

Fr Anthony Doe

# True Love

Passion & Purity



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# *True Love Passion and Purity*

*by Fr Anthony Doe*

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## *Being Chosen in Love*



### *Desire in the human heart*

**A**t one of the most poignant moments of His life Jesus made it very clear to His disciples that His relationship with each one of them had come into being through His personal choice and not theirs. ‘You did not choose me, no, I chose you.’ (*Jn 15:16*). Chosen to enter into friendship and intimacy with Him, they were to bear the fruit of mutual love that would be a sign of God’s presence in the world. This public declaration of Jesus personally making a choice is extremely important as we begin to contemplate the mystery of love at the heart of human experience. The context of this declaration, the last Supper, where Jesus instituted the gift of the Eucharist, could not have been more significant.

The Eve of the Passover was a time of remembrance for the Jews when communal feelings, centred on God’s salvific choice of His people,

found a focus in the story of liberation from slavery in Egypt. The Covenant made with Abraham (*Gn* 12:2) and confirmed with Moses on Sinai (*Ex* 19) was central to the very identity that the Jews cherished as God's chosen people, and which Jesus made clear He was bringing to fulfilment in His own Passion and Death. The experience of choosing and being chosen, therefore, has been at the very centre of the Judeo-Christian understanding of the nature of religious worship. It is the living context in which the Covenant, the expression of mutual commitment, has always found its meaning, as it brings alive the essential element of desire which alone can activate the interior world of the human heart.

### *Desire for love and for life*

This makes perfect sense when we start to examine the way we develop as human beings, particularly in our relationships with others and in our natural search for fulfilment. In the very deepest sense our desire to be chosen by another in love, to be the sole object of their desire, is at the very core of our being. We have truly been created to respond to the other person's loving initiative and the whole structure of the human personality is built around this expectation. To put it slightly differently, our human nature only comes fully alive when this deepest desire is activated, full of

expectation and willing to respond in hope. The extensive clinical observations of mother/baby relationships have shown clearly how important it is for the baby to experience the loving attention of the mother from the earliest days in order to grow and mature into a loving human being. The manner in which the baby is held and the different ways that the mother responds to the baby's needs for attention and reassurance powerfully communicates the mother's love that the baby experiences as freely given. It is this spontaneous freedom of the mothers' response which is of vital importance for the baby's growth. Being free, it affirms the essential goodness of the baby's core sense of being and activates the movement of life within the child.

The baby is the human symbol, for all of us, of powerlessness and dependence. If left alone for too long, the yearning for love in the baby can gradually give way to a real physical and emotional fear of being abandoned. As the great child psychologist and psychotherapist Donald Winnicott pointed out, the unbearable anxiety of the child in this state eventually leads to a fear of being completely annihilated; such is the intensity of the need in the human being for the unconditional response of love that makes life and living literally possible. It demonstrates very clearly that the desire for love is

synonymous with the desire for life itself and that real happiness cannot just be a passing experience but must be rooted in the development of the whole person. The mechanism for growth, therefore, that leads to ultimate fulfilment in love is triggered when love is freely given, when someone chooses to reach out and enfold another person through genuine commitment and devotion. It is then that an individual can become fully alive.

### *The intimacy of Jesus*

Jesus, in His choice of the disciple, makes it clear that He is motivated by a profound love that has its origin in the Father's heart. Jesus is the 'beloved' of the Father because He is the 'chosen one in whom my soul delights' (*Is* 42:1), the one who has been endowed with the Father's spirit 'that He might bring true justice to the nations'. It is this love that ultimately comes from the Creator that motivates His choice. 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you' (*Jn* 15:9). It is not just based on human affection, which obviously plays its part, but is rooted in the salvific love that the Father has for all His creatures. However, Jesus, through His own person, wants to make it clear that from now on this love is not just to be acknowledged in some generalised way but to be experienced individually

and personally. It is to have a unique impact on the person He calls into intimacy with Himself, calling them to a new level of love that will even give them the incentive to lay down their life for others. This will be possible because when Jesus chooses to love, His choice touches the very depths of the person's need to feel wanted and loved, evoking the mother-and-baby exchange.

This dimension is beautifully echoed again in the prophet Isaiah when Zion says, 'The Lord has abandoned me, the Lord has forgotten me.' The Lord then replies, 'Does a mother forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the son of her womb? Yet even if these forget, I will never forget you' (*Is* 49:14, 15). The experience of the Father's love, therefore, will be mediated through the personal choice made by His Son, to call into loving intimacy individuals who will experience this love entering into the very sinews of their humanity. It is in this experience of being chosen by Jesus that God will reveal His presence and the deepest yearnings of the heart will be fulfilled.

### *Self-realisation: our need to be creative*

When a person is chosen in love, growth and development begin to take place. Awareness of oneself, of others and a personal sense of identity begin to evolve. Desire for the experience of love is

not just connected with the obviously pleasurable sensations of being the object of another's affection and the well-being that comes from the physical reassurance of love, but from the need that is central to our God-given nature which is to be creative. This exists deep within each person and reveals both a longing to express and communicate the mystery of one's being and experience to others, and the desire to give life and sustain it. In the immortal words of the Book of Genesis we are told that 'God created man in the image of Himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female He created them' (*Gn* 1:27). God has revealed Himself as Creator, but also has aligned the whole of humanity with His creative identity. When God chooses to call a person into an intimate loving relationship, these needs, that are part of the God-like identity within us, are activated in a unique way. God's loving choice empowers us to full self-realisation and initiates a movement of life that wishes to express itself through communication and the generation of new life. Jesus has a unique part to play in this process.

Let us imagine, for a moment, God the Father as a huge diamond, Who every time a new person is conceived takes a fragment of Himself and places it deep within the person's heart. This fragment is a

unique part of Himself, irreplaceable and unrepeatable. It means that deep within every human being God's image and likeness, His living presence, waits to reveal itself in order to communicate the very essence of His love in a way that gives life to others. This fragment is each person's buried treasure. The only person who knows where it is buried is Jesus Christ, God's only Son, and this accounts for the unique role that Jesus has in the life of every human being. In His priestly prayer at the Last Supper, Jesus refers to the power that the Father has given Him over all mankind (*Jn 17:2*), the authority that was given its most profound expression in His self-giving on the Cross. It is Jesus alone Who has the power to bring alive this sacred image within us by first choosing us as disciples, and then, through a growing intimacy with us, entering into the depths of our humanity with a love that is reminiscent of the tenderness with which a mother loves her child. How does He do it?

### *Allowing the love of God in*

When someone chooses us in love, in order for us to respond and allow the love received to bring us alive we must be willing to surrender ourselves in trust. We have to let go of our defences and enter into that vulnerable state of longing which enables

us to be receptive. This places us in a powerless condition which can be frightening, arousing the deepest anxieties within us. But this is not always so. Depending on previous experience, particularly our earliest days of mother/baby dependence, the powerlessness we feel can be full of exciting expectation, full of hope that the loving encounter ahead will bring joy and new life. It is here in this powerless condition that Jesus wishes to make His appearance in our life. It is in the vulnerable and most defenceless part of our being that Jesus can make His entry and begin the process of establishing His presence permanently within us.

Hence, wherever the Christian community gathers there is always somewhere the figure of Jesus on the Cross, the figure of God in His most vulnerable condition. The crucifix, with the dying Saviour nailed to the wood, is the Church's most sacred symbol. This is totally understandable since it is from the centre of Jesus' suffering and death that the call to intimacy and fidelity is made, echoed so powerfully in the words of Jesus Himself: 'When I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw all men to myself' (*Jn* 12:32). To enter into the deepest recesses of a person's life, in order to bring them alive from within, Jesus cannot impose Himself on someone but can only make an entry through a mixture of

attraction and invitation. Jesus waits to be invited, yet always having, in a subtle way, made the first move. He comes to reveal Himself but also with the intention of liberating the person and empowering them to live the life they have been given to the full. 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (*Jn* 10:10). Why is it, therefore, that all of us in different ways constantly have to deal with resistance within ourselves towards the One whose only intention is to bring us to this fullness of life through satisfying in the deepest possible way the desire to be chosen in love?

### *Origins of our fear and resistance*

The answer is to be found in the fear, mentioned above, that exists side by side with the capacity to be loved and to love. It is a fear that all human beings know to their cost can quickly gain immense power and destroy the process of loving and replace it with violence and hate. It can also operate in a less dramatic way by robbing love of its creative drive to search for relationships and express itself through giving life to others. In other words it brings to birth a caricature of love that gives the illusion of fulfilment but in fact does not liberate the heart but keeps it undernourished and prevents it from growing. This, in many ways, is its most deadly form

and the one that most of us have to contend with. Where does it come from and how is it maintained? If we return to the earliest experience of the baby we will immediately see the capacity for fear is present right from the start.

As I have said above, the first environment of love, that of the mother's response, is itself not always going to meet the deepest needs of the child. The absence of the mother, be it through illness, work commitments, the care of other children, or perhaps an inability to respond caringly to the child through defects in her own childhood, are all potential sources of neglect. This in turn can arouse panic and rage and all kinds of violent reactions in the baby which will then lead to further unbearable feelings of guilt and anxiety. Being a vulnerable dependent person who waits with hope to be chosen and loved is not a simple business. It can be fraught with pain and uncertainty and will not always yield opportunities for growth and development. Through anger and frustration, survival takes on a new meaning when it depends more and more on the child's ability to contain its fear and assuage its emotional pain. What then begins to emerge is a complicated internal system of resistance to the experience of love from another person. It is not

that the fundamental capacity and desire for love and generative relationships is totally destroyed, but in many people there exist serious levels of impairment that will have damaged the God-given innate capacity for a trusting response.

## *Why Love can be so Difficult*



### *The enemy of our human nature - Satan*

**T**his must now be put into the context of salvation history. In the Book of Genesis we see Satan clearly targeting the very centre of our first parents' ability to live in complete openness and trust with God and each other. It is fascinating, in an almost macabre kind of way, to watch how Satan slowly arouses this fear and mistrust of God's love that one knows is rooted in the experience of innocence and joyful dependence. Fear becomes the basis of rejection, and fear becomes the substitute for loving trust. To be vulnerable and powerless in the world is dangerous. Since God, our Creator, is not truly respectful of our vulnerability and innocence, we are indeed at his mercy and open to His choice of us in love, not for reciprocal relationship, however, but so that He can exercise His power over us. It is, therefore, important to construct life and

relationships around other sources of security that shield the human heart from potential rejection and exploitation. We have inherited in our spiritual genes the experiences of our first parents and at the very epicentre of our createdness, where we are poised for loving encounter with God and each other, we are now vulnerable to the same experience of spiritual exploitation and the birth of fear that we see in the Book of Genesis.

It is not only through the failures of those in our immediate environment that we are driven into ourselves to construct what so often turns out to be a false reality; we are at the mercy of the spiritual presence of evil and malice that Jesus Himself encountered in the desert and later in so many forms in His ministry. Satan, the Evil One, the Prince of this World, has been revealed, in the words of St Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises, as the Enemy of our human nature. Through his envy and hatred of God he is constantly poised to manipulate and deceive the most noble human striving to bring alive the image of the Creator in each of us. He does this by using the human propensity to turn inwards through fear, in the face of human fragility and powerlessness, literally turning us into victims of our spiritual heritage. With what results?

## *Our fear of death, of not being loved*

The fear that I will not be loved, that I will be isolated, rejected, that I have no value in the eyes of others and will never be another person's choice in love, can turn human vulnerability into a nightmare. For some it becomes a terrifying reality and can lead to all kinds of personal disintegration from mental illness to physical violence and despair. For others it becomes the source of endless addictive behaviour patterns rooted in dependence on drugs, alcohol or sexual experiences. The deep yearning for human fulfilment opens up an abyss at the very heart of a person's life that becomes a tormenting emptiness if it is not filled with substitutes. Possessions, power, new experiences, even food are invested with the task of somehow offering meaning to life. And as we have seen in our own day, the pursuit of pleasure and immediate gratification of all instinctual drives have led to a trivialisation of human existence and the continual need to re-invent images of ourselves that become more distorted and debase the grandeur of human nature. Even where dramatic symptoms of a fear-driven existence are not present, there is a whole range of disordered responses that every individual has to endure. They might just be socially unacceptable, irritating personal characteristics that continually disrupt the flow of life and 'seem' to be

incurable. They are indicators, however, of a broken world that has incarnated its presence deep within the textures of life, and point to a distorted reality that has both spiritual and physical dimensions which defy human effort to control or eliminate. They in fact reveal the need for a source of healing that can remove the powerful effects that fear can produce, but at the same time is able to confront the mystery of evil which preys on defenceless humanity in the person of the Evil One.

It is clear from the Gospels that no one came to know Jesus authentically until they had experienced Him as a healer. Except for His mother, all the disciples had to undergo a personal transformation that enabled Jesus to enter into the wounded recesses of their hearts. The clearest example, of course, is Peter, who was dominated by an overpowering ego that blinded him to his fear and human fragility. His fear of rejection immediately overtook him when confronted by the servant girl in the High Priest's courtyard. So powerful was this fear that he was driven to deny this relationship with Jesus even while Jesus was physically present. Whether it was fear of rejection that went back to his earliest life experiences which made him vulnerable to the manipulative power of Satan or just the ever-present human weakness that could not tolerate public humiliation,

Peter's denial threw him into a state of deep anguished suffering. Human poverty and weakness have never had such a dramatic representation. But as we know, his powerlessness before his own fear and his inability to heal himself in the end were his salvation. They enabled Jesus to reveal His love for Peter in the very depths of his human weakness and so establish an intimacy with him that has become the foundation of the Church's experience of healing and forgiveness. It is in His healing that Jesus reveals His power and transforms the potential source of human fear. St Paul in his letter to the Philippians sums it up well when he says:

'But our citizenship is in heaven and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself' (*Ph* 3:20, 21).

### *The force of God's election on us*

We refer to the experience of Jesus as Saviour in terms of healing. However, in the light of the totality of our human nature, as created by the Father, this term does not describe the experience in all its depth

and accuracy. If we return to the story of Peter's betrayal and forgiveness by Jesus and look more closely at the Gospel texts, we can discern another element at work. It comes at the end of the story of the two disciples who are accompanied by Jesus on their journey to Emmaus. They reach their destination and celebrate the Eucharist with Him and, as St Luke tells us, on recognising Him, immediately leave and return to Jerusalem to be confronted by the words of the disciples, 'Yes it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon' (*Lk* 22:35). Peter had obviously shared his encounter with Jesus with the other disciples. There is no written testimony of what passed between them or of any words spoken. However, it was an encounter of such depth that not only was Peter healed and forgiven but he was empowered to witness to the other disciples in such a way that they believed him and in fact based their belief in the Resurrection on his testimony. Jesus, as with the other disciples, had chosen Peter as a disciple, but it was not until Peter had been able to experience Jesus' presence in the very depths of his weakness that Jesus' choice of him in love could activate the sacred image of the Father within him. As we have seen, the sacred image is a sharing in the Father's gift of revealing the mystery of oneself to others in love, at the same time communicating life in a way that brings freedom and light to those around

us. Peter's fear had prevented him from doing this. Only when it was completely unmasked could Jesus then take hold of it, release Peter from its power through his forgiveness, and enable Peter to truly experience the choice of Jesus' love.

### *Gift of self-sacrificial love*

The depth of loving intimacy that resulted between them is movingly captured at the end of John's Gospel in the exchange between Jesus and Peter on the shore of Lake Tiberias. There is a particular intensity in the feelings that were present in both of them when, for the third time, Jesus asked him 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' John tells us, 'Peter was upset that He asked him the third time 'Do you love me?' and said, 'Lord, you know everything. You know that I love You' (*Jn* 21:17). The exchange, however, was not only an acknowledgement of the intimacy and trust that had been established, but was also the opportunity for Jesus to then go on and extend the scope of this love that had taken possession of Peter's life. After each question, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Jesus responded to Peter's assent with the commands, 'Feed my lambs, look after my sheep'. Just as Peter's experience of healing and forgiveness had empowered him to bring alive the faith of his disciples, the personal experience

of intimacy with Jesus was to be the basis of a new ministry of salvific love for the Lord's family.

This encounter on the Lake of Tiberias is, therefore, a paradigm for all called to be followers of Jesus Christ. Eros is the name we give to that joy of being chosen in love, of having the need to feel cherished and special fulfilled by the love of one's beloved. When this is touched and engaged by the love of Jesus it becomes the source of a new energy of love that can move upwards and outwards to search for the fulfilment and happiness in the 'other', in a relationship where the joy of self-revelation becomes a mutual celebration. In other words a relationship where Eros is transformed into Agape, the gift of self-sacrificial love.

### *Eros and Agape*

Pope Benedict XVI has reflected on the presence of Eros in a powerfully illuminating way in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. He points out that there is an exclusivity in Eros that has a possessive overtone, but this is only right. Loving intimacy with another is always private, always exclusive. Indeed we are enjoined by the Gospel to recognise this dimension of Eros in our relationship with God the Father in prayer. 'But when you pray go to your private room, and when you have shut your door pray to your Father

who is in that secret place and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you' (*Mt* 6:6). Eros is ecstatic and is fired by the anticipation of emotional and physical pleasure. The body in erotic love craves recognition and the fulfilment of its instinctual drives. These are powerful forces and can overwhelm an individual's search for loving encounter with the 'other'. The drive to fulfil them can easily become an end in itself and hence Eros has often been seen as an inferior and unhealthy form of love. In response Pope Benedict says:

'Eros needs to be disciplined and purified if it is to provide not just fleeting pleasure, but a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence of the beatitude for which our whole being yearns.'

Purification and discipline become possible when they are placed in the centre of our understanding of the sacred image which has been implanted within us, our buried treasure. The self-revelation of the Father in Creation is intimately linked to his desire for relationship with us, culminating in union with the Trinity. The Father has revealed Himself as the life-giver of the whole of Creation and so His desire for us to live in union with Him means that He wishes us too to be givers of life, finding the real meaning of our existence as we are able to be

faithful to this joyful transmission of life. Jesus embodies all the different aspects of the Father's creative desire to heal, unite, and empower the other to give life. It is Jesus Who finds our buried treasure, our creative Father-like image, and unites it to the love of Eros with its passion and desire and eagerness for satisfaction, in His own person. Eros then has the opportunity of expanding and moving into a more specifically oblativ expression where the need to experience personal gratification in love is transcended and the needs of another person become the object of love. This signals the presence of Agape where the desire for self-revelation and the creation of relationship discovers a new dimension of altruistic concern. This can then carry a person into a mode of self-giving that gives life and seeks the happiness of another person. What is important is to maintain a continuum between Eros and Agape, an interplay that creates a dialogue between the need to receive and the need to give. As Pope Benedict says:

'The element of Agape then enters into this love, for otherwise Eros is impoverished and even loses its own nature. On the other hand, man cannot live by oblativ love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift.'

## *Jesus integrates physical and spiritual aspects of love*

When Jesus enters deeply into a person's vulnerable condition, one of His priorities is to become that bridge between Eros and Agape. He comes with the gift of His own glorified humanity in order to gradually integrate the physical with the spiritual dimensions of love. With the grace of His presence the exclusive drive for personal satisfaction in relationships is opened up in an agapatial response to the other person. One does not exclude the other but enriches the process of self-gift and the grace of receptivity. It then literally becomes possible to say that we love others not just in a human physical sense but 'in Christ Jesus, Our Lord.' His agency and presence embraces the experience of love by enabling the person to savour the buried treasure, which is deeply embedded in the fibres of their being. The desire to be chosen in love is in an immediate sense very much part of the experience of Eros, being a desire for the exclusive response of the 'other'. However, it must be recognised that often in its more mature form this desire to be the object of another person's choice in love can be an expression of a deep and selfless generosity: when the other person is needy and unable to contribute in a concrete and recognisable way to one's

wellbeing, for example, through illness, disability, or personal tragedy, and their choice is in fact an expression of total dependence. In a true sense we can see Eros and Agape fusing into an expression of a real fullness of love. This can only be made possible through the living presence of Jesus.

### *The living crisis of love in our age*

As has already been pointed out, when the state of vulnerable expectancy is either seriously disillusioned or crushed completely there arises the reflex response in the person that seeks to mitigate the pain and ensure that the anguish of desolation, if not totally eliminated in the future, is at least seriously reduced by careful self-management. This is the way Eros becomes the vehicle for all kinds of compensatory attachments and subtle forms of aggression that arise from the anger and frustration of a person who, in a very painful sense, has been disappointed in love. This is why the Evil One can find a real foothold in a person's life and close them off from any possible movement for change. In the general cultural context in which we live it is easy to see how this evil can take hold almost without appearing to do so. How often do we casually repeat the words from the Letter of St James 'money is the root of all evil'? Even with the simplest stretch

of the imagination we know that money, for most of us, is the legitimate means for constructing a well-insulated personal world that maintains a static experience of Eros that is basically defensive and in the end sterile.

Our culture plays on the need for human security and promotes an image of human fulfilment that is based on material prosperity and the gratification of instinctual needs. This is at the root of what one might call a living crisis of love that we have seen emerge in many highly-developed countries where the maintenance of prosperity has been tethered to the most basic form of self-interest. Eros has been successfully sealed off from Agape and the living presence of Jesus is for many at best an irrelevance, at worst a real threat to human freedom. And yet if Jesus is the one who can grasp the dynamic power of Eros, destroy the Evil One's attempt to hijack its potential gift and carry it into a whole new form of expression through the grace of Agape, where will He find the most creative opportunity to make His presence felt? In other words where is the privileged place in human experience that will give Jesus the opportunity of entering a person's life and enabling the human heart to realise its full potential?

## *Dynamic role of Jesus in our sexuality*

We have seen how the wound of loneliness and a sense of personal failure can engender a specific kind of openness of heart. Human vulnerability and poverty of spirit can give Jesus the opportunity to reveal His compassion and enable Him to establish a lifeline that can become the vehicle of faith. However, it can only take Him so far into a person's life since there is a place where He is able to go only if the person is willing to surrender themselves in the most hidden and intimate way, giving Him that total freedom that leads to real union of heart and soul. That place is a person's living experience of sexuality. It is in playing a dynamic part in a person's sexuality that Jesus is able to incarnate His presence most profoundly in such a way that the person's humanity is liberated at the deepest level. It is only then that the sacred image of the Father can begin to reveal its depth and mystery, with the unique synthesis of Eros and Agape energising the beauty of a person's capacity to love in a joyful and generative way. It is now time to examine this dynamic and yet complex aspect of human nature that can bring so much happiness and fulfilment and yet also be the source of deep pain and destruction in a person's life.

## *Masculine and feminine*

When we start to reflect deeply on the nature of sexuality we immediately encounter the presence of complementarity. The masculine and the feminine, body and spirit, the drive to receive as well as to give, the desire to be chosen as well as to choose, all participate in an energising movement that is at the heart of what I would describe as the aliveness of sexuality. This finds its focus in the power and drive to give life that likewise reveals a complementarity in the joy that accompanies the physical and spiritual experience of the transmission of life. The physical intensity of sexual pleasure can only be equalled by the depth and intensity of the spiritual joy that comes when a person is truly generative, when the spirit of one gives life to the other. This complementarity is, of course, part of the ideal. Sexuality not only reveals the potential grandeur of human nature but also is the forum in which we see, so clearly, the wound of sin and disorder that can destroy a person. It is where fear can be incarnated in its most subtle form, where Eros is subjugated most effectively to the need for personal pleasure and the very meaning of human life is robbed of its spiritual centre. This is why sexuality is in need of the divine presence of Jesus who alone can integrate its many parts in a way that brings harmony and peace to the whole

experience of love. He can only do this if he is allowed into its very centre, its drive to create a communion of love that has the power to give life.

### *Tragic fragmentation of our bodily reality*

With the advent of sin and the transmission of the ongoing spiritual wound that we all carry, human sexuality stands in constant need of redemption. This is so because it is rooted in the very essence of personhood that was tragically fragmented through the sin of our first parents. In the Book of Genesis we are told that man became a living being when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. This statement is literally foundational for our understanding of our own nature. We live because God has chosen us to live, but not as a separate entity from Himself but with His own breath of life animating our spirit. Furthermore, for man's goodness to be complete, God created woman as his helpmate, his companion. This elicits the joyful cry of bodily recognition of Eve that then underpins the two following statements:

'This is why man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife and they become one body.'

'Now both of them were naked, the man and his wife, but they felt no shame' (*Gn 2:24, 25*).

Authentic personhood participates in the very life of God, yet at the same time is able to embrace bodily reality as an integral part of the life of the Spirit. This in turn releases the dynamic movement towards physical union with 'the other' that is based on the God-given gift of sexual complementarity. This is possible since defencelessness, symbolised by the nakedness of Adam and Eve, posed no threat, aroused no fear of exploitation, which could damage the spiritual and bodily communion for which we have been created. Finally this must all be placed in the context of the first account of Creation where man, side by side with all the creatures God made, is commanded to 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it' (*Gn* 1:28).

### *Life-giving unity in each person*

Pope John Paul II in his reflections on the Creation texts has alerted us to this dynamism and life-giving unity of the human person that existed in Creation prior to the Fall. Man was created with the potential to realise this unity and live it faithfully by being challenged to make a choice, thereby activating his freedom. God, we are told, planted a garden in the East and:

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