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Three-part Heart?

By Henry H. Mitchell, 2024.

A Group of Three

Following is a pattern I have noticed, which I hope you find as helpful as I have.

Several years ago a friend who is a professional counselor suggested that, in order to create a little distance and objectivity regarding personal angst, I should review online articles about Richard Schwartz's Internal Family Systems Therapy, a secular counseling program.

Schwartz recommended introspection to identify separate facets of one's personality that have different emphases and come to the forefront at different times. Thinking about this, I found three such facets within myself. I tongue-in-cheek named the facets Hamlet, Romeo, and Leonardo, the first two after Shakespearean characters and the third after Italian Renaissance artist, inventor, and engineer Da Vinci. I chose them not for their stories, the fictional ones' being terribly tragic, but for their supposed traits which either matched mine, or to which I might aspire.

The next step in Schwartz's system was to bring Self into supervisory control of the facets discovered. I told my counselor friend that was impossible for me. I had no self left outside the three discovered facets, so I would, instead, have to ask Jesus to take charge of Hamlet, Romeo, and Leonardo! Once I had labeled these three internal tendencies, I did find that thinking about difficult situations was a little easier, and I was satisfied with that result.

Step Up to a Pattern of Three

Then, several years later, during February 2024, my beloved life partner, my wife Patricia, died unexpectedly. We had known each other since youth, we chose each other as teens, and we were married for more than 55 years. The shock and grief of her sudden departure were almost unbearable. Family and friends consoled me in many ways, including presenting books they thought might bring comfort. Our daughter Sarah brought one which she noted spoke of a concept a lot like my Hamlet, Romeo, and Leonardo. It reported priest/therapist Andrew Miller's result of many years of counseling: he found that all his counselees have a three-part heart: the original design, a guardian, and a functional worker. Yes, it matches.

As I mused over this parallel, I realized there is another significant comparison: *Genesis* 1:26 reports that God said, “Let us make man in *our* image . . . .” God is, again, *three*: Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

So I typed this chart, for my own further consideration and study:

Interesting Parallels

My earlier personal result (three internal parts/facets/personalities) from an exercise based on Richard Schwartz, Internal Family Systems Therapy.	"Hamlet"	"Romeo"	"Leonardo"
Defining traits of my three internal facets.	Identity from birth and family	Determinedly protective of my family unit	Competence
Three parts of the human heart, from Christa Black Gifford, *Heart Made Whole*, quoting Anglican priest and therapist Andrew Miller.	Emotional Heart (one's original design)	Guardian Heart (strives to protect the original design)	Function Heart (takes care of schedules, necessities, livelihoods, etc.)
***Genesis* 1:26, "Let us make man in our image . . . "**	**Father**	**Son**	**Holy Spirit**

(I assume that others might define the traits of their "Hamlet" differently from mine, and thus the protective focus of their "Romeo" would also vary from mine.)

A Divine Pattern of Three?

Are we each a reflection of the triune nature of our Creator? And if in harmony within ourselves and with our Creator, we are a miraculous one-ness? And if not in harmony within ourselves and with our Creator, we experience uncomfortable jangling of our restless parts, or even much worse? Maybe it is true for me, and not for others, universally. But I do think that, at the least, it may be a helpful framework for more focused scriptural self-examination and to make one's prayers more specific.

Continuing with my reading of Christian-based books offered by consoling friends, I found further parallels:

Three necessities for a grieving child, from Amy E. Ford, *When Your Child Is Grieving*.	Hope	Stability	Order
Three God-given inner needs, from L.J. Crabb, Jr., *Basic Principles of Biblical Counseling*.	Significance	Security	Love
Three important trees, from Tim Savage, *Discovering the Good Life*	Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil	Shoot from the Stump of Jesse	Tree of Life

What About Secular Psychology?

At this point in my thoughts on this topic, another counselor friend suggested that I look to see if there are (further) parallels among secular psychology writers (I had already identified the two at the bottom of the list below). That was a real "light bulb" for me. Are these writers describing, in their various ways, an evident pattern of God's creation within each of us? (Note: some writers substitute "persistence" or "perseverance" for "pattern" in the Purpose/Passion/Pattern definition. Either way, it fits.)

A common definition of personhood.	Purpose	Passion	Pattern
Sigmund Freud's model of the psyche.	Superego	Id	Ego
Carl Jung's model of psychological archetypes.	Anima/Animus	Shadow	Persona
A definition of depression.	Hopeless		Helpless
Definitions of PTSD (similar to unresolved grief).		1. Damaged "breaker switch," protective system overwhelmed. 2. Addictive behavior protecting *self* (left), destructive toward *function* (right).	

More Scriptures in the Pattern

Seeing that the three-part-inner-creation concept may have wide application, I recognize many other Scripture topics. Here are a few:

Romans 5:3-4, ". . . we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."	Hope	Character	Perseverance
I Corinthians 13:13, "Three things will last forever . . . ."	Hope	Faith	Love
Hebrews 11:1, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen . . . ."	Things hoped for	Faith-substance Faith-evidence	Things not seen
Romans 10:17, "Faith comes by [obedient] hearing, and [obedient] hearing through the effect of the [*Rhema,* revealed] word of God."	[Revealed] word of God	Faith	[Obedient] hearing
James 2:17, ". . . Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."		Faith	Works

Consolidating the Chart

I am a visual thinker. I like to “see” things to understand them. So at this point I consolidate the above little charts into one big one. I also now edit the uppermost rows to assume there is a three-part divine pattern within our human hearts. See the consolidated chart on the next page.

The words and phrases in each column are not synonyms, but each is a logical and meaningful cluster. With the Father we see original design, hope, significance, purpose, and God's revealed word. With the Son are passion, protection, stability, security, character, and faith. With the Holy Spirit are competence, order, love, perseverance, works, and obedience. I believe these clusters fully describe the desires of our heart, God's will for our lives, and the objects of our needed actions.

And when we feel unsettled within, it may not be something “bad” within us, but is more likely a signal that a portion of our heart has an unmet need or senses an important truth we are not recognizing. So the unsettling is a nudge toward self-examination, prayer, and receiving the direct One-to-one ministry of the very available Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

From the beginning:			
***Genesis* 1:26, "Let us make man in our image . . . "**	**Father**	**Son**	**Holy Spirit**
Reflections of God's creation in the human heart	Original design	Passionate protector	Competent worker
More from Christian authors:			
Three necessities for a grieving child, from Amy E. Ford, *When Your Child Is Grieving*.	Hope	Stability	Order
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Three trees, from Tim Savage, *Discovering the Good Life*	Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil	Shoot from the Stump of Jesse	Tree of Life
From secular sources:			
A common definition of personhood.	Purpose	Passion	Pattern
Sigmund Freud's model of the psyche.	Superego	Id	Ego
Carl Jung's model of psychological archetypes.	Anima/Animus	Shadow	Persona
A definition of depression.	Hopeless		Helpless
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An Overall Pattern

Upon reflecting on the consolidated chart above, I realize that almost all of human life involves a three step process. It appears in both grand and mundane settings – in games, in war, in careers, in shopping trips . . . . The three steps are: the Plan, and the two facets of execution of the plan: Offense and Defense. Is this yet another reminder of Divine Creation, mirroring God's intent and provision for each of us?

Father	**Son**	**Holy Spirit**
Plan	**Defense**	**Offense**

To discuss this simplified theme thoroughly would take many volumes. (They call it *The Bible*!) A too-quick four-sentence summary follows: God created a **Plan** of perfection. Adam and Eve allowed the devil with his insidious sin to pollute it and all their offspring (us!). God sent his Son Jesus as our perfect **Defense** against sin and its consequences, starting with a rebirth experience to escape the devil's genetic/ genealogical curse. After his death on our behalf and resurrection, Jesus introduced the Holy Spirit (". . . Tarry in Jerusalem . . . ." from *Luke* 24:49) to live within us to empower us going forward, providing our **Offense**.

When Things Don't Go Well

Although God has a perfect Plan, and we can freely join it, this is not a perfect world. Sin is still rampant, and its curse takes many horrible forms. As a result, living in the midst of this fallen world, we experience disappointments, traumas and pain, and confusion. Our Offensive efforts fail (disappointments). Our Defenses are overrun (traumas and pain). Our Plan is stymied and disrupted, and we don't know how to right it (confusion).

***Genesis* 1:26, "Let us make man in our image . . . "**	**Father**	**Son**	**Holy Spirit**
An overall pattern:	Plan	Defense	Offense
When things go wrong:	Confusion	Trauma and Pain	Disappointments

But powerful antidotes are available to us.

A First Antidote: Jesus' Restful Yoke

The first antidote is a come-to-Jesus experience: Jesus, our Defender, says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened [disappointments, trauma, pain?], and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me [my Plan for you, dispelling your confusion?], for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (*Matthew* 11:28-29 *NIV*)

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Note that Jesus indicates a gentle, restful learning experience when we come to Him with our burdens. Too often the idea of self-examination (a necessity prescribed by several Scriptures) is wrongly promoted as throwing oneself prostrate before God, in abject agony over one's shortcomings. We have plenty of shortcomings, but Jesus talks of our taking his *gentle* yoke.

Yokes are the devices with which beasts of burden (oxen) are fitted, yet Jesus' yoke instead gives us *rest*. Yokes are often made for multiple beasts of burden. I would suggest that Jesus yokes us with the Holy Spirit, who carries the weight on our behalf, while giving us *rest*, even in the midst of activities the Holy Spirit leads us and energizes us to accomplish.

And besides, at the outset, the forgiveness we receive in the process of self-examination, repentance, and forgiving others, relieves our greatest burden: the curse resulting from our own sin (see *Mark* 11:25).

A Second Antidote: Steadfast Obedience

As I already charted above in my three-column format, Paul wrote two related instructions in his letter to the Christians in Rome. In *Romans* 10:17: "Faith comes by [obedient] hearing, and [obedient] hearing through the effect of the [*Rhema,* revealed] word of God." And in *Romans* 5:3-4, ". . . we know that suffering [including disappointments, trauma, and pain] produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."

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A second antidote: *Romans* 10:17 and *Romans* 5:3-4	*Rhema* [Revealed] word of God Hope	Faith Character	[Obedient] hearing Perseverance

The *Rhema* of which Paul speaks is God's revelation to us. It is a deep realization of what God is explaining to us. It is our personal situation, informed by principles of Scripture. (In *Luke* 2:19, Jesus' mother Mary pondered all these *Rhemas* in her heart.) When we sense our personal *Rhema* and act on it with perseverance, our faith and character are boosted and developed, and our hope is restored. Often (maybe always!) we do not know God's great overarching plan for us. But in my experience we can always sense the next step we must take. It might be putting food on the table, taking care of housekeeping and repair chores, paying bills, spending time with someone who needs us, maybe even applying for a job that isn't logical to most observers, perhaps resigning from a position in a move that others cannot understand.

Also in my experience, one may not feel like taking those steps, and may even receive vigorous opposition from others to our taking those steps. That's when perseverance comes into play.

Many times I have thought I was taking steps for one purpose, only to have that purpose fail, and then I discover I have been specifically prepared for another result which is a blessing I never imagined. Therefore, whether in failure or blessing, the actions with steadfast obedience validate God's *Rhema*. I believe this is an example of learning to "hear God's voice." On very rare occasions He speaks audibly, and when that happens, I'd better listen! But often He speaks through principled nudges, and when that happens, I've hopefully learned to take action with perseverance. Life is a maze. We do not know what is ahead of us. But God does, and he internally nudges us along the right path, sometimes a complicated one with many unseen nearby dangers to avoid.

A Third Antidote: The Encouragement of Others

When in uncomfortable circumstances, I have a strong urge to talk to others. *Proverbs* 15:22 (*NIV*) states, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." Observations from different perspectives can be very helpful. That was easy for me when my wife Patricia was still walking this earth with me. We were one, and our mutual conversation and trust produced great satisfaction. But now, without her, the urge to converse is still there, and the urge is not just mine. It seems to be widespread if not universal.

My personal experience makes me aware of four good objectives in conversation: information, insight, wisdom, and a smile. Information is simply facts (hopefully). Insight is how information is connected to other information, and how that information *could* be used. Wisdom is how the information *should* be used. Wisdom usually cannot be directly imported from others. However, their insights can be tested against one's personal *Rhema* (see previous section) to discover the wisdom for one's own life. And the presence of a smile suggests optimism and confidence regarding the future and choices to be made.

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A second antidote: *Romans* 10:17 and *Romans* 5:3-4	*Rhema* [Revealed] word of God Hope	Faith Character	[Obedient] hearing Perseverance
A third antidote: the encouragement of others	Wisdom	Insight A smile	Information

One simple fact is that hearing oneself talk sometimes clarifies issues in a way that one has not previously noticed. Trying to explain things to others, you end up explaining them to yourself.

Of course, a danger in relying on the encouragement of others is that they may offer discouragement instead. That is when one must have one's own internal God-connection, praying and seeking His will, not anybody else's.

A Quieting and Comforting Note

Regarding questions I posed above, as you surely suspect by now, I have concluded that the likely answers are “Yes, yes, and yes.” We are each images of the triune nature of our Creator. If in harmony with ourselves and with our Creator, we are a miraculous one-ness. And if not in harmony within ourselves and with our Creator, we experience uncomfortable jangling of our restless parts, or even much worse.

The wonderful good news is there are God-given antidotes for difficult times. If we have internal angst, we must not berate and condemn ourselves, but rather take practical steps (such as those discussed above) to receive the unique healing ministries of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to the similarly-created facets of our own spirits, the God-reflections within us.

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