

LOVE

- an essay on the occasion of the receipt of a state pension.

1 – IN THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

I am aware of four “maidens of the house”. Are there more? Between them they teach, or reveal in subtle ways, all that needs to be known. Their attentions are not devoted equally to each visitor. Some who pass through here may be aware of only one - with another half-seen, perhaps, in the shadows of that ancient house.

Even when one or two of them introduce themselves they may not be recognised as what they are. We all have a tendency to see them as we expect to see them, and they, on their parts, enjoy disguise. They play many roles.

I, myself, have rarely seen the tall one with the silver hair and the severe gaze. She knows “the diagrams of glory”, the pure line, the ratio and proportion. Her compasses divide and demonstrate on sheets of steel.

The Countess (I call her) is golden-haired (Mr Sydenham calls it auburn), witty and elegant, with the right degree of careless sprezzatura in her speech and dress. She knows the stories, images and the arts of combination.

The third comes and goes in a fluttering of green and brown. She knows the ways of the world and dances. The phrase “the universal solvent of despair?” comes to mind. (“The Starlight Express”, by Elgar and Blackwood.)

The fourth wears the habit of a religious. (A “votaress of St Clare”? A Beguine?) She is the embodiment of Virtue. She speaks very little – perhaps to ask a quiet question – or turns her feet on the riverbank and reminds the poet of Proserpine.

It was this fourth “maiden of the house” who appeared to me in a dream some years ago. Did she speak, or did she show me these words, inscribed in a book? –

“Love draws all things to their image in the Mind of God.”

2 - ONE IDEA

These are purely personal reflections. There is nothing academic here. I will mention some writers and composers whom I happen to know, and whose works can help me explain what this statement, once heard in a dream, might mean.

I am now a person in receipt of a state old-age pension. It’s a good time to wonder what to do with myself. Of course, “nothing” is an acceptable answer. I don’t have to do anything. I could spend more time having a little rest.

But there are things to do – which I am drawn to do. This dream-given statement might serve as a motto for my work, as if all the words and music flow from one idea. An *idée fixe*?

There is a vicar in a novel by a favourite author, J Sheridan Le Fanu, who, the author says, had one idea, and that was wrong.

I sympathise with the vicar. Oh well.

These are just a few notes of a pensioner. I am not obliged to justify or explain anything. Some of the allusions and references are ludicrously esoteric. These are simply things that have caught my eye, or have helped me on my way. I am sure I am only the second person in 250 years to have read some of the writings of the “Mr Sydenham” mentioned above, the 18th century Platonic scholar Floyer Sydenham. Poor Mr Sydenham enters the story because he and his friends were trying to find a way of justifying a belief that Nature was a window into the divine at a time when the church was overcome with Deism, thinking of God as a gentleman who had set the machine turning and left it to spin, having long ago inspired certain people to dictate rules for living in the mechanical universe. Alternatively at that time, there were some enthusiasts who, while still thinking of this world as mechanical and material, believed in supernatural intrusions from the Holy Spirit, or other less respectable spirits, which might give us an occasional encouragement, or warning.

My 18th philosophers, strolling in their classical landscapes, had no time for the supernatural - but for them the whole world could shimmer with a Beauty that radiated from God, or Truth, or “The All.”

“Love draws all things to their image in the Mind of God.”

What does this mean? Even these words - Love? Draws? Image? Mind? God?

Of what kind of world does this speak?

Is this an idea, of Love as a guiding power, that can be found in any respectable theology of the last few thousand years?

Regardless of the words, which are all open to question, the meaning is simple enough to explain.

Mais, oui.

The kitchen of the old house might be its most ancient part. The stone flags are sunk lower than the yard outside by more than a foot. The range is ancient and still in use. There are all the coppers one likes to see. (There is, elsewhere, a kitchenette with a microwave for visitors.) I have a memory of stepping down into the house through the sunken back door. It was probably raining. The kitchen was warm and heavy with baking. Was someone reading, or singing –

“Love bade me welcome...?”

When we bake a lemon meringue pie, write a symphony, or begin a love affair, we may have some recipe or set of guidelines to begin with (more specific in the case of the lemon meringue pie than in the other cases) but we also have the sense that we are being drawn by something - the pie we want to eat, the hazy idea of the symphony we would like to have written, the possibilities of love.

It seems as if that pie, symphony, or love is out there, ahead of us, and we would know it when we found it.

When we achieve the pie we might look at it and say –

“Behold! The pie!”

If we ever finish the symphony we will say -

“Ah! That’s the symphony!”

Something similar to this might be said in the third case.

It is as if the plan or the design of the pie or symphony has always been there, or the love was “meant to be.”

But there are two other very important aspects of this common experience of Creation. (That’s what it is, Creation. These things, we might say, are small parts of One Creation, of the Whole.)

Firstly –

If the pie is awful we may have an even stronger sense of what the pie should have been. The ideal pie, sadly unachieved, has even more reality in our mind. If we aren’t too tired and fed-up we might have the urge (the Desire!) to try again.

If the symphony is just too much like hard work and we leave it half-finished it can resound with even more power and mystery than if it been had completed.

An old visitor to the House, Mr Mordant, would like to add:

“Young Schubert may have finished his B minor symphony and recycled an unsatisfactory finale in ‘Rosamunde’. For purely technical reasons, due to the limitations of the natural horns and trumpets of the 1820s, a finale would be a considerable creative problem if it were to end in B major, as an audience would expect in a B minor symphony. Imagine the composer looking at what he had done and knowing – ‘No, that isn’t it!’. The attempted finale is best put aside, not wasted, but re-used. It isn’t the thing! The unknown and unheard true finale remains there, out there, just beyond reach, even more strange and more powerful.”

When we engage in any creative project it is, for us, as if the Work exists before it has been begun - in what we might poetically call “the Mind of God”. It as if we imagine God to be some kind of Being, sitting beyond our world in a library of blueprints, artistic sketches, biographies, recipes - and we are trying to see through the mottled windows, or, if we have been able to enter, we are stumbling between dusty stacks (do they move?) in search of our book. We know what it is, but we can’t quite remember the title. We remember what it’s like, the black binding...

A long novel, a “bildungsroman” - the wandering poet - the old house – the dark staircase - the white-haired philosopher who has travelled far and spoken with great minds - the girl in the shadow - the scent of baking...

Secondly-

(And I am willing to accept that this might not be so much of a common experience.)

It can happen that, when we achieve the pie or symphony, or find ourselves in love, we have the sense that it isn't our doing. It's not our work. I tend to feel that anyone who achieves anything good (Good?) must feel this. An artist, or baker, can stand back and say "look at what I've done", it's forgivable, but they might say "look at this! Did I do that?"

The more we have been drawn to do something the more we feel that it is not ourselves that did it. The better the work, the less it feels as if we had any part in it.

It is as if something within us, or beyond us, has given us the desire to make the thing and guided our skill. In other words, Love has drawn us to write the symphony.

"Mr Plato would say," (this is the Countess,) "that this is divine inspiration, and that we might work without any sense of conscious control. We might be in a 'frenzy' – but the frenzy of inspiration is creative when the spirit takes over and yet we do not forget our skills and wisdom. This is not the kind of frenzy that might result when we simply lose our senses and impose our madness on the world. A certain discernment of spirits is necessary in cases of inspiration."

Love has drawn the symphony towards its Image (or idea) in the Mind of God.

Surely it is easy to imagine that this is how the world works?

"I like the pie," Thalia says, swinging on a precarious five- bar gate, (we are suddenly out in the meadows) "though I am having vegan moments. But what about this? Come on..."

She holds the gate open to let me through, swings it shut and walks, or lopes, ahead, impatiently.

"It's just over here. Look!"

We are on a ridge amongst pines. We come to a gap in the trees and we look down on a river, running through a wide valley.

"Is that what you call picture-skew?"

"Yes, I'd say so."

Yes, a fine view. The river, the woods and rocks on its slopes, and just where it should be, a ruined tower at turn in the river. A kingfisher darts below us.

"That's the work. It's LOVE. Feel it."

"The tower?"

"No, silly. Someone made that. They had to. The place demanded it. But not just that, all of it. The river – listen to it. The air. You can smell the pines. And us stepping through the trees to see the kingfisher.

"That's a Work of God, as much as your pie or your boring symphony, if you'll pardon the expression."

And this story.

We have to avoid the strange tendency we have when we think of the "Works of Nature", or "Works of God", to think of these Works as separate and individual objects. In "reality" (or, in the version of reality I am trying to justify) everything that exists exists in relationship. Everything is what it is

because of relationship with other Works. Every Work is made of many other Works. Every Work is a part of other Works.

A flower is made of many parts. It depends on its environment and the flowers that have gone before. The flower is also its image in an observer's eye, or perfume in an observer's nose. It's part of us, experienced through our senses and known in imagination and memory. We might know and love that flower as an individual flower, or we might glance at it as a small but vibrant part of a larger Work, our walk through that forest or garden. In either case what we know is something that we experience through our feelings and thoughts. The work lives in us.

You can't separate a work "out there" in Nature, from its audience, or co-creator - us.

And – if this is so – the observer, or audience, cannot be separated from the flower, or the river scene.

And if we, by walking, are part of that valley, that valley is affected by our presence.

This might seem far-fetched, but it's true in a performance. The musicians or players are affected by the attention or love, or, as importantly, the lack of it, of their audience.

That's what the world, or Creation, is like – a Performance.

Just as in the case of the pie, symphony, or love affair, we can sense (or imagine, if you wish) that we are only co-creators, participators, in something which is happening both within and without us, something which is in the process of being created.

It is "as if" Love is drawing that Work, in which we are a part, to its Image in the Mind of God.

We must think of God as something that is there, behind, or within, these things, guiding them, now, always – not as the gentleman who set the machinery turning and left it to its own devices. This creative process is something that is happening. We are working within it, whether baking, composing, or walking in the forest.

The idea that God made the world at some point in the past never did make sense. It is doubtful whether anyone ever thought like this. The biblical Creation story is a story, and a very deep mystery. Yes, we can imagine a moment of beginning – but the work goes on.

The alternative view is that everything continually flows from God, it "emanates", and Creation is something like a play of coloured images, constantly forming and dancing, but all of which shine from one point of light.

As I've said elsewhere, the view of God making something in a literal sense is like thinking of the world as a Seed Cake made by God and left to cool on the kitchen table. The "emanationist" view is of a world into which God pours out the ingredients for every kind of cake and pours out a love that we receive as the desire to bake seed cakes, lemon meringue pies, simple scones and exotic patisseries, all to the Glory of God.

Which of these images of Creation do we hold in our minds? Perhaps both at the same time?

A deep mystery lies in the fact that this idea of emanation, or outpouring, is much older than Christianity. This is the language Plato used, 400 years earlier, and it seems to be much older than

that. The understanding of the way Creation worked was a very ancient secret. The Genesis story of the seven days has deep meanings – secrets of the sacred structures within the changing Creation.

If we have grown up with the Genesis story in the back of our mind we can easily be confused. It's best, for now, to forget such things and look at experience. What do we actually see? What do we know?

We sense Love in the forming of things – and we sense Love as Mystery in the things and experiences which are forming – something beyond us which we keep trying to explain, but mustn't.

This has always been Mr Mordant's failing. He has a tendency to find himself in a strange place, or playing a curious fantasy on his clavichord, and he can't help himself thinking "what does it mean? Do these stones have significance? Is this theme a cipher?"

But this is Mystery. It's the Love that calls all things to Unity when it's half-known, in the shadow - the sense of meaning weaving through the world - "the Great Poetic Mystery."

We can follow the clues - but if we try to explain we are lost.

"My symphonies are like butterflies. If you try to pin them down they die" said Sibelius.

So far so good, I think.

"Love draws all things to their image in the Mind of God."

But there's a problem.

When I work on my symphony it is as if the symphony exists already and I am trying to search for it in the darkness. It is as if it exists in God's Mind. Sibelius said something to the effect that "the clouds opened and they were playing my fifth symphony in heaven" – but "remembering" it, and writing it down, was very slow and difficult work.

"Listen to his first version", says Mordant, "It's just not how it goes. It's not as if its not finished. It's as if it's mis-remembered and the composer gets in the way, filling in blanks!"

The idea that God has blueprints for everything is obviously ridiculous. It might sometimes seem as if this how it is, but it can't really be like that. If one is going to think of a God as an all-powerful being who has plans for every symphony, every pie and every life, why on earth should God not just write the symphony himself? Why not fast-forward or jump to the end? If God has plans for every life, why should God want so many lives to be miserable? That's an unreasonable God, whom we can so easily use to justify our own unreasonable actions.

If God is like this there is no freedom - no point to anything. If God is like this there is no need for Love!

That kind of God is both illogical and unnecessarily complicated. It's not true that this is the old and proper way of thinking about God. This God "that atheists don't believe in" and which the Jesuit writer Gerard Hughes asks us to pray to forget, was invented when we separated God from Creation, as recently as the 13th century.

The sense of Love drawing us to make the ideal pie or symphony does not require a specific plan in God's Mind. All it needs is a desire in both us and in Creation to be creative (or simply to eat), and a sense of rightness, a sense that a good Work is possible. Failure and imperfection are essential aspects of the working of the Good. An infinite variety of pies and symphonies can be Right and Good, but failed ones can also be wonderful in their own way, by being Works in their own right, or causes of new desire.

Chance, experiment and fortune are essential aspects of a Cosmos drawn by Love.

This outpouring of Love into Creation suggests a God who is infinitely simple.

Very little can, or should, be said about God.

There is no need for specific designs for anything – all there needs to be is one idea, which we might call Good, or Unity.

The Image in the Mind of God to which everything is drawn by love is Unity. In other words, Love draws everything simply to be a thing, a work, itself. In fact the Image to which all things are drawn is simply God – not that complicated, planning, judgmental kind of God, but that God which is totally simple and known through the working of Love in all things, on every level, the Truth to which all things are drawn by being what they are.

But this isn't cold and abstract philosophy, because it is impossible to separate this "Good" or "Unity" from Love. The active Love, which we experience in wonder, mystery, beauty, love of all kinds, is the same thing as the source of that Love, "the Source of All Being".

This is no cold and abstract philosophy because we experience this working of Love by being human, physical, living beings, through Love, not abstract intellect.

Love, according to this view of Creation, has precedence over intellect.

"Would Plato agree?" I wonder.

The Countess is the authority – and a friend to Ficino, Shaftesbury, Mr Sydenham.

"Mr Plato allows both Intellect and Love to be ways to Truth. There is talk of reason and the abstract One, but there's also that breeze of inspiration running through the garden and talk of Love by the Ilissos. Sadly no-one in our corner of the world knew these books in the middle-ages. Difficult times. But the light was breaking through – and gleaming in the coloured glass of Chartres."

3 – NEW LIGHT IN THE 12TH CENTURY

A year or two ago I was on a late-night train reading a very short book which I had bought at a lecture of the Temenos Academy in London. The book was "Metaphysics and the Cosmic Order" by Joseph Milne (Temenos Academy, 2006). (I have heard Professor Milne talk of the "invention of the God atheists don't believe in.") The book is a brief introduction to just the kind of theology I am trying to explain. Milne explains the gradual separation of God from Creation in the Middle Ages. The Good in Creation became thought of as something other than the Good of God. God, the new Aristotelian intellectuals argued, was unknowable. This new way of thinking worked against the

image of Creation as something that is sacramental and freely flowing from God, a divine experiment which contains infinite possibilities, and put in its place pages and pages of, to me at least, unintelligible argument.

The phrase in Professor Milne's book that stood out, as I sat in the Pendolino, talked of Bonaventure, who found a way round the new and negative theology. Bonaventure, "the Seraphic Doctor", was the leading theologian of the Franciscan movement. Inspired by St Francis's simplicity and humility Bonaventure argued that love must come before intellect – and Milne writes that Bonaventure had an

"understanding of Divine Love as the power that draws all things to unity in the Mind of God."

Milne's study looks at the conflict between a theology based on this outpouring love and a theology, focused on God's Will and our sin, which very quickly dominated the western church. Bonaventure clearly states that his work (especially his Hexaemeron, a series lectures on the seven days of Creation) is a criticism of "the philosophers", meaning the intellectuals who had become obsessed with the logic of Aristotle. The new philosophy, which came by way of the Islamic world, brought some good, in its support for scientific method (the Platonists already believed that understanding the working of Nature can only lead to God) but it also created deep stresses, as Aristotle, unlike Plato, was an atheist.

Bonaventure, in the 13th century, wholeheartedly supported the idea of a Creation which emanates in Love from Unity. The theology is fully formed in his works, but where had it been for the preceding thousand and more years?

The first clear statement of the idea that Love was the power through which God creates seems to have appeared, in the mid-12th century, in the work of Richard of St Victor. Shortly after this, in the same group of theologians, love becomes the key to the mystical life, the desire that draws the soul to God.

If we see these as two dimensions of one thing we can see that the love that causes things to flow from God is also the love that draws creatures towards God.

The theology of mystical love was developed by a theologian of the next generation, Thomas Gallus, also a Victorine.

In a mysterious way this new focus on love is woven into the new spirit which shines in St Francis. Thomas Gallus, though not a Franciscan, knew the great Franciscan preacher, St Anthony of Padua. Gallus's mysticism was taken up by the first great theologian of the Franciscans, Bonaventure. Mysteriously, Gallus's mystical thought seems to have come from Francis' close friend, Brother Giles, who lived long enough to pass on inspiring stories of both Francis' and Clare's mystical experiences to Bonaventure.

Francis is the vivid star of this constellation of saints, but he is not necessarily the source of the light. This new theology of love appears before Francis. As far as this new flowering of love is concerned, Francis became the focus of something that was already happening, a new theology of Love that desired to be born and which flamed out to illuminate this group of people at this particular time.

This idea of a new light finding its moment and place might explain how it is that important theologians like Alexander of Hales and Anthony of Padua were drawn to the Franciscan movement from the beginning, as if they were drawn by a light that already gleamed, or a Love that was already forming.

Francis is believed to have been inspired by the songs of the troubadours and to have sung such songs himself. These songs might have been a much more profound inspiration than they would appear if we were to look at only the differences – the worship of courtly love as opposed to the celebration of Lady Poverty or sacred love. Love can't be separated like that. There is only one Love.

Francis's "Canticle of the Creatures" is a song, not a poem. It was sung. A tune does survive, attached to other, later, words, that fits. It could be Francis' tune, remembered and used when other words had a resonance with the original Canticle. In the decades following Francis Jacopone of Todi wrote extravagant songs to sacred love, also, presumably, to be sung - and the Portuguese Franciscan musician Juan Gil de Zamora (c1230 – 1318) not only produced an important textbook on music, supporting the idea that meaning or feeling (affect) could be conveyed through music, but also may have been the musical editor of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, an enormous collection of songs about Mary.

This unified theology of love, as a creative power and inspiration for the mystical ascent, may seem almost obvious, something assumed to be an everyday aspect of Christianity, something we can know in ourselves when we work in the kitchen or study - but it owes its realisation to this group of holy people, the Victorines, Francis, Clare, Giles and Bonaventure, at that particular time – and , though it had this moment of flowering, it was a short-lived flame.

It could be said that this moment of illumination came just at the point of a change in understanding. The later theologians, with their reverence for Aristotle, drove God away from creation.

Let's look at this moment at the end of the 12th century more closely.

C S Lewis suggested that love, romantic love, was invented in the early 12th century. This might seem surprising, but it was if the language that could express the love for either a distant princess or for God did not exist before this period.

At the same time as the Troubadours sang their songs came the invention of Nature. The idea of Nature, as a unifying force, did not exist until the philosophers of the School of Chartres began to have a positive view of the material world. This positive view, that Nature reflects God's Ideas, was inspired by a re-reading of Plato's creation myth, his book *Timaeus*, one of the few fragments of Plato known in the middle ages. Plato describes God forming the "Soul of the World", the pattern, or Harmony in all things, which is also copied in the human soul.

The invention of Nature predates by a few decades St Francis and the Franciscan theology of Creation which he inspired.

The most elaborate poetic celebration of this new philosophy was the "Cosmographia" (around 1148) of Bernardus Silvestris, who was associated with the School of Chartres. This absurdly complex allegory derives from Plato's *Timaeus*, as passed down in the middle ages. The book introduces the character of *Natura*, Nature personified. It begins with Nature pleading with *Nous* (The Mind of God) on behalf of unformed matter, *Silva*, who desires form and beauty. ("Silva" can mean wood, forest, as well as matter, so the medieval forest in poetry has echoes of her wild and unformed character.)

In "Cosmographia" Matter (whatever that is) has the desire to find Form. Nature is not what we think of as nature, the "natural world", but is God's agent that helps Matter, Silva, to find Form. In later medieval illustrations Natura is sometimes shown fixing human beings together at a furnace, with hammer and tongs.

C. S Lewis discusses "Cosmographia" in his "Allegory of Love" (1936) but doesn't mention that the book provided him with the planetary mythology for his science-fiction novels.

Richard of St Victor was a Scottish born theologian, who died in 1173. His theology of love begins with the very abstract idea of God to be found in the works of the fifth century writer known as Pseudo-Dionysius. Dionysius rejects everything that can be said of God other than the absolutely simple statements God is One, God is Good. This is close to Plato, whose reasoning defines a Source of All Being, which is absolute Unity, and is also absolute Good. But Plato got this from Pythagoras, who was said by later biographers to have got it from the followers of Moses.

Plato is a philosopher, not a theologian. If the medieval writers had known more of his works they might have seen that his very abstract God is also the source of love and virtue, and that philosophy tends to evaporate and leave a need for religion if any true knowledge of God, Love or Virtue, is to be found.

Richard shows that, if God is Good, there must be an object of his Goodness. God is Love in the relationships of the Trinity, but that Love must also be creative to be truly Good. Creation is the work of God's outpouring love.

Love comes from God's Unity and Goodness.

This is the first direct statement that love is the active cause of creation.

(Ilia Delio. Simply Bonaventure, New City Press, 2001, p41)

Richard of St Victor uses the term "caritas" for this love, which translates the Greek "agape", the term used in the First Letter of John, for "God is Love."

Charity, "caritas", tends to mean simple kindness, but the idea of creative love suggests something stronger than this. The creative force of God is desire, "eros", and "eros", or "amor" becomes the term for love used in the mystical tradition, the love that draws us to God.

If God's desire creates the world, we can find in ourselves a desire to return to God. This is, again, a Platonic idea. What comes from Unity desires to return to Unity. This desire for return does not mean a literal return to the beginning.

This desire can draw us to seek the Source of All Being within us, which is the mystical way, but at the same time it is this desire for Unity which draws things, and us, to be what we are, to have Unity in ourselves, to be an individual Work of God.

The poetry of Gerald Manley Hopkins, who was particularly influenced by the Franciscan Duns Scotus, demonstrates this idea of things revealing God by being what they are. ("As kingfishers catch fire", "Henry Purcell" and others.)

Thomas Gallus (c1200-1246), like Richard of St Victor, drew on Pseudo-Dionysius and developed the idea that knowledge of God was both intellectual and emotional. Ultimately love supersedes intellect. This became a key idea in the work of Bonaventure.

Bonaventure and other Franciscan theologians had to use all the armoury of medieval intellectualism to argue against the destructive force of the rival systems and to justify the precedence of love over intellect.

In Gallus's mystical ascent intellectual knowledge falls away and love remains. (There are no words...) To Gallus this working of love is "eros". Creation is erotic by nature.

The mystery here is that Gallus's system of mystical ascent, which circulated under Bonaventure's name, is based on the sayings of Brother Giles, who, according to Brother Leo, was an ecstatic mystic. Bonaventure uses Giles's seven stages of contemplation and, to further complicate the relationship of these people, a treatise which was circulated under Bonaventure's name "The seven stages of contemplation" is actually by Thomas Gallus.

(Bernard McGinn. *The Flowering of Mysticism*, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998. Pp77-78)

Richard, Thomas, Francis, Giles and Bonaventure took ideas that were hidden but not developed in Pseudo-Dionysius and transformed them, in a time when Love and Nature were in the ascendant. In their Platonic-Christian theology it was quite possible to say that creation flowed and was formed in love and that everything sought, through love, to reflect the Unity of God - or sought that Unity in mystical love.

The medieval theologians would not have known Plato's "Meno". The dialogue begins with the question "can virtue be taught?" Once, after much amusing and satirical conversation, in which those who aim to make money by teaching are pulled part, Virtue is defined as the working of the Good in the soul. The Good is the divine within us. It cannot be taught, only known – and words fall away – Virtue can only be known through contemplation. As Floyer Sydenham wrote in the notes of his translation of "Meno"

"Faith and Opinion are, we find, and must be, unstable and slippery Foundations of Virtue. There is therefore a Necessity for Man, who lives in this World of Sense, if he would continue Good and Happy, amidst all the Sensible Objects, which surround him, and never cease to invite and draw his Attention to them, that he should, as frequently as possible, introvert his Attention, and retire into himself, to converse and hold Communion with the Fountain of his Being, the Author of all Good to him..."

(Plato, *Meno*, translated and edited by Floyer Sydenham, 1769)

Plato, in "Meno" and other works, argues that only true law is the law within Nature. Societies can make laws but they can never be the true law. The True Law is, to Plato, the Good in Nature, which flows from what we might call God. This is Virtue.

Plato's argument is equally valid in a Christian context. Love, or Virtue, to a Christian, is known through Christ within us. No words can teach that Love, it can only be known through Love.

Maude, the quiet sister of Virtue, would agree.

There are serious implications in the belief in a creation formed through love.

No human law can impose Virtue or Love. No words can explain Love.

The precedence of love gives meaning to the pseudo-Francis idea of preaching but “using words if necessary.” Love is all, is the answer, as the later mystic Julian of Norwich would say, and no words can communicate love. If Love is God, and, to a Christian, the Christ within us, words can be a barrier rather than a means of communication.

St Anthony of Padua’s preaching was said to have such power that it communicated to people who did not understand the words. The belief that words could fail inspired the early Franciscans to teach music as a means of expression, and in the 18th century the celebration of St Anthony’s festival in Padua included purely instrumental, wordless, music, led by the great violinist Tartini.

The Love that inspires the Desire for God and the love that forms the world are the same Love.

Therefore, there is no sacred or secular in creation. Everything that lives (or has being) is holy. Intellectual knowledge, science, must lead to God – and at the same time the whole of creation is scripture, and that must be a scripture which belongs to everyone.

We may have our religious disciplines to bring us closer to God, but the whole of Creation is one Book which speaks a common language. The world we read is not that indefinable thing “the material world” but a world which includes physical nature, stories, ideas, events, lives. It is all too easy to narrow our view of Creation by looking for only the “sacred”, or our own narrow view of the “sacred”, when everything, and that means everything, can be alive with Love.

4 – ONE LOVE?

The great medieval expression of this newly discovered cosmic love is Dante’s Divine Comedy.

Dante’s book is a map of the soul. Until recently (around 1600) the cosmos was assumed to have the same form as the soul, thanks to Plato’s “Timaeus”. The soul was more than a mirror of the cosmos – they were the same thing. We lived in the cosmos. It existed in us, if we had the love to know it.

Of course, this is still true. The apparent physical structure of the cosmos is not the same thing as the spiritual form, which is Harmony, and which is still as true as it was for Dante, and still the guiding law in Nature.

“I am pleased you have found the time to mention it!” says the severe Urania. “What would there be without Harmony? Nothing but formless Chaos pouring into the darkness with the vain hope of finding Unity again, of coalescing. From the moment of Becoming,” she declares, “Chaos found Number within itself, and Number brought Proportion, Ratio, and Harmony. Number is the unchanging Law that has existed from the beginning, the revelation of that absolute Unity which lies before Being.”

“True, my sister, but the Cosmos is more fun than that!” The Countess sparkles. “Harmony isn’t a law of cold numbers and ratios, but a game of images, symbols, the coloured planets, the roots of language. Harmony allows Music to be, allows Dance and Poetry. You may serve the icy intellect - I inspire my poets to weave their stories and to perform their masques in my knot-garden.”

The punishments in Dante's Hell and Purgatory are what we make for ourselves, not inflicted by an arbitrary legal code. They are all the result of misguided love, the effect of turning away from God. In some cases the poet can't avoid having sympathy for the sufferers. The love of Paolo and Francesco separated them from God and the world, but it was still love. Dante's homosexuals are on the very fringe of Hell, and some are saved, in purgatory. This was remarkable for the 14th century – but understandable if love is seen as the energy in Creation which also raises us to God, rather than purely human love, with procreation as its only justification.

Beatrice, Dante's beloved, reveals God's grace by being Beatrice.

When Dante meets Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise (Purgatorio, Canto 30), which is the most exquisite moment in the Comedy, where all myths of Nature, Christian and Classical, come together, she introduces herself

"Guardaci ben! Ben son, ben son Beatrice."

"Look! I am, I am Beatrice."

All the love that works through the cosmos can be experienced in a human encounter.

Would it have made any difference if Beatrice, the embodiment of God in Creation, had been a man?

If only Plato's writings on love had been rediscovered a few centuries earlier.

Dante's epic is a celebration of the cosmos of love and the climax of the vision which had emerged a hundred years earlier in Richard, Thomas, Francis, Giles and Bonaventure.

There is no proof that Dante was a Franciscan, though in the story he wears what might be a Franciscan cord. A revolutionary aspect of the book is that the characters are all real people, not myths or allegories. That could be seen as a Franciscan view of the world, seeing value in the individual, as a Work of God. In Paradise the Franciscan Bonaventure and the Dominican Thomas Aquinas sing the praises of the founders of each other's orders, the affective and the intellectual, Francis and Dominic.

At the climax of the poem St Bernard guides the poet to the summit of Heaven. Here Mary the Mother of God is the point through which Love enters Creation. She is a human being. The Incarnation was a point in time, but Love enters into the entire cosmos, into all time, and into the eternal soul.

The last lines of Dante's poem are:

*Here powers failed my high imagination:
But by now my desire and will were turned,
Like a balanced wheel rotated evenly,
By the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.*

The Divine Comedy is an essential text for the student of Love.

THE STORY SO FAR –

Everything is drawn by Love to be what it should be –

Nature has a law within it, which is both the physical law which guides the material Creation - from the simplest number to the most complex formulae - and the law of Harmony which guides Formation and, some would say, lives in the Soul.

This law of Harmony is inseparable from Unity, or Love, and comes to be when Unity enters creation - just as any musical tone contains within itself natural harmonics, or Number is a product of the One.

(In biblical terms “Wisdom”, if we wish to see it as the Harmony which guides Creation, is inseparable from “the Word.”)

This call of Love is both external, working through Creation “out there” as it seems, and internal, working within the soul.

In this world “Objective” and “Subjective” have no meaning. Our minds are part of the same Love.

Someone asked me recently where God’s love was in the story of St Francis embracing the leper. In this theology of Love the love Francis shows for the leper is God’s love, reflected from Francis. The same Love flows from the lover and the beloved.

As Thomas Traherne put it in the 17th century:

Love in the bosom is the parent of Love, Love in the stream is the effect of Love, Love seen, or dwelling in the object proceedeth from both. Yet are all these, one and the Selfsame Love: though three Loves.

Love in the fountain and Love in the stream are both the same. And therefore are they both equal in Time and Glory. For love communicateth itself: And therefore love in the fountain is the very love communicated to its object. Love in the fountain is love in the stream, and love in the stream equally glorious with love in the fountain. Though it streameth to its object it abideth in the lover, and is the love of the lover.

(Thomas Traherne, Centuries 2, 39-41)

Traherne is a rare beacon in the centuries after Dante.

After 1300 this all-embracing theology of love fades away. Scholastic theology separated God from Creation, and this separation became wider and wider in the Reformation as concerns for sin and predestination grew. The beauty and Love of Creation was no longer the same thing as the beauty and Love of God.

Some say human understanding changed and we all became self-conscious and detached from Nature (and therefore eligible for seats in Dante’s Hell) but it’s also as if the church felt all this love

was too easy. It gave everyone the opportunity, however hard to achieve, of the knowledge of God in the language of Creation and, if drawn by desire, of access to God by way of the mystical ascent.

The “affective” meditations of the Franciscans, in which feeling and Imagination played powerful parts, were quickly abandoned.

The fourteenth century “Cloud of Unknowing”, like Bonaventure’s “Journey of the Soul into God” from 100 years earlier, develops the ideas of Pseudo-Dionysius. Both books use Dionysius’s imagery of the Cloud beyond which God lies. But Bonaventure’s mystical process begins with Creation, and finding God in Nature and ourselves and, drawn by love, rises to the ultimate state of contemplation beyond the cloud – and then returning to see the world in a new light. The Cloud of Unknowing, wonderful though it is, omits the first part and seems to be the guidebook for an escape from Nature.

5 – LOVE CHANGES EVERYTHING

Love draws people, in human relationship, to be something new, more than the individuals, but, as Teilhard du Chardin explains in his “Le Milieu Divin”, all relationships draw people into God, towards the ultimate Union, but the individuals never lose their individuality.

The forgotten 18th century philosopher Floyer Sydenham, who unsuccessfully fought against materialism, made the same point in his unpublished epic poem “Truth”. Sharing of individual minds does not lead to the loss of self. Opening of individual minds is followed

“...Not by the Dissolution of those Minds,

(For Mind, being One, can never be dissolv’d)

But their Enlargement into That Great All.

Not by the Loss of any Form, (for Form

Is Being, & Being ne’er can cease to be)

But Exaltation into Form Divine.”

(Floyer Sydenham, Truth, Book the Nineteenth. BL Add MS 45181-45182)

And Thomas Traherne was saying the same thing in the 17th century:

“All creatures in all nations, and tongues, and people praise God infinitely; and the more, for being your sole and perfect treasures. You are never what you ought till you go out of yourself and walk among them.”

(Thomas Traherne, Centuries of Mediation, 2:76)

Teilhard de Chardin, whose style is rather opaque, has been rediscovered in the 21st century because of his theology of Evolution. I first heard of Teilhard in the late 60s when a favourite composer, and

childhood friend of my grandfather, Edmund Rubbra, wrote his eighth symphony as “homage to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.”

I learned most of what I know of theology from music. To me Teilhard’s message is conveyed in the evolution to simplicity of Rubbra’s third movement.

In this world “Objective” and “Subjective” have no meaning

In love, when we see through shared eyes, we see the world differently – or is it that the world is changed? Do we change the world through Love? Or are we and the world being changed by a Love which is beyond both?

“I would include in this work of Love’ the work of Imagination.”

This is old Mr Mordant.

“Performing together, in a string quartet, or whatever style of music takes your fancy, is also a working of Love. We work together and hope for a spark of grace. We are sharing Imagination – and Imagination is a shared world.

“Think of the poet and his apprentice, walking the green lanes. They see together. They experience together. It will undoubtedly be that there will not only be things seen that they would not have seen if travelling alone, but there will also be meetings, events and discoveries, brought about by Love.

“The world changes around them because they travel together. The world changes if we travel physically alone but bear another in our memory and Imagination.”

“I would agree,” says Maude, the votaress of Virtue, “and there is a truth in the thought that we can bear each other’s burdens in Love and Imagination – and the world changes around us.”

“And don’t think you’re the centre of everything” says the dancer, “This Love is still working in the world when you aren’t there. Look, my river and valley are Forming without us. It’s attracting people and encounters. It’s attracting stories - but they might be the kingfisher’s stories. Whoever it was, long ago, didn’t just feel like building that tower. The valley desired the tower.”

“As you know, “added Mordant, who hadn’t been very interested in the ladies’ observations, “I am interested in Ritual Magic. Plotinus wrote about Love as a creative force a thousand years before your medieval monks. To Plotinus it was Love and Desire that allowed magic to work. If Creation can have a desire within it which can draw things to Form, our own desires might draw Love to change the world if we will it.”

“I would say, I think, there is a truth in what Plotinus says.” Maude spoke very carefully, modestly but with a gentle firmness. “Remember, though, that it is always the same Love. One Love. Love is, as far as this conversation goes, (and our language is only our imperfect way of working with the inexpressible) that which draws to Unity.”

The Countess, who delighted in the play of Images, and to whom all Art was magic, added:

“Perhaps our own desire can affect the world around us, but if that desire is misdirected love, self-centred love, it will not be the Love that draws to Unity. If we will Good we are reflecting God’s will. We are sharing in the creating work of Love. It’s not our Work, just as in the examples we considered earlier, the baker, the composer and the lover. I would say that we must all work as if our art were changing the world. Why should we think there is anything different in the composer combining his harmonies and effects in a symphony and the magician assembling a talisman? Is the magician a composer manqué?”

Maude replied:

“All creative work, to be a work of love, must come from humility. If our desire is focussed inwards to our selves that misdirected love can be destructive to both ourselves and to the world, whether this is a misdirected love that attempts spiritual control, or a misdirected love that wishes to dominate and abuse nature. This, sadly, is our human failing. This is as far as this conversation should go. Beyond this we must pass through the veil to Mystery.”

This Love which draws two or more together and changes the world is something which is not of our making. It is something in which we participate. This is true of two lovers or of a community. A community can be united by Love, regardless of physical meetings, beetle drives, or even of noticeable affection. It can be a mystical body, drawn, as Teilhard says, into God.

6 - THE MASQUE

“Nothing here can be said to have reality,” the severe Urania would say, “beyond the One, and the Numbers which are all reflections of the One.”

Of course. All the rest is just words.

It’s just a ramble in pursuit of Love, and a look at some ways in which Love might be thought of as the “love that moves the sun and stars” – and every other kind of being or body in the “sublunary world”.

It’s a purely personal ramble, mentioning things that I’ve come across, or which have been presented to me, over many years. It reminds me that the work, the Pursuit of Love, or the Pursuit of Virtue, can follow many paths. I might be drawn to the pure science of number. I am certainly drawn to the play of images and language over which the Countess presides, which is also the language of Formation, the language that allows sounds to combine into Music and to find new meanings, the language that makes us ourselves out of stories, memories and dreams, and the language that Nature speaks in in those hills, valleys, plains and cities. I hope I can continue to learn this language, and gather honey from the muses’ garden.

I hope I can go out and Read the World – the “Omniform Reading” which Bonaventure writes about – in which everything has meaning, and as many meanings as readers, but all meanings are Love and lead us to Unity

We can learn the language in all these things, but Love itself, or the Virtue the philosopher talked about, which is the Good, Love in action, cannot be learned through words. In the Mystery of which Maude speaks, every aspect of our being, soul and body, remembers its Unity with all things.

None of this is new. I remember something I wrote just forty years ago, a whole book of poetry, far too long, but with odd moments that excited me at the time. This was 1979, before various distractions sent me in circles. It was “The Book of the House Beautiful.” Love was drawing ideas together in a rather chaotic way. Some things were beginning to find Form. The four “maidens of the house” were there.

Beneath the beams of the hall the four of them joined hands for a dance.

*This is the measure of the damsels' dance,
Pacing the boards, a silent tread –
But the music of their feet, the rhythm
Traced by their circling
Finds out harmonies in the hall,
Coaxes music lost in crevices –
And the house sings, resonates
With sounds to dance in sympathy.*

I hadn't expected this – they joined hands as I wrote. It was a complete surprise, not my invention.

*Music in the house, music for joy
That they should be dancing.
Seasons bound as a timeless year:
She is the Spring before the breaking,
She the Autumn before the Fall,
She is summer's glory waking.
She, Winter's agony, binding all.*

*This is the measure of the damsel's dance,
Conjuring in their rhythmic circuits
A circlet of light in the hall, turning –
Measuring with silent music
Eternity's circle – see – it falls away,*

*The walls open, the house's past
Becomes the immeasurable silent rest
Of spreading, deepening space.
The house is lost. Born into music.*

.....

*The sisters dance, hands linked – linked also
By the beams of light from their eyes.*

*“Whoso danceth not
Knoweth not what cometh to pass.”*

.....

*The ring of eternity sinks home,
Finds the soft walls of the house again.
The sisters part hands. After the dance
Hot tea and Gentleman's Relish.”*

Andrew Baker June 18th 2019