

Friendship - The Refraction of His Glory, Joy, and Beauty

By: Robert L. Withers

C.S. Lewis, in his section on Friendship in *The Four Loves*, writes:

...Friendship exhibits a glorious "nearness by resemblance" to Heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each has of God. For every soul, seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest. That, says an old author, is why the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy" *to one another* (Isaiah VI, 3). The more we thus share the Heavenly Bread between us, the more we shall all have.

As Barbara Reynolds discusses in her book, *The Passionate Intellect - Dorothy L. Sayers' Encounter with Dante*, Charles Williams took Dante's figure of Beatrice and worked out a concept that Williams termed *co-inherence*, quoting Reynolds on page 176:

It is a principle of divine community, involving substitution and exchange. To the lover, beholding the glory of the Divine in his beloved, the moment of revelation is unique; but it is also universal. The revelation can be experienced by anyone at any time. What is more, the beholder, as it might be Dante, may in turn be a vehicle of glory for someone else.

A number of years ago it struck me that *relationships are sacred trusts*. They are treasures placed in our

hands by God. Of course there are different types and degrees of relationships, but those in the Body of Christ should certainly be calling to one another, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD God Almighty."

Lewis, Dante, Sayers, Williams and, as I'll touch on in a future post, George MacDonald, saw that we can behold the joy and beauty of the Trinity uniquely revealed and refracted in others. This takes the Body of Christ beyond *function* and into *nature* or *essence*. This is beholding the New Jerusalem, a Bride adorned for her Husband with His glory; the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb being the light and the temple.

The NT's portrayal of the Body of Christ is first and foremost organic; function arises out of organic relationship, organic relationship does not arise out of function. While this is tangential to this post, I'll mention that I consider the greatest theological error of my life to be the idea that if I could reproduce the right "form" of church life that I'd have the right substance.

I find myself reflecting on the subject of friendship for a few reasons. On my other blog I've been looking back over my pilgrimage in Christ and thinking about people who have influenced me, and as I've thought about folks I've gained a renewed appreciation for them. Another reason for my reflection is that I've been spending time the past couple of years with Charles Williams, Dante, and Sayers, which has added to the appreciation of friendship that I'd previously gleaned from Lewis and MacDonald. Then there is the fact that Vickie and I are

in a challenging season of life which is causing me to consider the things that are really important. And lastly, as I approach my 60th birthday, more than ever I find myself valuing relationships in general and friendships in particular. For years I've known that I'm the product of friendships - anything in me that is any good, any grace that has come to me or through me, is the result of Christ, either working in my heart directly or through the lives of others, especially through friends.