

GOD'S LOVE IN CREATION

We usually think of God's sending His Son to earth to suffer and die for us as the greatest demonstration of His love, and so it was. However, there are also important insights into God's love in His creation, and important consequences for our lives as well.

Through His creation God revealed His own being. In the six-day account of creation there is deliberation, regularity, balance, and order. He began with what was formless and organised it. The goal of His creation was man in His own image. When God made Adam, He shared Himself. He revealed Himself as self-giving, and that is love.

In God's love in Christ we see two qualities of love: that it is measured by cost, and that He extends it even to those who do not deserve it. In creation we see God affirming Adam, not because of self-interest, but freely and without benefit to Himself, for Adam's sake. He made Adam and Eve beautiful, interesting and worthwhile, found them so, and called them "very good." Then Adam and Eve received God's blessing, and God told them to be fruitful and increase in number. In addition, God's love included trust. He put man in charge of the rest of His creation, to rule over it, and to use it responsibly. Their affirmation of each other in response to God's self-giving, in similar self-giving love included the marriage relationship, in which they became one flesh (Gn 2:24). The creative God granted them the privilege of carrying on His continuing creation as more human beings were born. When God shared His own image with Adam and Eve, they had direct knowledge of Him. As there can be no love that is compelled, Adam and Eve were able to give and receive freely, in relationship to each other, and in their callings in life (or vocations), to care for the rest of God's creation. God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it (Gn 2:15).

God made human beings with the capacity of love others and receive love. Their task was to reflect the being of God, and show to one another and to the rest of creation the kind of love that God had for them. As God in creation went beyond Himself, He made human beings with the capacity to affirm one another, to find other human beings beautiful and interesting, and to trust them.

So what happened in the fall into sin? We should not think that God's reservation of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a trap that God designed for Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve's complete humanness rested in God's creation, and their capacity for love and freedom. In His love, without compulsion, God trusted them, and even gave them the possibility of choosing the opposite of outgoing love: love of self. Everything they were had come from God, and so they should have trusted Him.

When Eve was deceived and Adam disobeyed, at least three things were involved. They violated God's command. They broke God's trust. Even worse, they misunderstood and rejected the being of God as a God of love. The serpent deceived them into thinking that being like God meant having power like God, and thinking that God was keeping secret knowledge from them. They forgot that they were already like God, and grasped for self-centred independence from Him. They relied on themselves alone. This left them isolated from Him, enslaved to sin, and unable to trust and love Him and one another. They became aware that one human being could now treat another in the same way they had treated God. They had to recognise themselves as evil, knowing evil in the sense, not of merely knowing about it, but of experiencing it. As they had abused God's self-giving, they could abuse other human beings' self-giving. Their attempt to preserve their individuality through exercising control also affected their relationship to the rest of God's creation. Because of Adam, God cursed the ground (Hebrew "adamah") from which Adam had been taken. We see the results in all violence against other human beings and the exploitation of the rest of God's good creation. Now Adam and Eve's "creating" activities were spoilt by vested interest, lust, resentment, jealousy, distrust, the potential for destroying others, and the desire for power. The worst of all was the working out of God's threat, "You will surely die."

All this has a great deal to say about the relationship of love that we, because of Jesus' redemption, shall have with God in eternal life, and the kind of conduct from us in this life, in which God delights, as we respond to Jesus' redemption.

Our redeemed humanness, which rests in God's self-giving, should include self-giving and trust. God has freed us redeemed people from being selfishly turned in on ourselves. God's love in Christ has opened the way for us to subdue the selfishness, the lovelessness, and the distrust in our sinful natures.

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). We, who are in Him, the image of the invisible God, are now called on to reflect God's self-giving love in a world that has gone wildly wrong, marred by sin and death. We even have to overcome other people's exploitation and misunderstanding of our attempts to show self-giving love. We are called to treat others as lovely, interesting,

and worthy of care. The Spirit of God, which was also active in creation, has begun to restore the lost image of God in redeemed people, and has begun to make us fully human again, with a relationship to God that reflects God's own being. As God is a God who both loves and speaks, we can again begin to go beyond ourselves, treat our fellow human beings as worthwhile in themselves, even when we know that they do not fully deserve it. As God continues to create life in the midst of all this death, our task is also to reflect the love of God. As the loving God continues His creating activity in such a way that He even uses human blindness and ignorance for His purposes, we are challenged to turn the ruin that we encounter into opportunities to reflect God's own gracious nature. As God revealed Himself in love and Word, we can pass God's love in Christ to others through God's own Word, which continues to work spiritual life and light. Our challenge is to imitate God's giving of Himself, not only in redemption, but also in His creation.

This has something important to tell us about how we should view, not only our social relationships, but also our vocations, our callings in life. Our daily work has a role to play, as we redeemed people deal with God's good creation, now subjected to futility, in positive ways, which are characterised by love and hope.

Those who are in Christ as new creatures look forward to the new heaven and earth. There not only the negatives, sin, death, and weeping, will be put aside, but, positively, God's self-giving love will continue, and so will ours (1 Cor 13:12). Those who are in God's image, His children and heirs, will continue to reflect His loving self.

Many of the thoughts in the article derive from "Third Use of the Law in Light of Creation and the Fall" by Piotr J Malysz, in *Logia, A Journal of Lutheran Theology*, vol. XI, number 3, Holy Trinity 2002, pages 9-19.