Finally, I will conclude with a reflection on the cultural and educational implications of the argument.

I.

(1) Every experience bears a universal meaning in a singular way. By this I mean that experience is never meaningful only for myself in my individual subjectivity, and hence never nominalistic in nature. Nor does experience ever bear a universal meaning in such a way that my individual subjectivity indicates what is merely an example of a universal meaning to which my individual subjectivity is “accidental.” Experience, rather, bears meaning as a kind of *universale concretum et singulare*. Experience is a concrete whole whose meaning bears a universality *in* its singularity, and *qua* singular.

(2) “Experience” comes from the Latin term *experior*, to try, or to learn by trying. In one of its definitions, the dictionary calls experience “the fact or state of having gained knowledge through direct observation or participation in events or particular activities.” The German term for experience is *Erfahrung*, from *fahren*, to drive or travel; and thus *erfahren*, “to come to know, discover, suffer, undergo.” My suggestion, then, is that experience in its root meaning involves anticipation, even as this anticipation presupposes a preliminary undergoing of a reality that is already initiated in me by an other. It presupposes a reality *given to me* that is simultaneously *operative in me*. Indeed, experience in its originary structure anticipates the whole

of reality—God and the order of being—even as that anticipation is always already mediated in and through encounter with singular others.

(3) Experience is a gaining of knowledge that always involves a surprise, but does so through an anterior *anamnesis*, or recollection, of the objective other, relation to whom has been first given to me. I thus always discover myself as already participating in this relation. Experience is a matter of the self's *having* relations only as a matter simultaneously and anteriorly of the self's *being* in relation (Giussani).

Note that this notion of experience involves no “ontologism.” Reality is not drawn out of or deduced from experience, as though it were simply a function of experience. Experience indeed involves anticipation of the whole of reality, but, again, only from inside an encounter with an other. Experience thus always incarnates a new historical event, via an analogical and not nominalist singularity.

As Balthasar puts it, experience is “not man’s entry into himself (*Einfahren*).”¹ Rather, it is an entry into one’s self only as the self has always already entered into, through being entered by, the objectively given reality of the other.

(4) The foregoing implies that experience at its root is beyond the distinction between active and passive in the conventional sense. Experience is receptive, but in a way that involves active participation in the reception. It involves participation in the initiative of the other who has become effective in one’s self. As the German verb *empfangen* nicely captures, to receive is also to conceive (from the Latin, *con-cipere*: to take in, or *with*; to become pregnant). Experience involves “consciousness,” which is to say, a “knowing with.” Here we can note the French term *connaissance* which, as Paul Claudel suggests, is a “*connaissance*,” a being born together with.² Further, as Balthasar points out in his interpretation of Aquinas, what is involved in experience is attunement to the whole of Being,³ an ontological disposition that is most basically a *cum-sentire*, a “feeling with,” or, in the Greek, a *sympatheia*, “feeling, undergoing, or indeed ‘suffering,’ with.”

¹Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 222.

²Paul Claudel, *Poetic Art* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), 40.

³Cf. *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1, 220ff.

All of this implies that a “letting be” forms experience in its inmost structure. Experience is at root a matter of patient agency.

(5) Experience involves objectively informed subjectivity. It is a newly subjective event *of* an objective form or logos, an event that thus never occurs beneath, prior to, or “accidentally” to this objective logos. (It is the failure to see this that characterizes the “modernist” conceptions of experience still prevalent today.)

It therefore falsifies the nature of both the subjective reality of the self and the objective reality of the other to talk of the self’s experience in abstraction from the reality of the other objectified in that experience; or, from the opposite direction, to speak of the other primarily as a function, or simply as an *object*, of the self’s own conscious activities and desires.⁴

II.

The foregoing sketch of originary experience presupposes a definite understanding of the ontological, as open to the theological, order of things. All of being is a community that is first given to us, and established in us, by God as Creator. This ontological community is best conceived in terms of a relation of love, which consists most basically in the love of God for the world: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us . . .” (1 Jn 4:10).

The fact that an ontology is presupposed in our account of originary experience does not entail that experience is a matter of deduction from ontology. On the contrary, it is of the essence of ontology that its first principles, precisely by virtue of being first, are operative always and everywhere. The result in the present case is a kind of paradox. If these principles, as first, are operative in every time and place, then it follows that we do not have to *deduce* them from an objective account of being. On the contrary, *they will themselves always already be exercised in* our originary experience. Their truth will be operative, however unconsciously, in every experience by the subject.

⁴That is, as though something of the thing in itself, the thing as its own subject, is not disclosed in the object. Such a view implies rejection of the “transcendental” meaning of being as true and good *in itself*, in its Thomistic sense. Which is to say, it signals the origin of an instrumentalist view of being and its truth and goodness.

Experience itself, in other words, bears an ontology *in its distinctness as subjective*.

The key to my proposal, then, lies in pondering the ontological implications of the *givenness* of things as originally experienced. Three comments will help indicate these implications.

(1) First, human experience at its root is a matter of an inchoative knowing and seeking of God. God, as Aquinas says, is known implicitly in whatever is known, and loved implicitly in whatever is loved. This implies that relation to God has always already been initiated in me by God, in the very act of creating me, and that my seeking of God is at root already a “finding.” This relation reaches to the inmost core of my being, and I participate from the beginning in the actualization of the relation as its subject in the created order. Being constituted in relation to God first by God, and being a substantial being in my own right, are not at root opposed. On the contrary, the two features together signify and express the generosity of God implied in his creating me.

This inchoative, implicit sense of God does not contain an intuition of God, and thus again it does not imply the kind of *a priori* knowledge that would warrant a charge of “ontologism.”

The idea of our implicit knowledge of God is, in sum, captured well in the statement of Joseph Ratzinger that memory (*anamnesis*) of God is “identical with the foundations of our being.”⁵ And it has its objective foundation in Aquinas’ statement that “God is in all things, innermostly.”⁶

(2) Second, the creature’s constitutive relation to God implies a constitutive relation also to the whole of created being and to all created beings.⁷ Key here is Aquinas’ distinction between *esse*,

⁵Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 92.

⁶*ST I*, q. 8, a. 1.

⁷Cf. the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, which, in par. 37, referring to the foundations of Christian anthropology, notes “the constitutive social nature of human being, the prototype of which is found in the original relationship between man and woman, the union of whom ‘constitutes the first form of communion between persons.’” See also the following statements: “The likeness with God shows that the essence and existence of man are constitutively related to God in the most profound manner. This is a relationship that exists in itself, it is therefore not something that comes afterwards and is not added from the outside” (par. 109); “The relationship between God and

or act of being, and *essentia* or *ens*, or what being is. Creaturely *esse* is at once common to all created beings and itself substantially existent only *qua* each individual being. Every creaturely being is related from within to the whole of being, always in and through a singular subject encountering other singular subjects.⁸

(3) Third, the “real distinction,” or difference, between *esse* and *essentia* or *substantia* mediates the generosity of the Creator to the creature. The creature in its basic structure is thereby disclosed to be gift. This means that the creaturely giver, or actor, is always first *given*. Creaturely giving occurs first *as* and *through* an *active reception* of what has been given.

The “real distinction,” which accounts for the reality of creaturely being as gift, is implicitly affirmed in our *originary experience* of the world. The self is given to itself at once *in itself* and *by another*. The human-personal experience on which Balthasar draws to show this is helpful. The child discovers the truth of his own being as good, or again the beauty of his being as given, through the radiation of the beauty of the mother become effective

man is reflected in the relational and social dimension of human nature” (par. 110). Regarding the meaning of “constitutive” relations, then: the act whereby each reality is at all, the act of *esse*, whose subject is always an individual substance, nonetheless remains “common” to all individual substances, in a way that mediates the relation of each to the Creator. Thus it is the very act by which each substance is created *in its singularity* that simultaneously establishes a *relation* among all substances. It follows, given a rightly conceived notion of the distinction between *esse* and substance, and of the fact of creation, that each individual substance’s being *in itself* and being *in relation* always presuppose each other. These features are never in principle or at the deepest level a threat to each other. Again, this is so by virtue, not of a *dialectical* understanding of being (Hegel), but of a properly *analogical* understanding of being rooted in a “real distinction” between *esse* and substance that mediates the “common” relation of creation *uniquely* to each individual substance (Aquinas). For a discussion of the proper meaning of “constitutive relations,” and the appropriateness of terming them “constitutive,” see my exchange with Michael Waldstein in *Communio* (forthcoming).

⁸See Adrian Walker, “Personal Singularity and the *Communio Personarum*: A Creative Development of Thomas Aquinas’s Doctrine of *Esse Commune*,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31 (Fall 2004): 456–79. Regarding relationality, see Pope Benedict’s statements in *Caritas in veritate* that “the development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family . . .” (53); and that “the Christian revelation of the unity of the human race presupposes a *metaphysical interpretation of the ‘humanum’ in which relationality is an essential element*” (55).

in the child. The child thus discovers his own reality as gift *in response* and *as actively responsive* to the attractiveness of the other that has been communicated to him and in which he simultaneously participates.

The experience of the self as gift, therefore—and note again the receptive, or responsive, character implied in the idea of gift as something *given*—lies most basically in a “letting be” of the self in relation to the other, in wonder. I experience the world most primitively not as something to be grasped at or possessed but to be gratefully received, something to which I myself am “owed,” in love. My activity toward an other is inherently responsive, always “co-generated” in its roots by the attractiveness of the other become effective in me.⁹ The self’s originary experience rightly understood thus undercuts at its root any pelagian disposition toward the world, even as it affirms in non-reductive fashion the distinctness of my own agency.

In sum, we recuperate originary experience in its catholicity only in terms of a God-centered ontological order, appropriated via a grateful and wonder-filled letting be.

III.

But further, as announced at the outset, my thesis is that originary experience, rightly understood, implies a dynamic in the creature for saying forever. The sense in which this is so can be seen by pondering further the radicality of that experience and its implied ontology. The “real distinction” undergirds what is our primitive experience of the whole of ourselves as gift. I experience the whole of myself as “owed” to an other, finally to an other who is inchoatively known as God. And I experience this owing as good, as a thing of attractiveness and beauty, hence as something relative to which I am spontaneously, even if at first not fully consciously, grateful and full of wonder. The crucial point is the wholeness implicit in this originary experience. It is the whole of my self that I experience implicitly as owed to another, finally to the Creator, in gratitude and

⁹See in this connection D. C. Schindler, “Freedom Beyond Our Choosing,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 618–53.

wonder. I experience the whole of my natural life as owed to the giving, hence the love, of another.

To be sure, originary experience in its natural ontological roots as sketched is, in the one order of history, profoundly obscured by sin, and is restored in an unexpected form in Jesus Christ. It is only in light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ that we can see the depth and breadth of what is involved in experiencing oneself as gift from, and thus as owed to, another. What I mean to stress here is simply that God's invitation to a generous *fiat* toward him as Creator, which is realized in a radically new form through Christ's granting us graced participation in his own divine *fiat* toward the Father, is planted in the roots of our being from creation. That this is so I take to be implied by Ratzinger's idea of an *anamnesis* of God lying at the foundations of our being.

But before indicating how the wholeness of being gifted and of owing to another gets expressed in saying forever, we need to take note of the duality implied in our reference to a relation that is at once to God and to other creatures inside this relation to God.

This duality is treated by John Paul II and also Joseph Ratzinger in relation to Genesis. In light of this text, they discuss man's imaging of God in terms of his "original solitude" and "original unity," as well as man's dominion over the rest of creation. First of all, man's "original solitude" means not only that man is different from all other creatures of the visible universe, but that man's relationality begins most radically in his "aloneness" before God. The point is not that man is originally without relation, but that man's relationality, his original being-with, is a being-with God (ontologically) before it is a being-with other human beings. Man's being-with God, as creaturely, is first a *being-from*, in the manner of a child. It is a filial relation.

Second, simultaneous with man's "original solitude" is man's "original unity," which refers to the spousal communion between man and woman. Ratzinger, in his commentary on *Gaudium et spes*, refers to this spousal communion between a man and a woman as the immediate consequence (*Folge*) of the content (*Inhalt*) of man's imaging of God that lies first in man's "unitary" being as child of

God.¹⁰ This aptness for spousal union, established inside man's and woman's common filial relation to God, is given with creation and is in this sense constitutive of the human being. But the point is that Ratzinger stresses the capacity for worship as the primary content of man's imaging of God. He does so because human beings are most basically "sons and daughters in the Son." As Ratzinger says succinctly elsewhere, "the center of the Person of Jesus is prayer."¹¹

Third, Genesis affirms man's dominion over the rest of creation, linking this with God's command that the man and woman be fruitful and multiply.

Thus, as indicated earlier, man's basic experience bears an order of God-centered gift-receiving and -giving. But we can now see more clearly, in light of the further specifications by John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger, that this order of God-centered receiving and giving enfolds the twofold form of original solitude and original unity, and thus of filiality and nuptiality. This originary experience with its dual form occurs inside the first covenant. God's gift of creation bears from the beginning a promise of enduring fidelity to his creation in its integrity. And this promise of enduring fidelity to the creature embeds an invitation to the creature to promise enduring fidelity to God in return. This call to enduring fidelity to God, in other words, is implicit in the creature's original self-reception of himself as gift-from-God. There is built into the creature a "primordially sacramental," or "pre-sacramental," sign and expression of God's love which says forever to the creature in the act of creating him, and this unending fidelity on God's part invites, and thereby initiates a call to, unending fidelity to God in return, on the creature's part.

In sum, what the creature really wants, what lies most basically at the heart of his originary experience, is to love God above all things, and to love other creatures inside this love of God,

¹⁰See Joseph Ratzinger, "Introduction and Chapter I: The Dignity of the Human Person," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 5, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), article 12. ("Erster Hauptteil: Kommentar zum I," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche 14: Der Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, vol. 3, ed. H. Vorgrimler, et al. [Fribourg: Herder and Herder, 1968], Artikel 12).

¹¹Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 25.

forever.¹² Further, in light of John Paul II's and Ratzinger's thought, this love that desires to say forever finds its objective mediation in the dual form of filiality and sponsality. This love that desires to say forever to God involves fidelity to all of God's creatures, especially human but also sub-human. It exercises dominion over these latter and thereby renders the whole of creation into a participatory sign and expression of man's call to be faithful in relation to God and in service to the human community.

Of course I do not mean to suggest here that the sense of a vocation to what we term a state of life is explicitly present in its full, or Christian, meaning already in originary experience. Nor *a fortiori* that the duality in states of life as conceived in Christianity, expressed in consecrated virginity on the one hand, and sacramental marriage on the other, is unambiguously implied in that experience. What I am saying, simply, is that originary experience embeds an implicit sense, an ontologically rooted memory, of a desire or "exigence" to say forever to God, which unfolds via the double relation of the creature in his original "aloneness" with God coincident with the original unity between man and woman, in a way that implies inclusion of the whole of created being within the ambit of the creature's faithful, God-centered generosity. My argument is that the self's originary experience carries this ontological memory, not in a complete and explicit way, but inchoatively.

I mean to suggest further that this inchoative "exigence" to say forever implies the desire to give one's whole self, thus including one's possessions, body, and mind, and that such a gift can be offered only once. But why only once? Why can't this gift of the self in its entirety be given simply in and as the *sum* of an ending series of discrete acts over time? Such indeed is the dominant view of our contemporaries which insists, for example, that marriage can be adequately understood as just such a sum of discrete subjective acts of freedom exercised by the spouses. But this overlooks what is implied in giving the whole of oneself. If an act truly bears the

¹²Regarding the desire for God, it should perhaps be emphasized, in light of what has been said, that this desire for God is always more basically a responsive participation in God's desire for me already expressed in his creation of me, and is thus but the form that objective being as gift takes in the subject, that is, in and as subjective activity. As a participation in God's desire for me, in other words, *my desire for God is at the most basic level already an act of service to God*.

promise of being a gift of one's whole self, it implies inclusion not only of one's present but of one's past and one's future. It follows that any subsequent act of self-giving can only, *eo ipso*, be a renewed taking up and reaffirming, in freedom, of a gift that has already been accomplished in principle in its wholeness. And indeed the original vow of one's whole self now calls for, even as it opens up the space for, a literally unending series of such free acts of renewed memory of what is already implicitly contained in the vow.¹³

According to the dominant view, in contrast, the sum of free acts of self-giving can add up to a total gift of self, provided they *continue to be exercised*.¹⁴ But such a set of free acts of self-giving

¹³The point here is nicely summed up in the words of D. C. Schindler: "Marriage is not the end of personal disclosure, but rather provides in its completeness a space for the development of intimacy, for the mutual self-manifestation of one person to another over time and in principle without end. . . . In taking vows, the couple has already *implicitly* realized the whole. When one pledges oneself, one hands over not simply one's present being, but in the very same act one includes both one's past and one's future. The future is, so to speak, anticipated in advance But this embrace of the whole *a priori* does not replace the future, it does not eliminate the graduality of time. Instead, it is a pledge precisely to live out that future in all of its temporal 'Unvordenklichkeit.' In this case, we have a filled infinity, a form that is closed, and indeed perfectly, exclusively closed, but which for that very reason is now 'ready for anything'" (*Freedom and Form in Schiller, Schelling, and Hegel* [forthcoming]). Schindler goes on to note that "the American writer Wendell Berry is right to compare the form of marriage with poetic form: there is, indeed, a powerful analogy here. Just as the closed form of poetry gives it an inexhaustible wealth of meaning, a depth of possibility that would be lacking in simply the aimless jotting down of thoughts, so too the ethical form of marriage opens up an endless source of personal gift, an infinite potential of spirit. In this case, insofar as it represents a super-actuality that embraces but does not exhaust possibility, we may point to marriage once again as a paradigm of freedom." See Wendell Berry, "Poetry and Marriage," in *Standing by Words: Essays*, paperback reprint edition (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2005), 92–105.

¹⁴In this light I recall that when I was living in California some four decades ago, there was much agitation for the idea of trial marriages, say for three years, at which time couples could part ways with no legal implications—an idea which seems oddly old-fashioned from today's perspective. The objection, which one might expect to have been obvious, is that it is impossible to practice on an explicitly temporary basis a promise the nature of which is determined by its implication of unending endurance. What the idea of a trial marriage overlooks, in other words, is that a vow that promises forever changes the character of all the acts that follow, giving them, objectively and from within, a participation in eternity. Indeed, the dominant contemporary view, which thinks that a permanent promise of fidelity can be given

without a singular all-at-once inclusion of past and future in a permanent vow gives us, even if these acts are exercised for the rest of one's life, the sum of what can only, logically, be partial or fragmented gifts of self.

Indeed, the idea that a vowed state, for example, between a man and woman in marriage, is synonymous with the sum of the spouses' subjective acts of freedom is truly a bane of our culture. It goes to the heart of modernity's inability to grasp what is implied most basically in the act of freedom, which is its inner dynamic for saying forever with the whole of one's being.¹⁵

What I am proposing, again, demands completion in a theology that places all that has been said within the framework of God's revelation as the God of creation and redemption in Jesus Christ, and of the Church as the continuing christological sacrament of that revelation. What is meant by the wholeness of the gift of self and its definitive and irrevocable nature, and thus by a vow, can be understood and realized in the full and proper sense only when incorporated through the grace of Christ into Christ's own eucharistic and crucified love unto death and rising from the dead, and into the Church's christological sacrament of this love. The argument begun here wants only to say, ultimately, that the vow that establishes a state of life, either as consecrated virginity or as marriage, is ordered intrinsically to martyrdom: to the witness of the gift of one's self unto the end, even to the point of including (possibly) the sacrificial gift of one's own life. But again, the unexpected depth and breadth of what this means is disclosed only in terms of God's own gift of self embodied in Christ. A state of life, finally, is but the "existential" image, actualized in and through the grace of Christ, of the love expressed in Christ's Eucharist, crucifix-

simply over time, renders consistent the common judgment of the culture that, whenever one or the other of the partners stops exercising his or her subjective acts of self-gift, the marriage has, *eo ipso*, come to an end.

¹⁵Indeed, there is an important further point implied here, which is that I enact the wholeness of my promise of fidelity only through the *fiat* of my active reception. Such enactment, in other words, is at the most basic level a "co-enactment" on my part enabled by God's goodness become effective in me, and taken over by me *in* my letting be. My act of unconditional fidelity is evoked and anteriorly "co-borne" in me by God's act of fidelity to me in creating me, an act of fidelity in which I become an originary participant in the very act of being created. But the full implications of this important point cannot be developed here.

ion, and resurrection. And a state of life on this understanding is best conceived as the properly Marian, as distinct from Petrine, form of participation in the eucharistic gift of self that passes through suffering and death to eternal life.¹⁶

The present argument in this light is limited to directing attention to the echoes of Christ's love stirring already in the deepest recesses of the creature's originary experience, with the intention of drawing toward its inconceivable fullness all that is implicitly "recalled" in this originary experience. My argument is best understood as a laying down and clarifying, in terms at once of the object and subject of experience, of the ontological premises that serve as necessary but not sufficient conditions for the ampler theological argument that is needed.

IV.

I conclude by addressing some implications of the foregoing for education and culture.

¹⁶There is much that needs to be sorted out here. A state of life, properly understood, gives objective form to an "existential" as distinct from "office-bearing" participation in Christ's eucharistic love. Each of the baptized participates in Christ's Eucharist both existentially and "officially," in the sense that ordained priests are always first members of the Church, and that all members of the Church, by virtue of their Baptism, exercise a priestly office, manifest, for example, in the capacity themselves to baptize in certain circumstances. This emphatically need not, and does not, imply attenuation of the clear and profound difference between the laity and the ordained priesthood. What I mean to emphasize here is simply that a state of life, for example, consecrated virginity, is as such not a clerical state. It seems to me that an awareness that this is so opens the way to a deepened appreciation for the state of consecrated virginity as a distinctly lay state, recognized already officially by the Church in Pius XII's *Provida Mater*, and indeed in Vatican II's renewed teaching regarding the laity and their "worldly" vocation. My statement is also meant to carry the implication that the vowed life of the three evangelical counsels, which express the gift of one's whole self—possessions, body, and mind—indicate the most objectively fitting existential form for the priest's office-bearing participation in the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church. But again, all of this needs more sustained development than can be offered in the present forum. For a reflection on the relation of the life of the evangelical counsels and the vocation of the laity, see Balthasar, *Laity and the Life of the Counsels* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

My overarching theological presupposition is that a state of life, as the distinctly “existential” image of Christ’s eucharistic love, discloses in a unique and decisive way the truth of our being as creatures. A state of life, constituted by a vow of either consecrated virginity or sacramental marriage,¹⁷ discloses, in objective form, the true relation between eternity and time, heaven and earth. Each state

¹⁷The suggestion here that there are only two states of life raises many questions within the Church today. On the one hand, there is the common perception that the priesthood as such is a state of life, which in the proper sense it is not. On the contrary, it has its sacramental-ontological reality as an office, indeed as an office that, as I have suggested, bears an objective fittingness for a vowed life of the three evangelical counsels. On the other hand, there is also an increasing tendency today to affirm that singleness as such can qualify as a state of life. But neither is this properly so, because a state of life requires saying forever to God in a vowed form. And the character of this vow that constitutes a state of life has its ultimate foundation in the dual character of the human being’s original experience, in original solitude and original unity, or filiality and nuptiality, both of which have their center in God. A state of life, properly speaking, is the mature person’s recuperation in freedom of one’s call to fidelity to God forever, which occurs either through consecrated virginity, and thus remaining “alone” with God; or through marriage, and thus promising fidelity to God through another human being. But it is nevertheless crucial to see here that the single life, if not (yet) actualized by either of these vows, does not thereby remain merely in a kind of neutral place where one remains suspended in a mode of inaction and unfulfillment. On the contrary, as we have indicated, there is a call for the gift of one’s whole self implicit already in the act of being created; and this call is immeasurably deepened in the act of being baptized. The point, then, is that this call is actualized in the tacit and mostly unconscious *fiat* which, in receiving creation, and in turn the new creation in Christ, already begins one’s participation in a promise of the gift of one’s self to God. The call to be faithful to God forever with the wholeness of one’s life is implied, and is already initially realized, in a natural form, at one’s conception, and again, in a supernatural form, at one’s Baptism. As long as one remains single, then, the relevant point is that one can already begin living the *fiat* of total availability to God, and, in this sense, realize the fundament of what becomes a state of life when recuperated in the maturity of one’s freedom in the form of a vow of consecrated virginity or marriage. What one is meant to do as long as one is single, in other words, is to live one’s total availability: to wait with active availability for God’s will. Of course, it has to be recognized that humanity, and the cosmos as a whole, exists in a deeply disordered condition by virtue of sin. And therefore it has to be recognized as well that the call objectively to a consecrated state of celibacy or to marriage may never be historically realized—as it is the case that everything in the cosmos exists in a broken condition, sometimes a seriously disordered condition that must be accepted, even with much suffering.

does so in its own way: virginity by disclosing the meaning of eternity and time in light primarily of eternity; marriage by disclosing the meaning of eternity and time, in light primarily of time.

To be sure, all of our actions can and should disclose the truth of this relation throughout the whole of our lives, and not only upon entering one of these states. The point is that a state of life gives the disclosure of this mutual asymmetrical relation between eternity and time, heaven and earth, its existentially *objective integration as the form of my life as such, in its wholeness*. All of our actions, rooted in our originary experience, are ordered toward the gift of self in its entirety, even as this total gift of self realizes its full and objective integration finally only in and as a state of life.

My proposal is that the primary purpose of education should be understood in this light. Education, which can be rightly understood only in terms of the whole person, has as its most basic purpose, in terms of method and content, the liberating of experience in this comprehensive ontological sense. The end of education thus lies in forming habits of thought and freedom that assist students to integrate the whole of worldly time in terms of heaven and eternity; and to understand that such integration takes objective form in a “perfect” way in a state of life.¹⁸

¹⁸The language of perfection has to be carefully qualified. (1) Historically, the state of perfection has been identified with the life of the three evangelical counsels. And this is fine, as long it is understood thereby that this “perfection” refers to the objective state and not necessarily the subjective condition of the persons living in the state, who may of course live more imperfect lives than those not living the life of the three evangelical counsels. (2) Secondly, my argument has referred to a state of life as such, hence including both consecrated celibacy and marriage, as objectively “perfect.” This in fact must be the case, insofar as marriage is understood itself also to embody, in its own way and *qua state*, a call to holiness. Both consecrated celibacy and marriage witness to the relation between heaven and earth, eschatology and incarnation, *differently*. It seems to me that the theological work of John Paul II, which recovers marriage as a call to holiness *qua state of life*, and the work of Balthasar, which develops the lay and “worldly” sense of the state of consecrated celibacy (“secular institutes”), share a deep unity in terms of the point proposed here. Balthasar develops the meaning of consecrated celibacy in its lay character. John Paul II develops marriage as a call to holiness, and thus as a participation, *qua state of life*, in eternity and heaven. This does not mean that the hierarchy between consecrated celibacy and marriage as states of life is eliminated. On the contrary, as indicated above, consecrated celibacy witnesses to heaven and earth *in terms primarily of heavenly existence*; marriage witnesses to heaven and earth *in terms primarily of earthly existence*. And therein lies sufficient ground for continued

But let me say more about what is meant concretely by patterns of thought that integrate eternity and time.

The relation between eternity and time is given its first form in the creature by God in the act of creation, and this form is implicitly affirmed in man's original experience as a creaturely subject. This form is expressed in the Creator's commandment to "be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10). It is only through such patient activity that the creature truly remembers the reality of God. Otherwise, in the words of Job (42:1–6), we know God "only by hearsay."

As Pope Benedict has affirmed, we recognize a presence only through silence.

Contemplation and silence are not matters of inactivity. It is not as though contemplation signals a contrast with creative action, such that these are at root two different kinds of acts meant at best to alternate with one another. On the contrary, contemplative letting be is the inmost form of creaturely activity as such. Stillness is not the absence of activity but, in the words of T. S. Eliot, where the dance begins, and is. It is the presence of God liberated into my being through my letting be that enables me to participate, in a creaturely way, in the power of God's love.

Again, Charles Péguy once said that the integrity of man and his work demands "staying in place," and suffering and silence.¹⁹ Just as the right relation between eternity and time demands silence, in other words, so does it demand "staying in place." "Staying in place" in the first instance does not mean simply not moving around in a physical sense. For if God as Creator can be found anywhere in his creation, then he can surely be found when one moves from one place to another. However, we must avoid confusing the finding of God anywhere with finding him nowhere in particular. We do so only by truly *being* in a place, through the interior stillness that alone permits depth of presence. "Staying in place," in a word, is but stillness now expressed in the form of space: it signals the depth hence genuine incarnation of presence, which occurs only in singular persons in singular times and places, in the opening of these

affirmation of a hierarchical relation between the two states.

¹⁹Cf. Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 156 (Chronology). Cf. also Charles Péguy, "On Money," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 36 (Fall 2009): 534–64.

singularities to eternity. There is no access to heaven except by sinking proportionately more deeply into the earth, taking on its flesh *here and now*.

Finally, another French author, Georges Bernanos, often used the term “imbecile” as an appropriate way to describe peculiar tendencies of our time. By “imbecile,” he meant, roughly, one who moves quickly through life not seeing anything. Such a person cannot “enter within himself,” but only “explores the surface of his own being.” One effort of which such a person is seriously incapable is “thinking.” Bernanos says that “the intellectual is so frequently an imbecile that we should always take him to be such until he has proved to us the contrary. He is particularly at home in the modern world of technology and numbers. In such a world he can climb to very high positions without giving away his half-culture.” The imbecile is “informed about everything and hence condemned to understand nothing.” He shows up at one’s door every morning, “his pockets stuffed with newspapers.”²⁰ Needless to say, Bernanos could have enriched his examples abundantly in this day of communication by cell phone and via the Internet, showing the link between such phenomena and a world dominated by imbecilic politics, economics, and academics. These phenomena foster an ability to be anywhere at any time and therefore in no place or time in particular, and (thereby) mediate a perception of the world as primarily an instrument.²¹

Bernanos says, in sum, that man has created technology and technology is now creating man, “by a sort of demonic inversion of the mystery of the Incarnation.”²² Or again that the peculiar “misery and odium of the modern world . . . is that it disincarnates everything it touches by accomplishing in reverse the mystery of the Incarnation.”²³ Already in the first half of the twentieth century,

²⁰For the sources of the quotations from Bernanos, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 358–68.

²¹Bernanos’ point is not that technology is to be condemned *tout court*, but that we need to recognize its non-neutrality with respect to the order of human consciousness and to the nature and destiny of the human being. His view, in other words, is entirely consistent with what Benedict XVI suggests when he says, in *Caritas in veritate*, that “technology is never merely technology” (69).

²²Cited in Balthasar, *Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence*, 545.

²³*Ibid.*

Bernanos saw the coming in the West of what Pope Benedict has termed a “dictatorship of relativism,” understanding it to be driven most basically by a tyranny of technicity and expertise.

The burden of my argument has been that there is an inner causal relation between the ills of modernity and the overlooking of the originary experience at whose heart lies a forgetfulness of God and of being as gift; and that this forgetfulness obscures the relation between time and eternity, or secular reality and the reality of heaven, that gives our human existence its most basic creaturely form. The fragmentation, technologism, and activism of our time are all signs and expressions most basically of a wrong relation between time and eternity, heaven and earth. My proposal is that it is only in learning to say forever that we become able finally to address these tendencies at their root. Only in saying forever in a vow do we give “perfect” and objective form to the presence of eternity and heaven in our creaturely time and flesh. Only such a vowed promise of forever permits eternity objectively and as a way of life to fill every moment of time, and stillness objectively and as a way of life to form every motion and place.

As I said at the outset, the problem today is not too much experience or too much thought based on experience. The problem, rather, is that there is virtually no experience at all in its proper depth and breadth as rooted in the search for God and for the whole of being, and therefore no thought or life rightly based on experience. The “experience” that prevails among our contemporaries, on the contrary, is best termed a distraction from experience, stemming from our inability to be still, and thus to know anything in its full presence.

Benedict XVI says that the “integrated human development” described in *Caritas in veritate* involves a “broadening [of] our concept of reason and its application” (31). “Intelligence and love are not in separate compartments: *love is rich in intelligence and intelligence is full of love*” (30), and love must therefore animate the disciplines in a whole marked by unity and distinction (31). The problem today, he says, is an “excessive segmentation of knowledge” that results in an inability to “see the integral good of man in its

various dimensions” (31). Thus he affirms that recovery of the place of metaphysics and theology, especially in their integrative capacities in the realization of wisdom and as themselves integrated by love, “is indispensable if we are to succeed in adequately weighing all the elements involved in the question of development . . .” (31).

I have attempted to show what are some root implications embedded within the God-centered unity of truth and love urged in *Caritas in veritate*. I have not attempted to show how these implications are to take form in the disciplines of the academy. My purpose, rather, has been to suggest that the academy should above all, in its methods and contents, serve human experience in its originary form, at the heart of which lies the “exigence” for saying forever to God, and to all of being as God’s gift, in wonder and gratitude and with the whole of one’s self. Education is, to be sure, ordered to the acquisition of the information and expertise necessary for careers in economics, politics, academics, and the like. But education, adequately understood, is ordered to information, expertise, and career training only as these are dynamically integrated in terms of the basic human vocation to live truly the relation between time and eternity as revealed in God’s creative and redemptive love.

As we consider our ecclesial and cultural situation today, it seems to me impossible to exaggerate the need for deepening our awareness of experience in its originary meaning. Only through such awareness are we truly able to realize the destiny of our embodied, intelligent and free human acts, which destiny, to paraphrase Eliot again, is to arrive finally at where we started and to know and love the place—God, self, and other in their objective wholeness—for the first time.

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