



Love Sees with New Eyes

There is a dimension of truth which most of us have tragically lost and need to recover, a dimension that cannot be put into words and sentences, though words and sentences can be used to suggest it.

All premodern societies had this other dimension, even the ones who were very far from having the propositional truth, the Christian content of revelation. This other dimension is a vision, a perspective, a habit of seeing rather than a specific thing seen. If we do not have this habit—this vision—then our theology will not sink much deeper than on a conscious, rational level.

The thing I speak of can be called myth, imagination, analogy, or sacramentalism. All four words are slippery and ambiguous. Rather than trying to define them, let me give an example. Indeed, let me give the crucial example for our purposes here, for our topic is the theology of love and how it applies to our lives. Without this way of thinking, such an application, such a connection between what God is and what we are, is tenuous and strained.

Since God is the Creator and since creation reflects and reveals the Creator, and since God is love, all creation somehow reflects and reveals love. That is a logical argument, but my point here is not to *deduce* the conclusion but to see it, to understand it, to stand under it. If God is love, all creation must reflect love. Yet we do not habitually look for these reflections. For instance, we no longer understand, except as a quaint historical curiosity, the idea that sexual love is not just biological. We have lost the idea, implicit in almost all the languages of the world except English—which has no masculine and feminine nouns—that human sexuality is the human version of a universal principle. When other languages call the Sun "he" and the moon "she," they are not simply projecting the human reality out onto nature, but seeing something that is really there. One version of this is the famous Chinese yin and yang. Another is the Indian marriage ceremony in which the groom says to his bride, "I am heaven, you are earth." She responds, "I am earth, you are heaven."

Many readers will find such ideas utterly unintelligible and perhaps suspiciously pagan. Why should a Christian take seriously the fact, for instance, that all the pagans peopled the sky with male gods and the earth with female goddesses? This sounds very strange to our ears.

It is not *only* pagan, any more than anything universally human is pagan. It is Christian too. Dante was a great Christian poet, with all of a great poet's power of imagination. However, the famous last line of his *Divine Comedy* is not poetic fancy but sober and profound fact: it is indeed "love that moves the sun and all the stars."

This is what we no longer spontaneously see. When we look up at the night sky, we do not see—as did the ancients—the glory of God. We have to be reminded of it, perhaps by a memorized quotation from Scripture. When we see the stars we do not hear "the music of the spheres," but only silence. When we think of gravity, we do not think of it as the body of love or the material expression of love, as Dante did. We do not see God's love at work in the very structure of matter.

Let's try to do just that. Have you ever wondered *why* there is gravity? Science explains that every particle of matter attracts every other particle according to fixed laws, proportionate to mass and distance. But science does not explain why. Why does that funny little electron in a hydrogen atom keep doggedly orbiting around its positively charged nucleus rather than zooming off orbit in a straight line? The scientific answer is: because its angular momentum, which tends to move it

straight away from the nucleus, is exactly counterbalanced by its electromagnetic attraction to its oppositely charged nucleus. But why? Why is it attracted to its nucleus? Why do negative and positive charges attract? Don't you see a real connection between this and love? Juliet loves Romeo because he's Romeo. And the electron loves (unconsciously, of course) its proton because it's a proton.

We can see the same principle at work on every level: gravity and electromagnetism on the inorganic level; a plant's attraction to the sun and to water and nutrients in the soil on the plant level; instinct on the animal level; and love on the human level. And within the human sphere there is also a hierarchy beginning with the sexual desire (*eros*) and affection (*storge*) that we share with the animals up to the friendship (*philia*) and charity (*agape*) that we share with the angels. The universe is a hierarchy of love. This is not a myth. This is the splendid and glorious truth. Look! How can you miss it? It's all around us.

Science's reductionistic method fails to see cosmic love. Modern science requires the use of the simplest possible explanation. This is the principle called "Occam's Razor." The modern mind always tends to reduce the greater to the lesser rather than seeing the lesser as reflecting the greater. It thinks of human love as only complex animal instinct, or even complex electrochemical attraction, rather than thinking of these subhuman attractions as love on a lesser level. Premodern thought saw lust as confused love. Modern thought sees love as rationalized lust. This is reductionism.

Christianity is anti-reductionistic. Christians cannot buy into reductionism, for they know that God is first. They know that the universe resembles God rather than vice versa, that God made man in his image rather than vice versa. They know that the best comes first, not last. They know that animal love is a late comer and imitator of perfect, eternal, divine love rather than vice versa. Evolution can never be the *ultimate* explanation for a Christian. Nor for that matter, for a good philosopher: how can more come from less? It violates the elementary Principle of causality.

An example of the influence of modern reductionism on the Christian mind is this: There are two relationships between Creator and creature. But modern Christians usually remember only one of them. First, God loves everything. Second, everything loves God. The second is as true as the first. Acorns grow into oak trees because they are in love with God. That is, they seek unconsciously their own perfection, which is a participation in some of God's perfection. An oak tree is more perfect, more godlike, than an acorn. An acorn is not satisfied to be an acorn, because it wants (unconsciously, of course) to be more like God. God is the magnet that draws all the iron filings that are creatures closer to himself. *That is why everything moves.* It is seeking its own perfection, which is a reflection of God's perfection. Everything moves out of love of God.

The point can be put in the sober, commonsense terms of Aristotle's philosophy. Any complete explanation of anything or any event, says Aristotle, must include four factors or "causes."

- The "material cause" tells what it is *made of*. For instance, we say that the house is made of wood or that the sonnet is made up of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter or that Aristotle is made of flesh and bones.
- The "formal cause" tells what it is *made into*, what its form, nature, essence, or definition is. This house is a private home or residence. This sonnet is a rhymed poem. Aristotle is a rational animal.

- The "efficient cause" tells what it has been *made by*. The house was made by a carpenter. The sonnet was written by Shakespeare. Aristotle is the product of sexual generation from his two parents.
- The "final cause" tells what it is *made for* its purpose, goal, good, or end. The house is to shelter a family and its goods. The sonnet is to express love to the poet's lady fair. And Aristotle, like every man, exists to pursue and attain happiness through knowledge of truth and love of goodness.

Of these four causes, the fourth is the most important because it is the reason for all the others; it is "the cause of causes." Carpenters build houses only because families knowingly seek shelter. Acorns grow only because they unknowingly seek their natural end, to become oak trees.

Now God is not only the first *efficient cause* of the universe, its ultimate origin. He is also the last final cause of the universe, its ultimate end. "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (Rv 1:8), the beginning and the end, Jesus tells us. Thus everything in the universe is and lives and moves and has its being not only from God but also *toward* God. Augustine's great line is true of everything in nature as well as man: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and [therefore] our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

The whole universe is a vast circulatory system. The blood of being is pumped by the divine heart through the arteries of the new creation (efficient causality) and returns through the veins of love (final causality).

Everything loves God in its way. Not only did God love everything into *existence* by creation, he also loves everything into *perfection* by being the universal beloved. Not only does God love everything, but everything loves God. Only man can move contrary to this principle of nature through freely choosing evil. Every *thing* loves God, but not every *one* loves God.

But all this is only analogy, you say? True: acorns, electrons, tomcats, men, and angels do not love God in the same way. But, then, neither does God love acorns, electrons, tomcats, men, and angels in the same way either. That is why they are different: because God loved these differences into existence. If we do not balk at the latter analogy, why balk at the former? In both cases we have real similarity, real analogy, neither simple sameness nor simple difference, but real likeness.

Thus the theology of love gives us a whole new worldview. The apparently abstract and theoretical theology of the inner life of the Trinity as love turns out to have the most radical and revolutionary consequences for our view of everything in the universe and everything in our daily lives. It brings us back to the forgotten wisdom of the myths. It plunges us into a world that really does shout the praises of its Creator. It allows the heavens to really declare the glory of God (Ps 19:1). It is not just clever poetic artifice. It frees us from the dusty, dirty, smelly little dungeon of a universe that "Enlightenment" thought gave us: a universe in which love and beauty and praise and value are mere subjective fictions invented by the human mind, in which the only things that are objectively real are blind bits of energy randomly bumping into each other.

This theology reinforces our own instincts. Our own deepest instincts are to see love as the highest wisdom and ultimate meaning of life. The theology of divine love which anchors this instinct in the nature of ultimate reality itself tells us that our deepest values "go all the way up."

It also extends this instinctive wisdom, that sees love as the ultimate meaning of things, into the entire creation. The arms of the Savior on the cross reach up to the Absolute and down to the depths of the human heart and across the whole universe from atoms to archangels. When Jesus threw open his arms on the cross, he said, in effect: "See? That's how much I love you."