

Rolheiser: The binding power of hatred

Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. We know this works for love. Does it also work for hatred? Can someone's hatred follow us, even into eternity?

In her recent novel, *Payback*, Mary Gordon poses that question. Her story centers on two women, one of whom, Agnes, has hurt the other, Heidi. The hurt had been unintentional and accidental, but it had been deep, so deep that for both women it stayed like a poison inside their souls for the next forty years. The story traces their lives for those forty years, years in which they never see each other, don't even know each other's whereabouts, but remain obsessed with each other, one nursing a hurt and the other a guilt about that hurt. The story eventually culminates with Heidi seeking out Agnes to confront her for some payback. And that payback is hatred, an ugly, pure hatred, a curse, promised to last until death, ensuring that Agnes will never be free from it for the rest of her life.

Agnes doesn't know what to do with that hatred, which dominates her world and poisons her happiness. She wonders if it will also color her eternity: *"Her last meeting with Heidi had troubled her belief in the endurance of the ties of love. Because if love went somewhere after death, where, then, was hate? She had understood, in Heidi's case, that it was the other side of the coin of love. Even after death would Heidi's hatred follow her, spoiling her eternity, the cracked note in the harmony, the dark spot in the radiance? Since Heidi had come back into her life, Agnes had, for the first time, been truly afraid to die. She had to make herself believe that the love of those who loved her would surround her always ... keeping her from the hatred and ugliness that Heidi has shown her. She had to believe it; otherwise ... the otherwise was too unbearable even to name."*

Gabriel Marcel correctly states that to love someone is to ensure that this person can never be lost, that he or she (as long as the love continues) can never go to hell. By that love, the other is connected ("bound") always to the family of love and ultimately to the circle of love inside of God. However, is this true then too for hatred? If someone hates you, can that touch you eternally and contaminate some of the joy of heaven? If someone's love can hold you for all eternity, can someone's hatred do the same?

This is not an easy question. Binding and loosing, as Jesus spoke of it, work both ways, with love and with hatred. We free each other through love and constrict each other through hatred. We know that from experience and at a deep place inside us intuit its gravity. That is why so many people seek reconciliation on their deathbeds, wanting as their last wish not to leave this world unreconciled. But, sad fact, sometimes we do leave this life unreconciled, with hatred following us into the grave. Does it also follow us

into eternity?

The choice is ours. If we meet hatred with hatred, it will follow us into eternity. On the other hand, if we, on our part, seek reconciliation (as much as is possible practically and existentially) then that hatred can no longer bind us; the chord will be broken, broken from our end.

Leo Tolstoy once said: *There is only one way to put an end to evil, and that is to do good for evil.* We see that in Jesus. Some hated him, and he died like that. However, that hatred lost its power over him because he refused to respond in kind. Rather, he returned love for hatred, understanding for misunderstanding, blessing for curse, graciousness for resentment, fidelity for rejection, and forgiveness for murder. But ... that takes a rare, incredible strength.

In Gabriel Marcel's affirmation (that if we love someone that person can never be lost), there is a caveat implied, namely, that the other does not willingly reject our love and choose to move outside of it. The same holds true for hatred. Another person's hatred holds us, but only if we meet it on its own terms, hatred for hatred.

We cannot make someone stop hating us, but we can refuse to hate him or her and, at that moment, hatred loses its power to bind and punish us. Granted, this isn't easy, certainly not emotionally. Hatred tends to have a sick, devilish grip on us, paralyzing in us the very strength we need to let it go. In that case, there's still another salvific thing remaining. God can do things for us that we cannot do for ourselves.

Thus, in the end, as Julian of Norwich teaches (and as our faith in God's compassion and understanding lets us know) all will still be well, hatred notwithstanding.