

Finding Spaces in Between

Paul Tillich claims the 'depths' for religion:

The name of this infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being is God. That depth is what the word God means. And if that word has not much meaning for you, translate it, and speak of the depths of your life, of the source of your being, of your ultimate concern, of what you take seriously without reservation [...] For if you know that God means depth, you know much about him. You cannot then call yourself an atheist or unbeliever. For you cannot think or say: Life has no depth! Life itself is shallow...¹

Created Depths?

Vladimir Lossky (Orthodox) writes:

'the mystery of the created being, the reality of a being external to any presence of God, free in relation to His omnipotence... in brief the reality of the *other-than-God*, the irreducible ontological density of the *other*.'²

Jacques Pohier (Roman Catholic) writes that '[God] is not the totality of goodness: the fact all goodness comes from God does not prevent other goodnesses than his own from not being his own, just as the being of creatures is not reduced to the being of God, and is not the being of God, even if it proceeds from the being of God.' (*God in Fragments*, 312).

Rowan Williams says that the fact of our createdness is what God wants. That is, to be a creature is '*of God*'. (*On Christian Theology* 69). Thus, what Williams describes as 'the Promethean myth of humanity struggling against God for its welfare and interests makes no sense...' (69). My wanting to be a creature and to realise my personal aims, aspirations, relationships, gifts and talents in this world is *godly*. Createdness entails

¹ *The Shaking of the Foundations*, London: Penguin, 1962, pp.63-64).

² Lossky, *Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, p.51. Rowan Williams also expresses the doctrine of creation vividly when he writes: 'It simply tells you that the entire situation of the universe, at any given moment, exists as a real situation because of God's reality being, as it were, turned away from God to generate what is not God.' (Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 68).

that we do not need to 'resign from nature by treating God as a successful rival for our attention...', rather to be-in-the-world is in fact what we ought to do as creatures. (cf.72-73 Williams).

Aesthetic and Religious Depths: Consider the following scenarios

- A. Two people from different religions have a joint experience of a work of art (music, painting, sculpture etc.) and – owing to the quality of the work – this has a profoundly emotional effect on them both. When they talk together afterwards, they use phrases like: '...a moving sense of the depths of humanity' and '...it filled me with a great love for humankind' to describe their mutual experience.
- B. Two people from different faiths attend an inter-faith service. The service has a profound effect on all present, the organisers of the service close with a collective interfaith prayer where they speak of the 'one God who unites us all'.

Living in the 'excess' of beauty?

David Bentley Hart: beauty appears unbidden and without desire, instead there is an 'overwhelming givenness'³ about it. Hart develops this further when he considers the notion of 'the gift' and distance: 'the beautiful fosters attachment that is also detachment, possession in dispossession because it can be received only at a distance, only in letting be, as gift...'⁴

Other 'goods': Susan Wolf and 'moral saints'

Her point is that from the high moral ground, 'no plausible argument can justify the use of human resources involved in producing a *pate de canard en crouete* against the possible alternative beneficent ends to which these resources might be put.' ('Moral Saints', 422)

She charges 'moral saints' with being 'blind to some of what the world has to offer'. (424). It is a good thing to pursue excellences that are not dominated by moral sanctity. Such pursuits, although they may in fact be incompatible with high-minded or austere ethical devotion, are nevertheless worthy goals. What is so intriguing about her argument is that she vividly identifies 'ideals' that seem to enjoy autonomy from those defined by religious or moral types. Thus she writes that:

'we make ideals out of athletes, scholars artists – more frivolously, out of cowboys, private eyes, and rock stars. We may strive for Katherine Hepburn's grace, Paul Newman's "cool"; we are attracted to the high-spirited passionate nature of Natasha Rostov; we admire the keen perceptiveness of Lambert

³ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 17

⁴ Ibid. 18

Strether. Though there is certainly nothing immoral about the ideal characters or traits I have in mind, they cannot be superimposed upon the ideal of a moral saint.' (422).

Inner Delight

Teresa of Avila's 'Interior Castle':

'I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as, in heaven there are many mansions.'⁵

'Let us now imagine that this castle, as I have said contains many mansions, some above, other below, others at each side; and in the centre and midst of them all is the chiefest mansion where the most secret things pass between God and the soul'. (202).

'For we ourselves are the castle: and it would be absurd to tell someone to enter a room when he was in it already! *But you must understand that there are many ways of "being" in a place.* Many souls remain in the outer court of the castle, which is the place occupied by the guards; they are not interested in entering it, and have no idea what there is in that wonderful place, or who dwells in it, or even how many rooms it has.' (emphasis mine, 203)

Bonhoeffer's polyphonic self

Speaking from a prison cell:

'I notice repeatedly here how few people there are who can harbour conflicting emotions at the same time [...] we make room in ourselves to some extent, for God and the whole world. We rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep; we are anxious [...] about our life, but at the same time we must think about things much more important life itself.'⁶

David Cheetham, 2015.

⁵ It is interesting that Teresa connects this picture of the inner self as a 'castle' with the mystery of the true *imago dei*: '...He created us in His image and likeness. Now if this is so – and it is – there is no point in fatiguing ourselves by attempting to comprehend the beauty of this castle...' E. Allison Peers, trans. & ed., 'Interior Castle' in *The Complete Works of St. Teresa of Jesus*, Vol. 2, London: Sheed & Ward, 1946: 201.

⁶ *Letters and Papers*: 310-11.