

Rolheiser: The law of gravity and the Holy Spirit

God is erotically charged and the world is achingly amorous, hence they caress each other in mutual attraction and filiation.

Jewish philosopher Martin Buber made that assertion, and while it seems to perfectly echo the opening line of St. Augustine's autobiography ("You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.") it hints at something more. St. Augustine was talking about an insatiable ache inside the human heart which keeps us restless and forever aware that everything we experience is not enough because the finite unceasingly aches for the infinite, and the infinite unceasingly lures the finite. But St. Augustine was speaking of the human heart, about the restlessness and pull towards God that's felt there.

Martin Buber is talking about that too, but he's also talking about a restlessness, an incurable pull towards God, that's inside all of nature, inside the universe itself. It isn't just people who are achingly amorous, it's the whole world, all of nature, the universe itself.

What's being said here? In essence, Buber is saying that what's felt inside the human heart is also present inside every element within nature itself, in atoms, molecules, stones, plants, insects, and animals. There's the same ache for God inside everything that exists, from a dead planet, to a black hole, to a redwood tree, to our pet dogs and cats, to the heart of a saint. And in that there's no distinction between the spiritual and the physical. The one God who made both is drawing them both in the same way.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who was both a scientist and a mystic, believed this interplay between the energy flowing from an erotically charged God and that flowing back from an amorous world, is the energy that undergirds the very structure of the universe, physical and spiritual. For Teilhard, the law of gravity, atomic activity, photosynthesis, ecosystems, electromagnetic fields, animal instinct, sexuality, human friendship, creativity, and altruism, all draw on and manifest one and the same energy, an energy that is forever drawing all things towards each other. If that is true, and it is, then ultimately the law of gravity and the Holy Spirit are part of one and the same energy, one and the same law, one and the same interplay of eros and response.

At first glance it may seem rather unorthodox theologically to put people and physical nature on the same plane. Perhaps too, it some might find it offensive to speak of God as "erotically charged". So let me address those concerns.

In terms of God relating to physical nature, orthodox Christian theology and our scriptures affirm that God's coming to us in Christ in the incarnation is

an event not just for people, but also for physical creation itself. When Jesus says he has come to save the world he is, in fact, talking about the world and not just the people in the world. Physical creation, no less than humanity, is God's child and God intends to redeem all of his children. Christian theology has never taught that the world will be destroyed at the end of time, but rather (as St. Paul says) physical creation will be transformed and enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God. How will the physical world go to heaven? We don't know; though we can't conceptualize how we will go there either. But we know this: the Christ who took on flesh in the incarnation is also the Cosmic Christ, that is, the Christ through whom all things were made and who binds all creation together. Hence theologians speak of "deep incarnation", namely, of the Christ-event as going deeper than simply saving human beings, as saving physical creation itself.

I can appreciate too that there will be some dis-ease in my speaking of God as "erotic", given that today we generally identify that word with sex. But that's not the meaning of the word. For the Greek philosophers, from whom we took this word, *eros* was identified with love, and with love in all its aspects. Eros did mean sexual attraction and emotional obsession, but it also meant friendship, playfulness, creativity, common sense, and altruism. Eros, properly understood, includes all of those elements, so even if we identify eros with sexuality, there still should be no discomfort in applying this to God. We are made in the image and likeness of God, and thus our sexuality reflects something inside the nature of God. A God who is generative enough to create billions of galaxies and is continually creating billions of people, clearly is sexual and fertile in ways beyond our conception. Moreover, the relentless ache inside of every element and person in the universe for unity with something beyond itself has one and the same thing in mind, consummation in love with God who is Love.

So, in reality, the law of gravity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit have one and the same aim.