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## *The Relationality of Creation*

An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Rev. Dr. Bill Harkins

*“The physical structure of the Universe is love. It draws together and unites; in uniting, it differentiates. Love is the core energy of evolution and its goal.”*

~ Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy*

One of my favorite professors at Vanderbilt University was Dr. John Compton, who taught courses in philosophy of science, and science and religion. He was a brilliant teacher whose father, Arthur Compton, was a Nobel Laureate who worked on the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, New Mexico, where John attended high school. John encouraged us to engage in the dialogue between science and religion, ask tough questions, and enjoy and explore the ambiguous spaces between. We read Thomas Kuhn’s book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). It challenged the view of scientific discovery wherein progress is generated and accelerated by a *particular* great scientist. Rather, Kuhn suggested, new discoveries depend on *shared theoretical beliefs, values, and techniques* of the larger scientific community—what he called the “disciplinary matrix” or “paradigm.”

Building upon this, feminist scholars identified attitudes toward gender and race as among those shared values and beliefs, and suggested that we need to question the ways histories of science recount who does what, and *who gets credit*. Evelyn Fox Keller, writing in her book *Reflections on Gender and Science*, suggested that science is neither as impersonal nor as cognitive as we thought. And it is not reserved for male geniuses working on their own. It occurs through collaboration. This includes religious values, critical inquiry, and dialogue.

The year Kuhn’s text was published, the Mercury Friendship 7 mission occurred. John Glenn, piloting the spacecraft, was returning to earth when the automatic control system failed, forcing him to manually navigate the capsule to touchdown. Katherine Johnson, one of the (“Hidden Figures”) African American mathematicians working for NASA, calculated and graphed Glenn’s reentry trajectory *in real time*, accounted for all possible complications, and traced the exact path that Glenn needed to follow in order to safely splash down in the Atlantic.

Such stories amplify and deepen the work of Kuhn, Keller, and others who encourage us to co-create a future in which more and different people—*regardless of race, gender, religion, class, or sexual identity*—can imagine themselves as participants in new unfolding discoveries.

At heart, these narratives evoke the *relationality* of Creation, and God’s love, an evolving, divine, dynamic energy. As the poet Wallace Stevens said, “Nothing is itself taken alone. Things are because of interrelations or interactions.” And as Ilia Delio has written in *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being*, “If being is intrinsically relational (as the Trinity evokes) then nothing exists independently or autonomously. Rather, “to be” is “to be with” . . . I do not exist in order that I may possess; rather, I exist in order that I may give of myself, for it is in giving that I am myself.” Or, as Mary Oliver said so well,

“And what do I risk to tell you this, which is all I know?  
Love yourself. Then forget it. Then, love the world.”

Sounds like a relational, Incarnational, Trinitarian Gospel to me. I pray that in this long, green season of Pentecost we find

ways to live into, and out of this “matrix” of God’s unfolding Creation.

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