A Story of Mutual Desires

The Dialectics of God’s Desire for Humanity and Humanity’s Desire for God
Table of Contents

Introduction .......................................................... 1
Creation: The God of Desire in Humanity ..................... 1
The Fall: The Beginning of Disordered Desire ................. 2
Redemption: Desiring Our Way Back to God ................ 4
A People in Transit: Sustaining our Desires ................. 6
In the End: Desires Fulfilled ................................... 8
Conclusion .......................................................... 9

Bibliography .......................................................... 11
Abbreviations of Sources Cited ................................ 11
Introduction

Ignatian Spirituality considers the “desire” of a person revelatory of that person. Desires speak much about “who we are” and “what we value in life.” Aside from identity, desires also reveal “for what” or better “for whom we are created,” as persons are supposed to have been created to seek the fulfillment of these desires.

And so, the theme of desire may provide a key to making sense of the whole Christian Faith – the story of redemption, which can be expressed as a dialectic interplay of desires between God and humanity through history.

On a more personal note, my experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius has also fired my curiosity in “desires.” The Ignatian phrase id quod volo (translated as “what it is that I desire in my deepest and truest self”)¹, taught me that ultimately “to love is to desire.”² In this regard, I feel that the stories of desiring and of loving that have shaped Christianity, in particular, and humanity’s own quest for God, in general, somehow are also mirrored in my own story of desiring God in my life and of God desiring me.

Creation: The God of Desire in Humanity
(Revelation, Creation)

From the very beginning God has desired to be known and to share his divine life with humanity.³ Throughout the ages he has revealed himself and his divine plan, first through

¹ Ramon Maria Luza Bautista, Schooled by the Spirit (Quezon City: Jesuit Communications, 2009), 41.
² In fact, Benedict XVI in his Encyclical, Deus Caritas Est, explains God’s love in terms of eros and agape. God desires humanity. God desires to be in relation with humanity. The Pope believes that in this same way, the way of love, humanity “desires” God; as it is only in being with God that humans experience “being loved...and discovers joy in truth and in righteousness – a joy in God which becomes his essential happiness.” Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2008), 8-21.
³ Cf. Dei Verbum 2, CCC 51
creation and then gradually through his chosen people. In creation, we have come to know him as the one who “conserves all things by his Words,” in turn “providing men with constant evidence of himself in created realities.”⁴ Among creation, he has chosen humanity with whom to communicate his desire of “intimate communion with himself,” consequently clothing humanity “with resplendent grace and justice.”⁵ “God willed both to reveal himself to man, and to give him the grace of being able to welcome this revelation in faith.”⁶

And so it is in humanity, as capax Dei; that is, created in the image and likeness of the Creator, that we find the capacity to know, love and serve this God, who in the first place, desired to be known. As God is a God of Desire, so is a human being a creature of desire. The Catechism notes, “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself.”⁷

The Fall: The Beginning of Disordered Desires (Sin)

God has placed desire in the human heart in order to move humanity to seek that which alone can satisfy to the fullest.⁸ Experience has taught us that not all satisfies and not all desires can be satisfied. Thus, St. Thomas Aquinas argues: “only an infinite being” can fully satisfy the human yearning⁹ whose ultimate object is unlimited good; every other finite good, especially

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⁴ Cf. Psalm 19:1 and Rom. 1:20, CCC 54
⁵ CCC 54
⁶ CCC 35
⁷ CCC 27
⁸ CCC 1718
⁹ Scholastic philosophy has taught us that man by nature is a composite being of body and soul. As a rational being, he is possessed of two faculties of rationality, an intellect, which is always ordained to seek the truth and a will that is directed to the good. Any movement of man towards the possession and enjoyment of some object seen as a good is known as desire. Desire may be purely physical, as appetites (for food, sex, sleep etc.), or “psychical”, as when thought and imagination discover or create various shades of the object for the one physical appetite, or finally purely spiritual, as when the object loved is of the spiritual or intellectual order (wisdom, art,
temporal goods, is incomplete.”10 And so, human desire is ordered towards God, for “God alone satisfies.”11

Yet, humanity, having been created good and “established in friendship with the Creator and in harmony” with itself and with the creation around itself,12 still preferred itself and created things to God, choosing itself and created things over and against God. 13 And so the very first sin humanity committed was one of desire – the desire “to be like God.”14 Adam and Eve were guilty of self-deception, of not accepting the limits of their own “creatureness” vis-à-vis the Creator. Theirs was a self-defeating denial of any authority but the absolutized self.”15 This signaled the start of a disordered will, ignorance and also concupiscence, which the Church holds as the source of evil desires.16 From the Genesis account, God then is seen as one who has “always warned man against seduction by what from the beginning has seemed ‘good for food...a delight to the eyes...to be desired to make one wise.’”17 With the human faculties now corrupted, even the inner harmony in humans which was created good and which seeks the good became disarrayed. Part of this “corruption” is a disordering of human desires. Sin therefore is understood as an “inordinate” desire, “a self-imposed shackling that follows upon our misplaced love for the finite instead of the infinite.”18

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justice or God). Man’s desire is rarely only physical or spiritual since man is a “vital union.” Given the spiritual order to which man belongs, man desires “the infinite”; as such, its fulfillment also requires “the Infinite.” Cf. New Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol VI. (USA: The Catholic University of America, 1967), 800.

10 New Catholic Encyclopedia. 918.
11 CCC 1718
12 CCC 374
13 CCC 398
14 Cf. Gen 3:5
17 CCC 2541; Cf. Genesis 3:6.
18 Duffy, Our Hearts of Darkness: Original Sin Revisited, 600-601.
Redemption: Desiring Our Way Back to God
(Christology, Trinity, Grace)

The story that follows the Fall is one of struggle by humanity vis-à-vis its desires and of a God reminding humans that only in him can they find the proper order that they desire for themselves. The history of the patriarchs, the prophets and the entire nation of Israel reveals a cycle of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, of desiring God and of later on exchanging him for idols and false gods. It is in this tumultuous landscape of faith and disbelief that God revealed himself as one who never gives up on humanity.\textsuperscript{19} The Church captures the reality of this ever-faithful God desirous of decadent humanity throughout history in the beautiful prayer used in her liturgy:

\begin{quote}
Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship
You did not abandon him to the power of death
but helped all men to seek and find you.
Again and again you offered a covenant to man
and through the prophets taught him to hope for salvation.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

God desires all humanity to be saved\textsuperscript{21} and in the fullness of time, has sent his only-begotten Son for the salvation of humanity.\textsuperscript{22} Jesus introduced God to us as “Abba” and has likewise called on his followers to grow in intimacy by relating to God as “Father.” Through his Incarnation and his joint mission with the Holy Spirit, Jesus revealed the inner life of God to humankind.\textsuperscript{23} In his public ministry, he manifested God’s presence among his people: bringing the good news to the poor; proclaiming release to the captives; restoring sight to the blind and freedom for the oppressed and proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{24} In all he did, Jesus became truly “God with us” (Emmanuel) “to deliver us from the darkness of sin and death,

\textsuperscript{19} Lumen Gentium 2
\textsuperscript{20} Eucharistic Prayer IV, The Roman Missal
\textsuperscript{21} Cf. I Tim 2:4-6
\textsuperscript{22} John 3:16
\textsuperscript{23} DV 4
\textsuperscript{24} Lk 4:6 and Mk 1:14-15
and to raise us up to eternal life." He is our model, the "perfect man", who invites us to follow him.

In particular, through the Paschal Mystery, Jesus showed us the way back to Father; that is, the way of obedience understood as ordering our desire with that of God's. While the disobedience (the exercise of a disordered will) by one man, Adam, has brought damnation into the world, the obedience (the exercise of an ordered will) by another, the man Jesus, has finally brought salvation to the world. Thus, it is in Jesus that we see the model of a restored humanity – Jesus whose will was so ordered to God such that he had no other desire but to do the will of the Father, as evidenced by his entire life. It is "the Father's plan of redeeming love" which inspired and directed Jesus.

The Paschal Mystery concretely showed how he lived in the presence of the Father and relied primarily on His will: "Not my will but yours be done." As such Jesus' kenosis (self-emptying), hailed by St. Paul, can be considered the ultimate sign of his desiring nothing more than to follow the will of the Father even unto death. In this sense Jesus' entire life is "salvific" for humanity, for in Jesus we have an example of how it is to allow grace to restore the order in our desires: God first, then others and lastly the self. From Jesus we have heard and seen how to love God above everything else and to love others as ourselves (Mk 12:28-33) and also to pray "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10). From Jesus we also have heard, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9:24; Cf. Lk 17:33; Mt 10:39, 16:25 and Jn 12:25).

25 DV 4
26 CCC 520, GS 38.
27 Cf. Rom 5:19
28 Cf. Jn 6:38; Hebrew 10:7
29 CCC 607, Cf Lk 12:50;22:15; Mt 16:21-23.
30 Lk 22:42
31 Cf. Phil 2:6f
This redemption that was won for us by Christ has obtained for us justification that makes it possible for us again to cooperate with God’s grace. As our disordered desires have alienated us from the one true object of our desire, the grace of Christ’s salvific act re-orients these desires toward God. While sin caused us to veer away from God’s desire for us to be partakers of his divine life, grace restores us and enables us to participate once more in the life and intimacy of the Trinitarian life. Thus, what we have lost (an ordered desire) due to sin in the beginning, by God’s grace, we have recovered by the power of Christ’s redemption. As in the words of St. Paul, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.”

A People in Transit: Sustaining our Desires
(Ecclesiology, Pneumatology, Liturgy, Sacraments, Grace)

In carrying out the desire or will of the Father, Christ inaugurates the kingdom of God on earth for it is the Father’s will “to raise-up men to share in his own divine life” by gathering men around his Son Jesus Christ. This gathering is the Church, “the seed and beginning of that Kingdom.” When Jesus already accomplished his mission (cf. Jn 17:4), he sent the Holy Spirit “in order that he might continually sanctify the Church, and consequently, that those who believe might have access to Christ in the one Spirit to the Father (cf. Eph 2:18). It is this Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, who will teach the disciples everything, remind them of all that Christ did.

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32 CCC 1993
33 CCC 1997
34 2 Cor 5:17-18.
35 LG 3, CCC 541
36 LG 2
37 LG 5
38 LG 4
39 CCC 729.
Thus, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church then will be a community of disciples who desire God and the values of the Kingdom, standing as the living witness to the world of the loving and faithful presence of God and perpetuating the story of salvation achieved by the Christ-event through Tradition and the Sacred Scriptures.\textsuperscript{40}

As a concrete expression of perpetuating in memory this desire of God for humanity’s salvation and humanity’s own desire for God’s sustaining presence in the “here and now”, the Church in her liturgy, celebrates the mystery of her Lord “until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26; 15:28). By recalling the mysteries of redemption, the Church makes available and present the merits of Christ’s redemptive act to the faithful so that they can “lay hold on them and are filled with salvific grace.”\textsuperscript{41} In particular the celebration of the seven sacraments is considered a perpetuation of the saving desire of Jesus for humankind, re-enactments by the Church of certain acts of Jesus’ own public ministry – his care for the sick, concern and compassion for sinners among others.\textsuperscript{42} The seven sacraments are rooted in Jesus’ very person as the sacrament of God’s desire for all, later finding expression in the Church as the sacrament of Jesus. The seven sacraments of the Church then “visibly manifest and effectively enact the Church’s mystery and mission of making Christ present.”\textsuperscript{43} And so, in celebrating the sacraments, we find the God of desires making himself tangible for his people through the sacred symbols, answering in very concrete ways their own desires for the divine to enter into their daily lives – God becoming food for the hungry in the Eucharist, well-being and hope for the sick and the dying in Holy Anointing, newness of life in Baptism and compassion and mercy for sinners in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

\textsuperscript{40} DV 8
\textsuperscript{41} Sacrosanctum Concilium 102, Cf. CCC 1163
\textsuperscript{42} CFC 1521
\textsuperscript{43} CFC 1524
The Church, being the sacrament of Christ, “signifies in a visible, historical and tangible form the presence and redeeming activity of Christ, offered to all persons of every age, race and condition.”

Set at proclaiming the desire of God for man from the very beginning “to make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of love,” the Church is by nature missionary. Thus, she is to proclaim God’s universal desire for the salvation of all peoples in the spirit of inculturation, ecumenism and even interreligious dialogue.

In the End: Desires Fulfilled
(Mariology, Eschatology)

While the ultimate fulfillment of our desire for God and God’s desire for us to “partake of his divine live” remain a future that we hope for, part of that expectation is already experienced at present as a “foretaste” of that future. In particular the Church’s liturgy is embedded with this eschatological element: in the Church’s own recognition of its community worship as directed towards that goal as expressed “by the Spirit’s groaning, “Marana tha!” (1 Cor 16:22);” in the Eucharistic celebration which shares in Jesus’ own eschatological desire: “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you...until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God,” (Lk 22:15); and in the experience of the sacraments wherein the Church is assured of her inheritance of everlasting life, while “awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing in glory of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13).

Whether one calls this future experience the “beatific vision” (contemplation of God face-to-face) or “heaven” (a state of eternal bliss, of communion with God), the eschaton is the fulfillment of both God and humanity’s desire; that is, humanity’s

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44 CFC 1367.
45 CCC 850, Cf. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio, 23
46 RMI 52, Cf. ND 1174; Unitatis Redintegratio 1; AG 1,4; LG 16, GS 22 and Nostra Aetate 2
47 Cf. CCC 1130
desire for God who is the only absolute who can satisfy its deepest longings and God’s desire for humanity to finally be with him, sharing in his divine life.

In this regard, the figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary stands as a “sign of certain hope and comfort for the pilgrim people of God.”48 With Mary’s *fiat* and close collaboration in the mission of her Son, the people of God are able to experience the possibility of desiring and living-out what God desires. Imitating Mary’s perfect loving fidelity to God in our daily lives allows us also to enjoy freedom from sin and to live in God’s love.49 And, in Mary’s privileges of being conceived without the stain of original sin (the Immaculate Conception) and of her being assumed into heaven at the end of her earthly life (the Assumption), the Church is given a glimpse of the future that awaits anyone whose desires are reoriented by grace toward God. Mary, thus, prefigures our eschatological union with God despite the “disorders” at present.

**Conclusion**

Tracing the terrain of salvation history expressed by the core tenets of the Christian faith has revealed that “the story of salvation” can be retold as “a story of desires” – one which all started with desire, progressed with desire and culminates in desire. First and foremost, it was a God of desires who created humanity, thus, making humanity also capable of desiring. And what was in the beginning, an ordered desire, was subsequently lost because of the sin of Adam, but was regained by the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

However, while I have tried to synthesize this whole theological enterprise using the concept of “mutuality of desire,” the framework has its limitations. For one, “mutuality” is to be

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48 LG 68
49 Cf. CFC 395
understood in an analogical sense, for the relation between God and humanity can never be a position of “mutuality.” It is obvious that there can never be a comparison between God’s desire and human desire, as the former is infinite while the latter is finite. Secondly, strictly speaking, even humanity’s desiring for God is not totally its own. It is God who in the first place has put this desire in the human heart. This statement is not to be construed as discounting human freedom to desire God. What this simply means is that, following the principle of primacy of grace vis-à-vis human actions, “desire understood as grace” or simply “the grace to desire God” is not humanity’s own making but God’s.

To end, allow me then to quote an excerpt from the prayer of St. Anselm of Canterbury, “Teach My Heart,” which best captures my own experience of my continuing and deepening desire for God:

Let me seek You in my desire
Let me desire You in my seeking.
Let me find You by my loving You now.
Let me love You when I find You.\(^\text{50}\)

\(^{50}\) As cited in Bautista, *Schooled by the Spirit*, 49.
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AG  
*Ad Gentes Divinitus* (Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity). Second Vatican Council

CCC  
*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Manila: Catholic Bishop’s Conference of the Philippines, 1994

CFC  
*Catechism for Filipino Catholics*. Manila: Catholic Bishop’s Conference of the Philippines, 2008

DV  
*Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation) Second Vatican Council

GS  
*Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) Second Vatican Council

LG  
*Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) Second Vatican Council

NA  
*Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions). Second Vatican Council

ND  

RM  
*Redemptoris Missio* (Encyclical by John Paul II, 1990)

SC  
*Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on Sacred Liturgy). Second Vatican Council

UR  
*Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism). Second Vatican Council