



“A rose has no why”

Nehemiah said, “you enliven everything” (9:6) – usually translated, “you give life to everything”, referring to everything in heaven and on earth. Isaiah 6:3 says “God’s presence fills the entire world” or “the whole earth is full of your glory”. Paul says, we know “that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time,” (Rom. 8:22) and that salvation is not just of mankind, but of the world. In Revelation 21, He who was seated on the throne, the *Christos Pantocrator* of ancient iconography, declares, “I am making all things new” and there is a vision of “a new heaven and a new earth”.

Salvation is not just to do with mankind, but with the meaning of the earth.

It is a mystical idea that mankind is but a link in a chain of being which includes everything in heaven and earth. This chain is the secret of existence extending from the Throne of God to the edge of the universe. The thirteenth century Spanish mystic, who influenced St. John of the Cross, Rabbi Moses de Léon wrote in *The Book of the Pomegranate* that, “there is nothing – not even the tiniest thing – that is not fastened to the links of this chain. Everything is catenated in its mystery, caught in its oneness. God is one, God’s secret is one, all the worlds below and above are all mysteriously one. Divine existence is indivisible. The entire chain is one. Down to the last link, everything is linked with everything else; so divine essence is below as well as above, in heaven and on earth. There is nothing else.”

At the heart of Christian prayer we pray for things to be “on earth as it is in heaven”. The mission is, with God’s help, to bring this about. Mission and spirituality are not simply anthropocentric. They are ecological or eco-theo-logical. Christian, Jewish and Islamic mystics have traditionally had this sensibility in common and they have influenced each other.

Rabbi Moses Cordovero from Safed writing in the sixteenth century about the infinity of God said that because of God’s infinity, nothing can be outside God, and even this “nothing” is created by God “contracting” himself to make room for it. “Realize, rather, that the Infinity of God exists in each existent. Do not say, *This is a stone and not God*. God forbid! Rather, all existence is God, and the stone is a thing pervaded by divinity.” Elsewhere, in his commentary on the *Zohar*, he writes, “God is everything that exists, though everything that exists is not God. It [the Infinity] is present in everything, and everything comes into being from it. Nothing is devoid of its divinity. Everything is within it; it is within everything and outside of everything. There is nothing but it.”

We find this kind of mystical thinking strongly articulated early in the Middle Ages in the West with Nicolas of Cusa (1400-1464) and then in the Dominican priest Johannes ‘Meister’ Eckhard, and it enters deeply into Western thinking, whether Jewish, Catholic, Protestant or Islamic. My own favourite such writer is the seventeenth century, Angelus Silesius in the *Cherubinic Wanderer*. He calls the Infinite Oneness of God “sap” of the universe which he equates with beauty. “The rose has no why. It blossoms without reason.” And with wisdom: “No speck so tiny is, no spark can be so dim/ The wise man does not see God’s splendour deep within.”

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