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Love

A Brief History Through Western Christianity

Carter Lindberg

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To Alice

Preface

"What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?"
Judges 14:18

For Samson, that great athlete, sexual and otherwise, whose story is related in the book of Judges, the answer to the riddle is love. As the story progresses through Samson's affair with Delilah, we learn that love not only makes the world go 'round; lack of love literally brings everything crashing down. In the words of the Song of Songs (8:6–7): "love is strong as death, passion as fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it." The centrality of love to human life permeates biblical writings from the erotic poetry of the Song of Songs to the shorthand gospel of John 3:16 that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Not only the biblical writers, but philosophers, poets, and theologians from Plato through Dante to C. S. Lewis have struggled to describe, define, and demonstrate love. Their

efforts continue to inform, deform, and reform present understandings and experiences of love. The history of love ranges from Adam and Eve to the most recent pot-boiler romance novel, from star-crossed lovers to parents and children, from friends to enemies, from medieval troubadours to contemporary minstrels of all stripes, from churches to talk shows. Is love an "eternal idea"? Or does the understanding of love have a history? Does love change, grow, diminish? Does spousal profession of love have the same meaning at the altar and at the golden anniversary? Can marriage be based on love? Is love in an arranged marriage of the tenth century comparable to love in a voluntary marriage of the twenty-first? Indeed, what do marriage and love have to do with each other? Do parents love their children less or more now than in prior times? Is love a feeling? Is love an act? Is love an art? Is love voluntary or involuntary, or both? How is self-love related to love of the neighbor? Does love extend to enemies? What is the relation of love to sexuality? Can love be commanded? Is love redemptive? Is love divine? Is divinity love? How does love form and inform our existence? What, indeed, *is* love? The questions seem to have no end, and any effort to set forth a history of love, especially a "brief" one, must be highly selective. Rather than "justify" my selections, I take refuge in the candor of Eusebius (c.260–c.340), "the father of church history," who wrote at the beginning of his *The History of the Church*: "I have picked out whatever seems relevant to the task I have undertaken, plucking like flowers in literary pastures the helpful contributions of earlier writers, to be embodied in the continuous narrative I have in mind." Obviously, in the following "history," many beautiful flowers have been left in the pastures.

The following "brief history of love" presents some of the theoretical and practical "answers" to questions about love set forth in Western culture from early reflections in

Greco-Roman culture to the present. Since a dominant thread running through Western culture is Christianity in its many expressions, we shall approach our subject from its perspective. But even this limitation is too broad because every aspect of Christian theology expresses in one way or another a concept of love. It is possible under the rubric of love to include anything and everything. Library shelves groan under the weight of innumerable studies on this theme. To read and understand even a small fraction of all these studies is far beyond my ability. There is also the dangerous professorial penchant of killing the subject. As Søren Kierkegaard noted, theology professors too often reverse the miracle of Cana: they turn wine into water. Therefore I have attempted a broad narrative of love in Western history. The downside of such a "brief" history is that every reader will miss his or her favorite philosopher, theologian, or saint. I hope that in spite of such disappointments, this little volume may provide an entrée to a fascinating and complex subject. To that end, I have avoided footnotes but have provided a bibliography of the works directly informing my views for those who wish to fill in the gaps of this endeavor as well as find correctives to my synthesis.

So many people have contributed to this project that there is not space to grant them their deserved gratitude. Blackwell's editors, especially Rebecca Harkin, have been wonderfully supportive. I am grateful to students at Boston University School of Theology who shared their insights in seminars on the topic of Christian love. I am also grateful to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia where I was privileged to be the St. John's Visiting Professor of Church History in the spring of 2005. The students there in the seminar on Christian love provided valuable insights and perspectives, but of course like my other students should not be blamed for the final text. Our neighbors, Pat and Deb Garner, often – with wine-fortified courage! – asked how this project was going, listened

patiently, and asked great questions during the many months of writing. As always I am grateful to George W. Forell, my Doktor-Vater, perpetual mentor, and friend, who many decades ago introduced me to this subject in his own seminar, and then guided my dissertation on Luther's concept of love. Above all, I am grateful for the love and laughter of Alice.

Chapter 1

The Language of Love

"The Greeks have a word for it" is an old cliché but nonetheless apt for our subject. Indeed, in relation to "love," the Greeks not only had *a* word, they had many words! Like so many aspects of Western culture, our understandings and views of love have been influenced by contributions from Greek thought. The Greek vocabulary for "love" includes the nouns "storge," "epithymia," "philia," "eros," and "agape," and their respective verb forms. On occasion some of these words for love are interchangeable but they are not strong synonyms. As we shall see, the history of the language of love is intimately related to the history of ideas. But as some wag once put it, the history of ideas is akin to nailing jello to the wall. Hence, caveat emptor, readers are warned that past historical contexts are often foreign countries and that words familiar to us may have been used quite differently in different times and places. For example, Cheyette notes in his study of medieval troubadour literature that when we moderns limit our concept of love to a sentiment, we miss its medieval political and social meanings. Bolkestein makes a similar

point in his study of pre-Christian social welfare when he notes that in classical culture "philanthropy" meant love among men or human love not charity or social welfare. And Jaeger notes that by the time of Shakespeare, the increasing privatization of love viewed public expressions of love for such charismatic persons as kings, rulers, churchmen, and saints – common in the Middle Ages – as hypocritical gambits for advancement.

Some of the many Greek terms for love no longer have much currency in our vocabulary. *Storge*, a more literary term for familial love or parental affection, and *epithymia*, a term associated with libido or desire have not had a significant impact on the Western vocabulary of love. *Philia*, *eros*, and *agape*, on the other hand, have significantly influenced Western languages and ideas. *Philia*, with meanings of friendship, close family relations, and human solidarity, is familiar in its English forms of *philadelphia* for brotherly love and philanthropy for benevolence. These expressions of concern for the well-being of others, both of which are present in the Greek New Testament, are reversed in the related term philander. Eros is familiar in modern languages in the related forms of the word "erotic."

In the pre-philosophical Greek cosmogonies, theories of the generation or birth of the cosmos, Eros appears as a uniting force. Hesiod, the great eighth-century-BCE poet next to Homer, presents Eros as one of the first to emerge from the dark abyss of Chaos, and then as the one who draws everything together, the creative, uniting force. Eros is "the most beautiful of the immortal gods, who in every man and every god softens the sinews and overpowers the prudent purpose of the mind." Ancient Greek literature portrays Eros as a violent, crafty god whose arrows drive people into torment and passion for the first person seen after they are struck. In the later Greek myths, Eros is the personification of love as sexual desire.

His famous shrine at Thespiai, a site for Plutarch's (45–c.125 CE) *Erotikos* ("Dialogue on Love"), held quadrennial festivals to love. Eros was often presented as the son of Aphrodite (Venus to the Romans; goddess of love and beauty) and Ares (Mars to the Romans; god of war). Hesiod portrays Aphrodite's origin in the white foam that arose from the severed genitals of Uranus thrown in the sea by his son Cronos. Hence the famous Botticelli image of Venus on the half-shell arising from the sea. And Ares, Homer tells us in the *Iliad*, was hated by his father Zeus. With parents like that, it is no wonder that Western culture has perennially associated sex and violence. Epicurus (300 BCE) defined Eros as "a strong appetite for sexual pleasures, accompanied by furor and agony." The aggressive aspect of love in the Greek tradition often portrayed the lover as pursuer. Thus in the myth of Apollo and Daphne, Apollo – the god of manly youth and beauty – pursued the nymph Daphne who escaped him by being transformed into a Laurel tree. One needs only to review the Greek myths to realize that Freud was not the first to posit the relationship of sex and death, nor was Stanley Kubrick's 1964 movie, *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, its first artistic expression.

Eros, the handsome god of sexual love – "the most beautiful of all the gods" – also is associated with the chaos and death accompanying the violent physical desire seen in the stories of Paris and Helen, Zeus and Hera. Paris gave the "apple of discord," a gold apple inscribed "for the fairest," to Aphrodite who thereupon promised him the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen. So Paris carried off Helen, the wife of Menelaus, thereby setting in motion the Trojan War, the destruction of Troy, the death of Achilles, and his own death. The Olympian gods, of whom Zeus is the "father," were not paragons of monogamous or faithful marriages, but rather it seems the initiators and models of the dysfunctional family. Their love stories are

stories of violence and rape. The relations of Zeus and his sister-wife Hera with each other as well as others cannot be abbreviated here, but their activities in sex and war make the most bizarre television talk shows pale in comparison. The Greek poets could portray Eros as cunning and cruel, instilling people with a maniacal drive that disrupts reason and life itself, a theme later explored in Plato's (c.429–327 BCE) *Phaedrus*. Centuries after Hesiod, the Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE) noted in his *The Art of Love*, "love is a kind of war." We often forget this disruptive element because we are more familiar with the personification of Eros under his Latin name, Cupid (also named Amor). But the cute, winged, chubby lad of our Valentine's Day cards is far removed from the primal force of nature with its potential for mad passion, the irrationality and chaos epitomized by Eros's sharp arrows that cause severe, painful, and even mortal wounds. There is a sense in which this divine madness of Eros was "baptized" in medieval and early modern Catholic mysticism. For example, St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), a "Doctor of the Church" since 1970, wrote of the divine madness that overcame her when pierced by the arrows of God her Lover: "The pain was so great that I screamed aloud; but at the same time I felt such infinite sweetness that I wished the pain to last forever." The (orgasmic) rapture of such wounds are captured in Bernini's sculpture "The Ecstasy of St. Teresa" (1645–1652; Santa Maria Vittoria, Rome) that depicts her "transverberation" – an angel plunging a flaming golden arrow into her heart. When the angel withdrew the arrow, "I thought he was carrying off with him the deepest part of me; and he left me all on fire with great love of God." The image is repeated in the baroque engraving, "Beatrice and the Arrow of Divine Love" (by Liska, 1708) that depicts the Cistercian Beatrice of Nazareth (1200–1268) being stabbed in the chest by an arrow.

A classic Greek expression of the effort to exert rational control over Eros or at least to gain understanding of such

love is Plato's dialogue *Symposium*, also known as the *Banquet*. Martha Nussbaum in her study, *The Fragility of Goodness*, extensively analyses the historical–political context and multi-faceted content of this dialogue, juxtaposing Socrates' famous speech on love (Eros) to that of Alcibiades. I shall focus on Socrates to the neglect of the other major participants because it is largely Socrates' perspective that has influenced the idea of love as an ascent from the material to the spiritual world, the striving for immortality. The immediate setting for the dialogue is a banquet hosted by the poet Agathon who has just won a prize for his poetry. The company decides that their topic of conversation will be Eros. When it is Socrates' turn to discuss love, he relates the knowledge of love revealed to him by the priestess Diotima. Love is either the desire for that which is not possessed or the desire not to lose what is loved. In either case, love is marked by a lack and thus the desire to acquire what is lacking. This is because, Diotima explains, love was born at the gods' feast celebrating Aphrodite's birthday at which Poverty and the god Plenty slept together and conceived Love, who is neither mortal nor immortal. In Diotima's words, love "is always poor," "is always in distress," always in search of fulfillment. Here Eros is the human quest for fulfillment; the drive to possess the good forever.

Plato's understanding of love is tied to his *eudaimonia* (eudaemonism), often translated as the drive toward happiness. We miss the dynamic of eudaemonism, however, if we think of it in a modern psychological sense of feeling pleasure. Plato, and then Aristotle, thought of eudaemonism as an active drive (*daimon*) toward the good (*eu*), that is, the drive to living and doing well. Diotima says to Socrates: "the happy are made happy by the acquisition of good things." Eros in this sense is what C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* termed "need-love." Love is the striving or ambition that characterizes all human activity. However, the love of pleasure, wealth, fame, persons,

beauty does not finally alleviate love's poverty or need because all temporal things perish. That is why, Diotima affirms, "all men . . . desire the immortal." Ascent toward immortality begins on the biological level – the hope that children will preserve the memory of the father – and progresses toward the more permanent "children" of fame and ideas. "Who," Diotima says, "when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones?" The imagery of ascent is explicit: "[B]egin from the beauties of the earth and mount upward for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions . . . [to] the notion of absolute beauty, . . ." The perception of beauty in the world recalls in the soul the memory of ideal beauty, and the recollection of beauty and truth inspire yearning for a higher existence in the realm of pure ideas; an immortal realm not subject to the decay and death of the world. With its spiritualizing ascent to the primal form of beauty, the soul discovers a radiance of the Beautiful, the inspired order of the world. The motif of ascent from lower to higher, earth to heaven, will imbue medieval Christian mysticism and theology. The influence of Plato's *Symposium* extended into the early modern period through Dante's (1265–1321) *Convivio* and Marsilio Ficino's (1433–1499) *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love* that in turn influenced literature for the next couple of centuries.

The downside of this Hellenistic "beatific vision" was that in identifying the good with the beautiful, there arose the tendency to associate evil with the ugly and the deformed. As Younger notes in the entry "Beauty Contests" in his *Sex in the Ancient World*, "male beauty was considered to connote good character. Similarly, the ugly man was reckoned poor in spirit. . . ." It should be added that the Greeks were not

alone in associating external circumstances of life with the intellectual, spiritual, and moral condition of persons. In the Bible, Job's sufferings are attributed to his sin; in the medieval period, leprosy is seen as a disease of the soul, and the Knights of the Round Table are always exceedingly handsome; in our days, poverty is often attributed to a moral flaw in the poor person.

The image of love as an ascent motivated by a hierarchy of increasing value for the lover is graphically displayed in the long art history of images of the ladder to heaven. The best known of these innumerable artistic renditions relate, in the Byzantine world, to John Climacus's (c.570–c.649) "Ladder of Paradise" and in the medieval West to the "Ladder of Virtues" in the twelfth-century "Garden of Delights." In the Garden of Delights image, figures fall off the ladder because they are attracted to lesser goods than the highest good, heaven, at the top of the ladder. It is significant that the figure at the very top of the ladder receiving the "crown of life" from the hand of God is labeled "caritas," medieval Latin for love. Thus Plato's recasting of the older myths of Eros into a teleology of love was appropriated by Christian iconography. Love is directed toward an end, toward an immortality freed from the fetters of physical existence, freed from the downward pull of appetites such as sexual desire, and freed from loving things or persons for their own sake because eternal happiness cannot be acquired in what is perishable. Eros is finally the desire to overcome desire. Paradoxically, then, Eros may lead to asceticism. At any rate, Eros is the ladder to divinity, from the perishable world to the imperishable, from mortality to immortality. So understood, love is redemptive; it transcends the vulnerabilities of life in the world. Yet in a sense this may be called a kind of redemptive hedonism, the search for spiritual pleasure beyond mere physical pleasure; the use of things and others for one's quest for immortality. That is why some

have argued that Platonic Eros is ultimately egocentric, self-love desiring to be self-sufficient.

Although Aristotle (384–322 BCE) differed significantly from his teacher Plato in ways we cannot pursue here, he too conceived of love as an ascent or a striving for perfection, for pure form in Aristotle's terms. Aristotle rationalized the ancient Greek Eros into the "Unmoved Mover." In Aristotle's chapter on the "Eternal Being" in his *Metaphysics* he concludes: "The self-sufficient activity of the divine is life at its eternal best. We maintain, therefore, that the divine is the eternal best living being, so that the divine is life unending, continuous, and eternal....It has also been shown that the first mover cannot be moved [because it is without attributes; it is impassive] and is unalterable...." The Unmoved Mover moves us "as an object of love." As Pure Form, it does not itself act but rather its perfection kindles eros to strive for it. The world and all its life arises from its longing for God. Thus, love is a one-way street: humankind must love God; but it is impossible for God to love humankind for that would detract from the perfection of the First Cause which cannot think of anything except what is perfect, i.e., himself.

In the eighth and ninth books of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle also diverges from Plato in discussing friendship as a love of benevolence rather than a love of desire. Thus the guiding conceptual word is not eros but *philia*. Nussbaum argues that "friendship" is too weak a translation of *philia* because it does not convey the "very strongest affective relationships that human beings form," including those that have a "passionate sexual component." She prefers to translate *philia* by the word "love." Bolkestein also notes that "friendship" is not identical with the Greek "philia," a word that includes affective relations closer to what moderns term love, such as those of parents and children, brothers and sisters. *Philia* also has the meanings of comradeship and social

affiliations. In Aristotle's *Ethics*, he placed *philia* in his doctrine of the practical virtues. *Philia* as a feeling rests upon a *habitus* ("habit" in the sense of a characteristic attained by repeated, habitual action). The one loving in the sense of *philia* therefore wills the good differently than the person moved by erotic desire: he wills the good for the other for the sake of the other. The lovable is of three forms: the good, the pleasurable, and the useful. Correspondingly there are three forms of friendship. The consummate friendship is that of the good. In this friendship the friend is loved for his or her own sake, not for the sake of something useful or pleasurable that is obtainable through him or her. Their friendship is durable, based upon trust and mutuality.

This friendship-love grounded upon willing the good for the other for the sake of the other is named *eunoia*, benevolence. Because rationally one always desires the good for oneself, the question remains about the possibility of benevolent relationships. Aristotle answers that love to another derives from self-love (*philautia*). The precedence of self-love has its source in a universal principle. All existing being is affirmable and lovable being. Thus when a master craftsman loves his work, he fundamentally loves himself, i.e., his own self, becoming manifest in the work; a similar transference illustrates love to others, to friends. Thus each person initially loves himself, and each person is himself his best friend. To love means to assign good things to the beloved. The self-love that thinks the good exists in possessions, honor, and bodily pleasure is reprehensible. True self-love allots oneself the most beautiful and the good in the highest sense; in this way the person lives to please the best in him or herself. Hence, in this self-love there is also the possibility of self-sacrifice. Still even if a person renounces a noble deed for his friend, he acts according to the command of self-love: with his magnanimous renunciation he allocates to himself the better lot. "[I]f all men were to compete for

what is noble and put all their efforts into the performance of the noblest actions, all the needs of the community will have been met, and each individual will have the greatest of goods, since that is what virtue is." The Aristotelian orientation to friendship was continued by Cicero (106–43 BCE).

Cicero's writing on friendship, *De amicitia*, was appropriated by medieval Christian culture and blended with biblical precepts by, among others, the famous Cistercian abbot and spiritual writer, Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167), the "patron saint of friendship." Some scholars have suggested that Aelred's best known work, *Spiritual Friendship*, is mainly a reworking of Cicero's *De amicitia*. Another example is Richard de Fournival (1201–1260), physician and cleric, whose *Advice on Love* praises love as "the virtue of virtues." Thus, "as Cicero tells us, self-interest must come second to love, not vice-versa." Fournival refers to Cicero's oft-repeated definition of friendship when he writes: "Cicero is speaking about such spiritual love when he says that love is a common feeling of compassion and good will for all things divine and human."

It was the Roman poet Virgil (70–19 BCE) who gave Western culture one of its most overworked phrases: "Amor vincit omnia." "Love conquers all" – the inscription on Chaucer's Prioress's brooch – is so commonplace that its origin in Virgil's *Eclogue* is often forgotten. His epic *Aeneid* on the foundation of Rome, as well as his other writings, were a staple of Western Christian culture through the Renaissance, and he was believed to be a "Christian by nature" before Christ because of his ethics. Virgil is Dante's guide through Hell and Purgatory, but has to remain in Limbo.

In addition to the classical influences of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, the works of Plutarch (45–c.125 CE) and Ovid have been interwoven in Western concepts of love up to the present. Plutarch's celebration and promulgation of the philosophy and values of Greece, whose political viability by his time had been replaced by Rome, find expression in his *Moralia*. Among these collected essays on ethics are treatises on love, brotherly love, and marriage, as well as on friendship and the education of children; writings admired by Montaigne and Shakespeare. Plutarch softened the sharp edges of the received Platonic misogyny in discussing marriage as companionship and friendship. Physical intimacies in marriage, he wrote, "are the seeds of friendship;" and it is absurd "to declare that women have no share in excellence." We are to honor and cultivate friends and relatives "for we are neither able nor by nature fitted to live solitary, without friends and without companionship."

Plutarch's dialogue on "Love" (*Erotikos*), an echo of Plato's *Symposium*, is of interest for his praise of marriage over "boy-love." It seems that pederasty may still have been a matter of debate centuries after the late Plato began to question it and Aristotle had condemned homosexual relationships as a disease. In *Erotikos*, Protogenes claims that "there is only one genuine Love, that of boys," and that "of true Love the women's apartment has no shred." The only reason for marriage is that it is "necessary for the propagation of the race." In response, Daphnaios asserts that marriage leads to friendship and mutual respect whereas boy-love is contrary to nature. "But the love of virtuous women not only undergoes no autumn, but flourishes even with hoary head and wrinkles and abides forever in tombs and monuments. Very few unions of male lovers have endured, but of men and women joined in love we can count myriads of cases where unions wholly faithful have been maintained loyally and eagerly to the end." The dialogue, including other participants, reviews the classical Hellenistic views and stories of Eros including the sense of divinely inspired "madness." "This passion is commonly called 'enthusiasm,' . . . because it shares and participates in a divine [*theos*] power." "Enthusiasm" is literally "God-withinism" (*entheos*).

One of the most influential classical writers upon medieval literature and the development of what is known today as "courtly love" was Ovid. He is best known for his *Ars amatoria* (*The Art of Love*) and *Amoris remedia* (*Cures for Love*). These two works in particular are clear sources for Andreas Capellanus's (twelfth-century) *De arte honesti amandi*, usually called *The Art of Courtly Love*, and for the *Roman de la Rose* (*The Romance of the Rose*) (thirteenth century) begun by Guillaume de Lorris and completed by Jean de Meun. As Allen notes, the major French writers of the eleventh century knew Ovid as well as the Bible by heart. However, all too often, medieval writers did not grasp Ovid's parody and satire, and thus took him seriously. Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374) thought Ovid wanton and condemned his *Ars amatoria*. On the other hand, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) praised Ovid for showing how "to kindle the sacred fires of Venus in cold hearts," and used his stories in the *Decameron*. And Chaucer (1343–1400) referred to Ovid as "Venus's clerk."

As mentioned earlier, Ovid compared love to war: "Love is a kind of war, and no assignment for cowards;" and every lover is a warrior under the command of Love. Ovid's advice when caught in multiple affairs: "swear up and down it's a lie.... Wear yourself out if you must, and prove, in her bed, that you could not possibly be that good, coming from some other girl." Indeed, affairs should be kept secret to avoid the complications that arise from angry husbands and jealous women. Ovid adds that this very secrecy will make affairs more pleasant. Deceit and manipulation are among the techniques the teacher in this manual of seduction promotes as skills the reader may practice to gain his goal.

With the rise of Christianity as a world religion, the classical reflections on love were called into question by the church. The initial critique from the side of the biblical tradition was not primarily ethical but rather theological. The biblical

tradition was totally at odds with the common Greek conviction that the relationship of the gods to humankind excludes a love relationship. As noted, Aristotle thematized love cosmologically with his argument of the unmoved mover. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle posited the highest good as the ultimate ground of movement because it moves others as the object of their love and desire. The Absolute is the quintessence of perfection that thereby moves everything to strive for it. The final cause thereby remains in itself exempt from movement because movement denotes a lack, a desire for fulfillment. Since the Absolute lacks nothing it also desires nothing. Thus the Absolute need not and does not communicate with any but the Absolute. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, love in the form of self-love becomes relevant as it moves the virtuous to implement for himself the most beautiful and best actions.

Between the Platonic theory of Eros and the Aristotelian teaching of friendly benevolence on the one side and the beginnings of a Christian theology on the other side there appeared at first to be an unbridgeable gap. The Bible understands the relationship between God and the people of Israel and thus extending to humankind to be a relationship of reciprocal love; a relationship that therefore includes self-disclosure and communication. In the Bible, God is presented as the God who communicates his own self to humankind. Furthermore, the Hellenistic anthropocentric perspective permeated the "divine Eros" making it – in its better expressions! – analogous to human love. The biblical perspective viewed human love from a theocentric perspective – love to others is to be analogous to divine love. In contrast to Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, the biblical God enters history, moves and loves humankind encouraging people to call him "Abba," i.e., "Father." To say "our Father" expresses a relationship of trustful love.

Furthermore, "love" in the biblical accounts is rendered by an alternative Greek vocabulary. In place of the usual Greek

word for love, eros, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and then the Greek New Testament used agape to designate at the same time the creating and redeeming love of God to the world and to humankind, the reciprocal love of humankind to God, and the love of persons as the witness of human love to God.

Agape is a comprehensive term including expressions of the above loves, which in the New Testament specifically expresses God's absolute and redemptive love shown in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Of the many Greek words for love, eros and agape have had particular significance for the Christian concept of love. It seems that agape was not a particularly significant part of the classical Greek religious and philosophical vocabulary of love. Lexicons such as Peters' *Greek Philosophical Terms* have extended entries on eros but not on agape. However, readers of the Greek New Testament have long been aware that agape is the dominant term for love in the Bible, and that eros does not appear in the texts at all. Assuming the writers of the Greek New Testament were self-conscious in their choice of vocabulary, the obvious question is why they chose the term agape and excluded the term eros. One reason may be that the term agape did not have the philosophical, religious, and ethical baggage associated with eros. In addition, the New Testament authors, themselves Jews, had ready to hand their Scripture, the Hebrew Bible, already in Greek translation. Known as the "Septuagint" or "LXX" in reference to the legendary number of 70 translators, this Greek translation of the "Old Testament," in circulation by around 100 BCE, used the term agape to translate the Hebrew words for love, "'aheb" and "hesed." While "'aheb" may refer to loving things, it is a comprehensive term for the reciprocal love between persons and that between God and people. Such reciprocal love is to be responsibly active in serving others and maintaining relationships. "Hesed" is that

personal love that promotes the well-being of others. It is rooted in God's faithful and redeeming love, and thus is to act likewise toward others. Following the model of the Septuagint, the agape forms for love in the New Testament undergo a fundamental revaluation in relation to the common Greek language usage; the central meaning of love is set forth as the affection of persons to one another, God's affection to persons, and persons' affection to God.

There is no doubt that the biblical authors used the linguistic tools available to them, and that Greek was the common language of the Mediterranean world. The question, however, is whether the New Testament writers consciously used "agape" in contrast to "eros" in order to convey a specific theological meaning. Günther and Link in their article on love argue that they did: "It is because all human thought, feeling, action and worship are a response to a previous movement by God, that the LXX prefers the simpler word *agape* to the more loaded *eros*. The completely different direction of thought makes this quite understandable." This theologically informed choice was forcefully argued by Anders Nygren (1890–1978) in his study *Agape and Eros*. While Nygren was not the first to note the biblical use of agape for love, he so strongly emphasized the Christian use of agape and so sharply posed the historical–theological opposition of agape and eros, that nearly all consequent studies of the concept of love have reacted to his work.

In *Agape and Eros*, Nygren intended to set forth and to clarify the distinctive character of the Christian concept of love, agape, in contrast to the Greek concept of eros. Agape is primarily God's love, even when expressed by humans. Agape is a descending redemptive love, from God to humankind. Agape is completely unselfish; it is sacrificial giving. Agape loves the other and thereby creates value in the other. Eros, on the other hand, is acquisitive desire; it is the ascending movement

of human attempts to reach God (however perceived). Eros is egocentric and is the highest form of self-assertion. It is primarily an acquisitive desire that loves its object for the value it sees in it. We might say that the opposition between agape and eros may be expressed with the theological epigram that salvation is received not achieved. We shall have the opportunity to discuss criticisms of Nygren's argument when we get to the modern period. For now, we may continue to reflect on the developing vocabulary of love.

By the early fourth century, the church had moved from a persecuted minority to an established position in the Roman Empire. Consequently the language of the Western church was no longer Greek but Latin. Latin did not possess the philosophical and literary distinctions of Greek. So, for example, the Greek eros and *philia* are both expressed by the Latin *amor*. Given the great importance of Scripture to Christianity, the first Latin Christian texts were most probably translations of the Bible. Agape was translated by three Latin words: *caritas*, *dilectio*, and *amor*. *Caritas* is the love of God and also ethical virtue. *Dilectio* is love in the sense of an act of the will on the basis of previous choice. The dominant word choice is *caritas*; *amor* is the least used for translating the Bible. *Dilectio* and *caritas* express the biblical law of love of God and neighbor. Latin-speaking Christians were accustomed to these words in reading and hearing Scripture. The words, while coming from profane Latin, now carried a new sense, a biblical sense of love.

In her massive study of the Latin vocabulary of Christian charity, Hélène Pétré argues that the early Christian claim of a new gospel required a new vocabulary to express that claim and its ramifications. Of course the early Christians were not privy to some special language but rather spoke the languages of their context, first Greek and then Latin. In the process of translating literally and theologically from Hebrew to Greek to

Latin, the authors of the Bible struggled to utilize the linguistic resources at their disposal. Later Christian writers, influenced by biblical vocabulary, continued this process of adapting profane language to evangelical usage. According to Pétré, the most characteristic example of the influence of the biblical text on the Christian sense of words is that of "caritas." *Caritas* was designated to translate the Greek *agape*. This old Latin word had a variety of senses: familial affection, friendship, sometimes patriotism. It took on the special sense of love of God and love of the neighbor for the Christians. At the same time it took on a rich religious and ethical content due to the frequency of its use in the Latin Bible. *Caritas* expressed in the least imperfectly possible way the nature of God of which the essential attribute is love: "God is caritas" (1 John 4:8,16). Hence the title of Pope Benedict XVI's 2006 encyclical, "Deus Caritas Est." *Caritas* expresses the incomprehensible benevolence of God for humankind: "See what caritatem the Father has given us" (1 John 3:1; cf. 3:16; 4:9, 16; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4). *Caritas* sums up the entire Christian ethic, the law and the prophets, because the only thing demanded of the Christian is the two loves, the love of God and the love of others. *Caritas* is the compassionate and benevolent love for the poor; it is patience, mildness, unselfish (1 Cor. 13:4); it is dedicated to serve others (Gal. 5:13); it is mutual support (Eph. 4:2); it is the gift of the life that configures human love on the love of God (1 John 3:16).

These texts, as well as others, illustrate the change in import of the word from its profane to its religious sense. Vocabulary is formed in a word's usage, the resonance it evokes, its affective character, rather than solely in its unique intellectual content. There are splendid words, words that evoke an ideal and for that reason have a great expressive richness. This is so particularly in the language of a group. Words such as *caritas* gained a new quality in Christian language because they

express a notion that is at the same time ethical and religious. The banal comparison of a society with a living organism, expressed by use of the word "corpus," picks up a completely special force and life when, following St. Paul, the church considers itself the "body of Christ," and Christians as "members of Christ." For the Christian community, *caritas* was not simply a human sentiment; it was the highest of the virtues for it conformed the person to God. Why did the word *caritas* itself and its synonyms so frequently recur in Christian authors if their religion was not, above all, the religion of love? It is not without interest for the history of ideas that this name was adopted by Christianity as that of the greatest and most characteristic of the virtues that it preached; it summed up all its ethics.

Toward the end of his *Confessions*, St. Augustine (354–430), the major theologian of Western Christianity, wrote: "Behold, the single love of God and of our neighbor, by what manifold sacraments and innumerable languages, and in each several language in how innumerable modes of speaking, it is bodily expressed." We shall next look at the "innumerable modes" of love expressed in the Bible.

Chapter 2

Biblical Views of Love

The concept of love in the Hebrew Bible reflects the development of biblical texts over a long period of time and in changing social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, the Hebrew Bible includes many types of literature: poetry, prophecy, wisdom, law codes, and narratives. Hence to assume that *a* concept of love can be abstracted or systematized from the rich and varied literature of the Hebrew Bible is misleading. A unified fundamental meaning of the Hebrew word-stem "to love" can hardly be determined because the concept covers a broad field of meaning ranging from preferences ("for he loved the soil," 2 Chron. 26:10) and proverbs ("Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it," Prov. 15:17), to the erotic poetry of the Song of Songs ("Upon my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves," 3:1), spousal affection ("Isaac . . . took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her," Gen. 24:67), and friendship ("Jonathan loved him [David] as his own soul," 1 Sam. 18:1), to God's love for his people ("When Israel was a child, I loved him," Hosea 11:1), for individual Israelites

The God of Israel expects not just a portion but all of Israel's love: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4–5). Love to God is not wordless rapture, but is reciprocal and capable of expression. Hence, God's commands and prohibitions shall be kept "in your heart," and publicly expressed and passed on to the next generation. "Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:7–9).

Moses makes it clear to the people that the relationship with God is not just a past event but a continuing, contemporary relationship. "The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today" (Deut. 5:2–3). As with any relationship, the partners are expected to remain faithful. "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Deut. 5:9–10).

The biblical text goes on to narrate a rocky history of this love between God and his people. Time after time, the prophets warn of and then explicate the social and political catastrophes resulting from the people falling in love with false gods. These adulterous relationships, the breaking faith with the covenant, are evident in the oppression of the poor, the widow, and the orphan. The specifics of such self-aggrandizement in place of loving the neighbor as oneself are sharply and succinctly detailed in the book of Amos.

Marriage imagery for the relationship between God and Israel is developed in a startling way in the book of Hosea.

God tells Hosea to take a whore for a wife, and to have children by her as a parabolic action and metaphor for Israel's infidelity and God's faithfulness and love in spite of that infidelity. God's love for Israel is presented as a shocking defiance of convention. "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord" (Hosea 1:2). "The Lord said to me again, 'Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods . . . " (Hosea 3:1). Israel's life arose out of God's love, a love that even as Israel falls into adultery cannot be turned aside. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, . . . The more I called them, the more . . . they kept sacrificing . . . to idols. How can I give you up, . . . ? . . . I will not execute my fierce anger; . . . for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath" (Hosea 11:1–9). Els notes that marriage imagery signifies the personal quality of God's love, and that Hosea in chapter 11 "comes near to saying that God *is* love." Israel deserves destruction for faithlessness, yet God's love remains steadfast: "I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them" (Hosea 14:4).

While the people may not always remain faithful to God, God remains faithful to them. God's love is not eroded by the vagaries of human response but is the nature of God. "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Isa. 54:10); "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer. 31:3). The prophets reiterate God's "gracious deeds . . . according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Isa. 63:7). The future, according to Jeremiah, holds the promise of a new covenant. "It will not be like the covenant that I made with

their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sins no more" (Jer. 31:31–34). The sovereign God who in his love relationship to Israel tolerates no third party, is at the same time ready to be entirely Israel's life.

What then is Israel's life in love with God to be? It is clearly not a life of sentimentality or ecstasy but rather an ethical life. The idea of a subjective feeling of love for God is rare. The Bible as a whole does not advance the mystical religiosity that permeates classical Greek religion. Likewise, the Bible does not promote mystical union with God through the rituals of nature religions. The Hebrew Bible records ongoing attacks on the Canaanite fertility cults revolving around Baal worship with its phallic symbols of pillars and its sacred prostitution. "You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods, . . . Break down their altars, smash their pillars, burn their sacred poles . . ." (Deut. 12:2–3; cf. also 2 Kings 23: 4–15). Unlike the ancient Near Eastern divinization of natural forces with the assumption that sex is a primary principle of generation in both creation and divinity, the Hebrew Bible does not attribute sexual characteristics and functions to God. In the Bible, humankind does not ascend to God by any means; rather, God chooses humankind. The article on love by Günther and Link echoes the contrast of eros and agape mentioned earlier. "In the OT [Old Testament] man can never ascend to God; in the Gk. [Greek] understanding of *eros* he can."

God's love to Israel judges as well as forgives Israel's aberrations from the divine standards of justice set forth in the commandments (Exod. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:6–21) and summarized in the phrase "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). Verse 34 adds the "alien" to neighbor: "you shall love the alien as yourself." The broad semantic range for "neighbor," generally meaning a person of the covenant community, gave rise to extended discussions of its meaning as may be seen in the lawyer's question to Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). The "alien" (also "sojourner," "resident alien," "stranger") usually meant a non-Israelite living in Israel. The love that requires accountability includes that between parents and children. "Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them" (Prov. 13:24).

Love to the neighbor is not only the grateful response to God's love for Israel, it is also commanded in two specific texts: Deut. 10:19 and Lev. 19:18, 34. Thus love to God and the neighbor is far more than an emotion; it is behavior. Love to the neighbor as oneself is a communal ethos that in principle summarizes and extends individual commandments. This love, understood as mutual solidarity within the community, is directed to the adult citizens and requires them to protect the dignity and substance of the ethnic group.

The prophets never tire of proclaiming responsibility to care for the least in the community. "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1:16–17). True worship is not "solemn assemblies" and "offerings," but justice. "I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; . . . But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (Amos 5:21–24).

Jenni makes the point that the reference to self-love in Lev. 19:18, 34 "is simply presupposed as the norm" not "as a dangerous temptation one must combat through self-denial." Love is self-explanatory; persons are referred to what they already know. In contrast, then, to the Western cultural interest in introspection and conscience, the biblical reference to self-love appears in the pre-Freudian context of covenant rather than emotion and self-regard. In his extensive study of Lev. 19:18, Mathys persuasively argues that this is the correct insight into the famous friendship of David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:1, 3; 19:1; 20:17; 2 Sam. 1:26). Jonathan, the son of King Saul, is the one who initiates the pact to protect the future king, David.

We mentioned above that biblical religion continually sought to separate (the root sense of the words "elect" and "holy") itself from the fertility and mystery religions of its context. In relation to love between persons the Hebrew Bible strips sexual relations of the numinous religious character that Israel's sexual-mythical environment attributed to them. In contrast to the Baal religious orientation, the Bible celebrates the joy of sex without supernatural baggage. Sexual relations are not means to self-transcendence and ascent to the divine or by sympathetic magic means to influence the fertility of crops and animals upon which agricultural peoples are so dependent. Sex is not a divine principle but simply part of the creation. Again, in contrast to the mythologies of the ancient world, the creation stories in Genesis 1–2 declare God made humans in two sexes to be companions. Woman is created as the fit partner with man, with human dignity, equally blessed by God (Gen. 1:27–28). The strength of sexual attraction is clearly set forth in such stories as Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 24:62–67) among others, not to mention Jacob who spent 14 years serving his future father-in-law in order to win the hand of Rachel (Gen. 29:18–30)! The biblical celebration of

sexual love is famously expressed in the Song of Songs, also known as the Song of Solomon. The Song of Songs echoes ancient Egyptian love poetry in celebrating the sensual pleasures of human sexual relationships. Medieval efforts either to moralize and allegorize away the erotic dimension of the Song of Songs or to link sex to salvation distort the poetry.

At the same time, while human love is not spiritualized it is ethical. The intoxication of sexual love, "better than wine" (Song of Sol. 1:2, 4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:13), is not an excuse or reason for adulterous behavior. "Rejoice in the wife of your youth, . . . may her breasts satisfy you at all times; may you be intoxicated always by her love. Why should you be intoxicated, my son, by another woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? For human ways are under the eyes of the Lord, and he examines all their paths" (Prov. 5:18–21). That no one is above the law, including the king, is clear by the judgment of David for taking the wife of another, Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11–13). The God whose covenant manifests his steadfast love to the people, expects the people to be faithful to that covenant love and in turn to manifest it in relation to others. Consonant with this orientation, the institution of marriage is not constituted primarily by love as an emotion but by faithfulness to the covenant of marriage.

In the New Testament, as in the Hebrew Bible, love is grounded in God's self-revelation. Leaving aside historical questions of Jesus' self-understanding, his words, and the event of Easter, the New Testament texts present Jesus as the definitive revelation of God's love (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:8–10). On the eve of the crucifixion, the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus saying to his disciples:

> As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide

> in his love. . . . This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. . . . You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.
>
> (John 15:9–17)

The love that is expected of the disciples has its basis and its model in Jesus' love to them. The commandment to love is part of a comprehensive theological conception of love that is modeled on God's covenantal love and the response to it presented in Israel's fundamental confession: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4–5).

Again, the biblical *commandment* to love the neighbor is not contingent upon spontaneous personal affections, religious transformation, or the lovability of the neighbor, especially if perceived as an enemy. The commandment to love is a commandment precisely because it is rooted in God and is God's continual word of judgment and reconciliation to the human failure to love. In the words of Victor Furnish: "When love is presented in the New Testament as the sovereign command of a sovereign Lord, then it becomes evident that it is the divine love alone which is regarded as the measure and meaning of love's claim." Furnish continues, "Therefore, to hear that love command is to be called to repentance. . . . Yet because the infinite demand of love formulated into this commandment has its origin and context in the infinite love of God, the one under command knows that he stands not only under judgment, but under grace. The command discloses not only the depth of man's sin and the seriousness of his alienation from true life, but also the depth of God's forgiving love and the seriousness of the divine purpose to save."

Jesus' continuity and discontinuity with his religious tradition appears throughout the New Testament. For example, his emphasis upon love for God reiterates his Scripture, the Hebrew Bible. Jesus replies to the question of which commandment is the greatest by combining Deut. 6:4–5, cited above, with Lev. 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:40; cf. Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28). At the same time Jesus directs love of the neighbor beyond cultic restriction and beyond the circle of compatriots. To the old question of who is my neighbor, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37). Whoever is in need is the neighbor. The tradition is further shattered when the religious people, the priest and Levite, do not help but the alien Samaritan does what has to be done for the wounded man.

The implication of the parable that God's love includes everyone, including notorious sinners and enemies, is spelled out elsewhere. The account of the woman sinner who anoints Jesus' feet with oil (Luke 7:36–50) connects love and forgiveness: " 'her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.' Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' But those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' "

In the demand to love one's enemies, Jesus radicalized the law. In a series following the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–12), Jesus sets forth the demands of a new age with the formula "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times. . . . But I say to you." The old age forbade murder, the new forbids anger and disparagement; the old age forbade adultery, the new forbids lust; the old age posited controlled retaliation,

the new promotes non-retaliation. The series ends: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, . . . For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (Matt. 5:43–47). The parallel in Luke reads: "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. . . . But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, . . . Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:32–36; see also Rom. 12:14–20; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9).

According to Piper, there are not sufficient sources in either Stoic–Hellenistic literature nor in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish literature to establish any of these literatures as the origin for the command to love one's enemies. His analysis of the Sermon on the Mount argues that the essential historical origin of the command to love one's enemies can only be possible as part of the proclamation of Jesus. "That which sets the early church off from its environment . . . is that which it has in common with Jesus."

The new demand to love even one's enemies is set in the context of Jesus' proclamation of God's love and mercy that in forgiving sins creates a new situation that enables love to others including outcasts such as lepers (Luke 5:12–15; see Lev. 13–14) and "tax collectors and sinners" (the former collaborated with the Roman authorities and thus were viewed as treasonous and exploitative; the latter is a collective term for those whose work made them ritually unclean). Jesus' answer to the question put by the Pharisees and scribes, "Why do you

eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" is "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:29–32). This agape love is distinguished from the love of friends that is reciprocal, mutual liking, by its gratuitousness or disinterestedness. That is, agape love is not dependent upon results.

God's love presented as forgiveness and mercy is not just his disposition, a kind of divine "stock in trade," but it is an ethical love that demands and well as enables. God's unconditional love for sinners calls sinners to respond with unconditional love for others. God's love, Jesus proclaims, creates a new situation, new responsibilities as well as possibilities. The New Testament writers apply this love to Jesus himself; i.e., Jesus the one who proclaims the love of God becomes the one who is proclaimed to be the love of God. Hence love of the least is love of Jesus and neglect of the least is neglect of Jesus. At the Last Judgment, the nations will be separated "as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." "Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' " The righteous are clueless and the King then says, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." The King then addresses those at his left hand: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." The unrighteous are equally clueless, and are told: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least

of these, you did it not to me" (Matt. 25:31–46). The essence of faith in Jesus as the Christ is that it is active in love (Gal. 5:6).

In his letter to the Romans, Paul emphasizes "God's love poured into our hearts." "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:5–8). Indeed, Paul proclaims, "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37–39).

Consistent with the other New Testament writings, Paul's understanding of ethics flows from his conviction of the priority of God's love. "[O]ne who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments . . . are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8–10). "[T]hrough love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' " (Gal. 5:13–14). "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith" (Gal. 6:9–10). It is of interest that Paul rarely speaks of love for God. Rather, the agape that flows from God is directed to service to the neighbor.

The question now is, what is that service to the neighbor? What is the content of that love, agape? It clearly is not "wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice, . . . envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness," nor is it gossip, slander, hatred of God, insolence, pride, ruthlessness and heartlessness (Rom. 1:29–31). "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends" (1 Cor. 13:4–8; cf. Gal. 5:18–26; Rom. 12:9–21). Love is at the same time God's action toward humankind and the human answer to it.

God's love liberates the person from that calculating frame of mind that accompanies human efforts to attain success however defined. The freedom of the Christian, Paul reminds his Galatians, is not the occasion for self-aggrandizement but the fulfillment of Lev. 19:18. "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' " (Gal. 5:13–14; Rom. 13:8–10). Furthermore, Paul does not limit this to the Christian community; it is a universal responsibility derived from God's saving activity: "So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith" (Gal. 6:10; cf. Rom. 12:9–21). Within these parameters, the believer is to love in the concrete circumstances of his or her life, "testing everything" to figure out what the good is in the particular situation that will build up the person and the community (1 Thess. 5:21).

One New Testament letter, according to Theissen, that provides a powerful model of early Christian ethics based on love is the letter of James. For the author of James, the commandment to love is inextricable from treating each person, including those outside the Christian community, on an equal footing. The biblical injunction to love the neighbor as oneself is understood in James to entail the renunciation of one's rank so that love is more than merciful condescension to the needy or deference to the superior.

> My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor man, "Stand there," or "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:1–4)

The commandment of love implies the commandment of impartiality, of equality, "for God shows no partiality" (James 2:11).

When James refers to the socially and economically marginalized as "brothers and sisters" he is conferring upon them a fundamentally egalitarian status that he intends literally and not in word only. "If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works is dead" (James 2:15–17; cf. Rom. 2:13). It is important to note that James is not speaking of requests by the needy but rather the very existence of poverty that must incite response. Furthermore, the community as a whole is to alleviate need wherever seen; this is a collective work to which each contributes. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27), that is, the "world" as socio-economic hierarchy opposing God's equitable love (cf. James 4:13–5:6). That such love was understood to be counter-cultural may be seen in the Gospels' "great reversal" theme where the first shall be last and the last first as well as in "the Magnificat" (Luke 1:46–55) where Mary speaks of the humbling of the powerful and the

lifting of the lowly; the feeding of the hungry and the exile of the rich.

Similar conviction is expressed in 1 John 3:11–23:

> For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.... We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death.... We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us [cf. John 3:16] – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

A more comprehensive review of the New Testament writings concerned with "love" would further emphasize what we have already seen in these selected texts: love (agape) is first of all God's gift and then the responsibility of Christians. Without the transcendent theological understanding of love, the ethical meaning of love would lose its enabling foundation. Love as community with God is the driving force and creative origin of the concrete, demanded love to others. The English language may promote a tendency to linear thinking about this relationship of God's love to love of the neighbor. Hence, our reflection may be enriched by recalling how another language, in this case German, provides word plays that hold these loves together and suggest their dialectical relationship. In German, "Gabe" means gift and "Auf*gabe*" means duty or responsibility; note that "gift" is embedded in "duty." Likewise, in the set of words "Wort" (word), "Ant*wort*" (answer), and "Verant*wort*ung" (responsibility) we may play with the relationship of God's Word, human response and responsibility seeing the centrality of God's Word in human answer and life.

Chapter 3

A World Without Love? The Greco-Roman World and Early Christianity

Gerhard Uhlhorn, in his magisterial three-volume study of the history of Christian charity, described the Greco-Roman context for Christianity as "a world without love." Uhlhorn (1826–1901) was motivated to undertake his study by a conversation with Theodor Fliedner (1800–1864), the "father" of the modern deaconess movement and a leader in the development of social welfare. Fliedner had urged Uhlhorn to write the history of Christian charity in order to awaken and increase contemporary works of love in the context of the social ills of the Industrial Revolution. Given Uhlhorn's intent to present the history of Christian love, his judgment of the Greco-Roman world may appear both harsh and suspect. His point, however, was not that pre-Christian Greeks and Romans had no inkling of love but that their understanding of love did not envision love beyond one's own circle or status for the well being of others.

The Roman dramatist, Plautus (c.254–184 BCE) wrote: "A man is a wolf to a man whom he does not know." Aid to the poor was seen as useless because it could not elevate them to the level of the rich and thereby grant happiness. Indeed, it was said that assistance to the poor is not only a waste of effort but is no favor to the poor because it only extends their miserable lives. Plautus, again: "What is given to the poor is lost." And: "He deserves ill of a beggar who gives him food and drink. For that which is given is thrown away, and the life of the beggar is protracted to his misery." Plato's ideal state according the *Republic* has no room for the poor; beggars are to be expelled. If a worker is ill, there is no obligation to assist him; if he can no longer work, he is a drain on the state and his life has no value.

Greek and Roman attitudes shared a general disdain for the "least" in society, for women, the weak, and the marginalized. The Roman city-state did, however, strive to inculcate a sense of civic responsibility and social stability through contributions from the wealthy. The supremacy of the emperor and the well-being of the upper class depended at least to some extent upon the loyalty of the populace, and that loyalty in part at least rested upon received or anticipated benefits. Nobles, office-holders, and priests were to provide support for buildings, feasts, grain doles, and entertainments. The expectation of beneficence was supported by the promise of honor. If one did not give when expected, the consequence was *infamia*, that is, disgrace, dishonor. *Fama*, on the other hand, was the favorable public reputation, even glory, that the noble person strove for and that was attainable through that gift-giving so important to ancient culture. As Countryman points out, "It is not surprising, under the circumstances, that the fundamental motive for philanthropy was *philotimia*, 'love of public recognition.'"

While honor is an evident motivation for the "philanthropy" of the wealthy, there is little evidence of pity or compassion for the poor in ancient culture. In the ancient world, one gave in order to get. As mentioned earlier, eudaemonism is a perspective that defines the ethical life in relation to happiness or personal well-being. In Plato's *Symposium*, eudaemonism is the love-impelled ascent toward the good and immortality. But even with Plato's refined eudaemonism, the chief benefit of such love is always one's own benefit. As developed by Aristotle, the point of friendship and generous benevolence is the decorous conduct worthy of a noble person. Classical Greco-Roman understanding of "charity" focused only upon those of equal status with a view to advantage. The Aristotelian view was that wealth is useful in securing friendships not in just being amassed. The point of view was the reciprocity of the *do ut des* principle, "I give that you may give." This principle of quid pro quo that posited an equivalent return could be conceived as a contract in which each party gives and receives an equivalent. Hence, the Greek historian Polybius (c.205–c.123 BCE) stated that "nobody ever gives anything of his own willingly to anybody." The *do ut des* principle, according to Kudlein, formed with individual nuances the basis of pre-Christian teaching and praxis of friendship. Thus the physician, according to the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca (c.4 BCE–65 CE), could be conceived as the "friend" of the patient, but could never be conceived of as the "friend" or "benefactor" of the poor. The explicit "physician of the poor" has its roots in the *philoptochía*, the *amor pauperum*, "love of the poor," of early Christianity. Thus early Christendom was particularly attractive to the poor. Nock emphasized that "a poor man must have gained a great sense of security" through belonging to a Christian community.

Benevolence gained honor, friendship, and business. Hence the Roman statesman, Cicero (106–43 BCE) remarked that

most people are generous for the sake of honor: "What is given to friends is outside fortune's grasp." The inscriptions of the ancient world testify to Cicero's point. Hands' volume, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome*, provides examples. A second-century-BCE inscription celebrates Apollonius, son of Hierokles of Miletus, a doctor who served "the people freely during the six month period of office; and in as much as he did this with his heart set upon honor... he is awarded an encomium to encourage further service, also an olive wreath... [and an inscription] on a stone which is to be placed in the temple of Poseidan and Amphritite." An inscription of about the same time speaks of another doctor, Menokritos, who continued "his energetic service in his love of honor." Around 100 BCE, Theopompos, "maintaining the good relations with the people inherited from his ancestors, and seeking further to increase his right-dealing with gods and men, having zealously pursued the life of virtue and honour from his earliest youth... [leaves] an imperishable memorial for all time of his noble spirit and goodwill for the people... the purchase of [anointing] oil for the gymnasium...." Theopompos as a result was awarded "a gold crown and two bronze statues with honorary inscription; the decree itself to be inscribed on two stone monuments; public proclamation of these honours at festivals of Dionysos and of Artemis; inscriptions also to be added to the statues of sons and daughters set up by Theopompos." Even more explicit is the intention expressed by a wealthy man of the second century CE: "I wish my gift and favour... to be published on three marble pillars; of these, one should be set up... in the market before my house, and one should be erected in the *Caesereum*, set close by the gates of the temple, and one in the gymnasium, so that to both the citizens of Gytheion, and to the non-citizens, my philanthropic and kindly act may be clear and well-known to all.... My idea is to achieve immortality in making such a just and kindly disposal

[of my property] and, in entrusting it to the city, I shall surely not fail in my aim." The Roman orator, Pliny the Younger (c.62–c.114 CE) asked what could be greater than glory and praise for all eternity. To which question Tertullian (c.160–c.225 CE), the African church father and first major theologian to write in Latin, retorted: "You pour forth statues and inscribe sculptured images and have your honorary epitaphs, reading 'to the eternal memory of...' Why, as far as it lies in your power, you yourselves provide a kind of resurrection for the dead."

The historian de Ste. Croix has argued that "the graeco-roman world was obsessively concerned with wealth and status.... But wealth was by far the most important determinant of status. Ovid put it beautifully... 'it is property that confers rank'...." Ste. Croix goes on to point out that classical socio-economic vocabulary was weighted with moral values that portrayed the wealthy and powerful as good and the lower classes as bad. "The Roman governing class was as thoroughly devoted to property as the most wealth-conscious of the Greeks. No surviving Greek writer was as thoroughly devoted to the over-riding importance of property rights as Cicero...." Biblical language turned these values upside down by often associating the poor and marginalized with moral virtues and the wealthy and powerful with corruption. The early church also reversed the Greco-Roman view of wealth. According to Tertullian, among others, ambition and desire for glory were vices; the drive for social recognition was in strict opposition to Christian humility, and the goal of social recognition is a typical mark of the social-climber mentality.

The poor obviously did not have such means to the honor and fame their society prized, and thus were often scorned. Cicero called the poor "the scum of the city" who, he said, should be skimmed off and sent to the colonies. Since, to the Romans "property confers rank," their devotion to property

rights granted an owner the right not only to the use of his property – including slaves – but also to its abuse or even destruction. Since wealth was an important determinant of status, Greek vocabulary began giving moral weight to socio-economic terminology. Words for property-owning – rich, fortunate, distinguished, well-born, influential – also had moral connotations of the good, the best, upright, fair-minded. Words for the lower classes of people – the poor, the mob, the populace – had negative moral connotations. In classical antiquity there was no pity for the destitute. The reigning ideology was that the gods love the wealthy.

Education and health care depended upon philanthropy. Civic support of education and health care was limited to soldiers and their families. There may perhaps have been free medical treatment at the temples of Aescaplius, the god of physicians, but there were no hospitals in the ancient world. "Public service doctors" in ancient Greece meant only certification by the polis not that there was free medical attention. Those with long-term illness, the deformed, the handicapped, and "surplus" children were not considered worthy of care by society. Plato, for example, had little patience for the chronically ill; medical resources should be for those who can return to a productive life.

In his pioneering study on the early spread of Christianity, Adolf von Harnack attributes the expansion of Christianity in the early centuries to its faith being active in love; the Christians not only had a new vocabulary of love, they lived it. "The new language on the lips of Christians was the language of love. But it was more than a language, it was a thing of power and action.... The gospel thus became a social message." Even the Greek satirist and scoffer of all time, Lucian of Samosata (c.120–c.200), while ridiculing Christian beliefs in Jesus, conceded their love of one another to the extent of sparing no expense.

In the early church, worship, liturgy, and love for the neighbor were seen as inseparable. The exercise of love to the neighbor was intrinsic to every Christian community that desired to remain true to the gospel. Again Harnack: "Brotherliness is love on a footing of equality; ministering love means to give and to forgive, and no limit to this is to be recognized. Besides, ministering love is the practical expression of love to God." Of the numerous writings testifying to this connection Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165) and Tertullian provide representative examples. Justin, who literally lost his head for love, was one of the first Christian thinkers to defend the faith to the emperor and the Roman Senate. He described the weekly liturgy of scripture readings, sermons, sacrament, and offering. The offering is voluntary: "And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president [i.e., bishop], who succors the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need."

Tertullian linked worship and love of neighbor in contrast to his culture: "Though we have our treasure chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price [i.e., we don't have to pay to worship]. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's

Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. 'See,' they say, 'how they love one another,'. . . ." In response to the charge that Christianity was eroding the old cults, Tertullian responded: "[Y]ou say, the temple revenues are falling off [due to the growth of the church]: how few now throw in a contribution! In truth, we are not able to give alms both to your human and your heavenly mendicants; nor do we think that we are required to give to any but to those who ask for it. Let Jupiter then hold out his hand and get, for our compassion spends more in the streets than yours does in the temples."

Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215), who became head of the famous Catechetical School there, wrote in his *Paedagogus*, a tract on Christian life: "Even as such wells as spring up, rise to their formal level even after they have been drained, so that kindly spring of love to men, the bestowal of gifts, imparts its drink to the thirsty, and is again increased and replenished." Love to the neighbor is not dependent upon the neighbor's character but that person's needs. Chrysostom (c.347–407), bishop of Constantinople, stated that "alms are to be given, not to the way of life, but to the human being; we must have compassion, not because the poor are virtuous, but because they are needy." The clarity of Chrysostom's preaching led to his exile and death.

All Christians were called upon to assist "the least" in society. In this respect fasting or choosing less expensive food such as fish was recommended as a means to save expenses in order to provide assistance to those in greater need. As the examples illustrate, the early church did not think its works of love were limited to personal almsgiving. A church fund, literally a "common chest," *arca* in Tertullian's Latin, associated charity very closely with worship and the church leaders, bishops and deacons. The bishop is among other things to be a

"lover of the poor." The deacons are to ascertain who are in distress and not exclude them from a share in the church funds. The gifts of money and in kind (bread, wine, oil, cheese, olives, fruits, vegetables – even flowers) were brought to the worship service and entrusted to the bishop, by whom they were placed on the altar and thus consecrated to God. All these goods were understood as nothing else than the gifts of God which should be distributed to the needy. Hence, the recipients received these gifts from the hand of God. Recipients were designated by the bishop with the advice of the deacons who were expected to be familiar with local needs. The deacons were responsible for distributing the money and goods both at the close of worship and to the homes of the needy. The office of the deacon since the second century was twofold: assisting the bishop in the liturgy of the Lord's Supper, and extending that worship in a "liturgy after the liturgy" in service to the needy. Through the mediation of the deacons daily life was moved to the center of worship and worship was extended into daily life.

A memorable story of one of those deacons is that of St. Laurence, a Roman deacon. A tradition stemming from St. Ambrose (c.339–397) presented Laurence (d. 258) as the exemplar for selling the church's liturgical art and treasure in order to provide for the poor. When confronted by the Roman prefect who demanded Laurence turn over the church's treasure, he assembled the poor of his parish to whom he had distributed the church's wealth, and explained that the poor were the true treasure of the church. The Roman official was not amused, and legend has it that Laurence was slowly roasted to death on a gridiron. That Laurence was probably beheaded instead does not diminish the point that Laurence illustrated the Christian conviction that God's love is active toward the least of society. The action of Laurence was a model of love for others: Ambrose, bishop of Milan (c.339–397), and also Deogratias, archbishop of Carthage (454–477), used

church wealth to redeem captives after the collapse of the Pax Romana, as did also St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354–430). St. Cyril (c.315–386), bishop of Jerusalem, sold liturgical art to provide food for the poor. Riquet cites Ambrose: "The goods of the Church are the patrimony of the poor. Tell me, if you can, what prisoners the pagan temples have ransomed, what poor folk they have fed, what exiles they have supported?" Rudolph provides an historical overview of these actions into the Middle Ages including the story of a monk who sold his only possession, a copy of the Gospels, in order to feed the poor, "thus selling the Word which commanded him to sell all and give to the poor."

It was common in the early centuries to follow the worship service with what we might today call a potluck meal. Significantly, for our discussion, it was called a love feast, an agape meal. Some of the aspersions that Romans cast on Christianity focused on the agape meal with claims that it was an occasion for immorality. Tertullian asks why there should be any surprise that people in love should eat in common. After all, he wrote, the Greek Socrates and the Roman Cato shared their wives with their friends!

> O noble example of Attic wisdom, of Roman gravity – the philosopher and the censor playing pimps! What wonder if that great love of Christians towards one another is desecrated by you! For you abuse also our humble feasts, on the ground that they are extravagant as well as infamously wicked.... Our feast explains itself by its name. The Greeks call it agape, i.e., affection. Whatever it costs, our outlay in the name of piety is gain, since with the good things of the feast we benefit the needy; not as it is with you... but as it is with God himself, a peculiar respect is shown to the lowly.... As an act of religious service, it permits no vileness or immodesty. The participants, before reclining, taste first of prayer to God. As much is eaten as satisfies the cravings of hunger; as much is drunk as befits the

> chaste. They say it is enough, as those who remember that even during the night they have to worship God; they talk as those who know that the Lord is one of their auditors.

As if to contrast the agape feast with Plato's *Symposium*, Tertullian concludes: "We go from it, not like troops of mischief-doers, nor bands of vagabonds, nor to break out into licentious acts, but to have as much care of our modesty and chastity as if we had been at a school of virtue rather than a banquet."

Harrison notes that the "Church's care for the needy, for foundlings, widows, the poor, although it had Jewish roots, was new and striking affirmation of a common humanity shared by all, rich and poor, in the traditionally hierarchic context of late antique society." The Christians' love for the poor exhibited through the charity of the church made a deep impression in the Roman Empire and contributed to the growth of the church. This is clearly seen in the action of the Emperor Julian (332–363), known as Julian the Apostate because upon becoming emperor in 360 he renounced the Christian faith in which he was reared and embarked upon a campaign to reinstate worship of the old gods of the empire. Rejecting open persecution of the church, Julian strove to displace it by co-opting its social concern. One of Julian's letters, provided by Kidd, noted that Christianity was spreading because of its love for the neighbor. "I think the impious Galileans [i.e., Christians] have observed this fact [pagan neglect of the poor] and devoted themselves to philanthropy. And they have gained ascendancy in the worst of their deeds through the credit they win for such practices.... [T]he Galileans also begin with their so-called love-feast ["the agape"], or hospitality, or service of tables – for they have many ways of carrying it out, and hence call it by many names – and the result is that they have led very many into

atheism [i.e., rejection of the gods of Hellenism]." Julian, as Pontifex Maximus, High Priest of the Empire, wrote to the High Priest of the province of Galatia: "If our religion does not make the progress we could wish, the blame lies with those who profess it. The gods have done great things for us,... But is it right that we should be satisfied with their favors, and neglect those things that the impiety of the Christians has cultivated, their hospitality to strangers, their care of the graves, their holiness of life? We should earnestly seek all these things." "The godless Galileans," Julian went on, "see that the [pagan] priests neglect the poor, and then immediately take the opportunity for charity." Julian noted that the Christians did not limit their social work to their own communities but served the whole society. "For it is disgraceful, when there is not a beggar among the Jews, and when the godless Galileans support our poor as well as their own, that our people should be without our help." Julian not only exhorted his priests but himself moved to establish care for the poor and needy including for the first time the construction of alms-houses and hospitals. Julian thus attempted to imitate Christian social action in order to deprive the Christians of the effective power of their love for others.

Eusebius of Caesarea described not only care of the poor but of the sick. In his *The History of the Church*, he described responses to a plague from a letter by Dionysius of Alexandria.

> Most of our brother-Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves.... Heedless of the danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life... for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors.... The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead

> and treating unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; . . .

Bolkestein notes that whereas in the East, including Israel and Egypt, the support of the poor, especially widows and orphans, was characterized as the greatest responsibility, it was nearly never mentioned or praised in pre-Christian Greek and Roman culture. The Greco-Roman temples of the classical age did not promote any sense of care for others. The rich had no ethical responsibility to the poor. There were no lack of admonitions to the rich, but the emphasis was that the wealthy should acquire and use their fortunes in an honorable manner, and not pride themselves on their wealth. That they should give of their wealth to the poor was not asked of them. That is, the philosophies of the elite focused on eudaemonism and the Greco-Roman religions made little or no connection with ethics. In this sense, Uhlhorn echoes the assessment of Lactantius (c.240–c.320), "the Christian Cicero," who emphasized that the pre-Christian era had no "charity" in the sense of love of the neighbor.

The worship of the Greco-Roman gods and, later by the time of the Christian era, emperor worship and cults, were integral to Roman public life and citizenship. The religious acts of the offering of sacrifice, prayer, and dedications, essential aspects of Roman religion, were characterized by the term *pietas*. *Pietas* meant "duty" and did not carry the connotations of our modern term "piety." Religious activities took place at the shrines of the particular deities and were the province of the professional priests associated with the shrines.

The Roman *cultus* was primarily directed to maintaining peaceful relations with the gods, the *pax deorum*. Contributions in money and goods to the priesthood and ritual performance was consumed by cultic performances or held as assets for times of catastrophe to expiate the gods. Cult ritual therefore had an end in itself: maintaining good relations with the gods. When Tertullian stated that Christians give more on the streets than pagans in their temples, he was demarcating the Christian faith from the religions of Rome. Tertullian, Ambrose, and others claimed that their faith engaged and alleviated the needs of the culture whereas in Rome's religions all money flowed into the cult alone. In the Roman cults there was not divine worship in any communal sense; rather the cultic performances were a sort of spectator sport where, if interested, people could watch – in silence! – the priests. There were no divine mandates or ethical expectations, but rather a kind of contract between the divinity in question and the person or persons making the sacrifice and prayers; a striking of a bargain. Since it was not intended that the good will of the gods would be gained by ethical conduct, the Hellenistic-Roman forms of religion were not conducive to love of the neighbor.

The well-known Greco-Roman *liberalitas* (liberality) was an aristocratic virtue exercised toward friends and fellow-citizens, but not toward the needy. The responsibility of "noblesse oblige" that led to the construction of public works such as public baths and roads may have benefited more than the friends of the benefactor, but the motivation was fame, honor, and esteem. These achievements were then memorialized in monuments – not quite the children of immortality Diotima extolled in her speech to Socrates in the *Symposium*, but "stone children" would do if you were not a poet. Humanitarian works for the poor did not merit monuments and inscriptions. There were also the "bread and circuses" – state-supported distributions of grain and sports events both in Rome and the provinces. Uhlhorn sums up civic welfare, such as it was: "It was an offering brought to vanity, to avarice, or to policy; it was a ransom which wealth paid to poverty in order not to be disturbed by it."

Uhlhorn further argues: "The ethics of the Greeks and Romans did not advance beyond a more or less refined eudaimonism. The chief principle of action is always one's own benefit. Even with Plato it is not otherwise, a fact which makes us wonder how it is that in the case of this best representative of the ancient world a naked egoism so frequently comes to the fore." Aristotle, too, in speaking of friendship assumes a selfish basis for generosity. "For all this generosity and benevolence springs not from love, but from the reflection that such conduct is decorous and worthy of a noble man."

Uhlhorn's evaluation of the Greco-Roman understanding of love sounds remarkably like Nygren's description of eros. Indeed, in an article critical of Nygren's analysis, Lowell Streiker agrees. Nygren's description of eros "pretty well summarizes Plato's teaching of love as it is found in the stages-of-ascent account of the *Symposium* and the love-as-the-rewinging-of-grounded-souls palinode of the *Phaedrus*." "As characterized by Plato, love is not a divine experience, i.e., the gods have no need to love, for they lack nothing. Love, the desire for what one does not have and the 'upward' movement toward it, is exclusively a human activity." But Streiker goes on to argue that Plato does not reduce the love of another to selfishness, and that Platonic eros has a legitimate use within Christian theology, as is clear in the case of Augustine. "In his understanding of love, Augustine is at once with Plato. Philosophy is the search for happiness, a quest for the good. This search, both Augustine and Plato would agree, can never end in finite, sensible objects. It can only reach fruition in the Eternal. In this way, Eros is truly man's quest for God. And without this quest, the so-called way of God to man would remain a trivial and irrelevant doctrine."

Thus it is to Augustine that we next turn to see how he related apparently conflicting views of love.

Chapter 4

Caritas: The Augustinian Synthesis of Biblical Agape and Hellenistic Eros

The person in the West who more than any other synthesized the Hellenistic heritage of eros with the biblical proclamation of agape was St. Augustine (354–430). His intellectual and spiritual journey from pagan philosopher and rhetorician to Christian priest and then bishop entailed profound reflection and writing upon his Greco-Roman heritage and the religious options of his day. His writings – autobiographical reflection, biblical studies, polemical works against rival religions and perceived heresies, creative theologizing on major topics, his numerous sermons and writings on pastoral care, and his end of life revisions – are too vast to even list here. We can only note selected aspects of his contributions to the history of the idea of love, and hope readers will be stimulated to pursue further readings.

No other theologian has been as influential upon the West as Augustine. He marked the theological–spiritual course for the church up to the modern period. Biographically a person of

pagan and Christian culture, and profoundly influenced by both Greco-Roman culture and biblical faith, Augustine is often the lightning rod for the perennial theological and philosophical controversies over whether Western Christianity is a cultural synthesis or a cultural syncretism of its double origin in Greek and biblical religious views. If Christianity is to be characterized as a religion of love, is it eros or agape, or is it both?

Nygren asserted that "Augustine's view of love has exercised by far the greatest influence in the whole history of the Christian idea of love.... Ever since his time the meaning of Christian love has generally been expressed in the categories he created, and even the emotional quality which it bears is largely due to him." Likewise, O'Donovan argues "Until more detailed research proves otherwise, we must make the supposition that Augustine is responsible not only for the currency of 'self-love' in the theology of the West but also for the predominance of the 'summary' [i.e., the two-fold commandment to love] in Western Christian ethics." Nygren, among others, attributes Augustine's influence not only to his genius but to his context of living "on the frontier of two separate religious worlds, those of Hellenistic Eros and primitive Christian Agape."

Aurelius Augustinus was born in Thagaste (in contemporary Algeria), a provincial bourgeois milieu. His father was a pagan and his mother, Monica, was a devout Christian. Augustine lived in a time of great political and social crisis. By the time of his death while bishop of Hippo Regius, a small North African seaport and Roman military post, the city was under siege by the Vandals. Aleric's Visigoths had pillaged Rome and shaken the Roman world to its foundations in 410, the symbolic date for the end of the Roman Empire in the West.

Augustine lived in an afflicted society that appeared to be rushing pell-mell toward disintegration. "Eternal Rome" was collapsing as it faced perpetual warfare with barbarian war bands in the north and the challenge of Persia in the

east. Taxation skyrocketed to finance the military; the poor were victimized by horrendous inflation; and the rich sought refuge in unparalleled accumulations of property. To add insult to injury for the Christians, the charge arose that all these disasters were the consequence of the abandonment of the traditional gods of the empire. In response to this pagan charge, Augustine wrote his famous theology of history, *The City of God*.

Augustine's family, though not rich, was free and he was bright. His father, Patricius, a minor official, perceived that economic advancement was through a classical education, and thus he scraped together the means for Augustine to gain such an education with its emphasis upon rhetoric. Patricius' ambition for his son coupled with Augustine's intelligence (he has been compared to Plato and Aristotle!) led to prestigious positions as a teacher of rhetoric in Carthage (376–383), Rome (383–384), and then Milan (384) where he was appointed to the municipal chair of rhetoric with its potential of further rise in prestige and power. A Roman citizen, Augustine's mother-tongue was Latin; he also had a modest acquaintance with Greek. Hence his vocabulary for love consisted of the Latin terms *amor*, *caritas*, and *dilectio*. Petré notes that Augustine tends to use *caritas* and *dilectio* as equivalents of the Greek agape while *amor* retains more of the Platonic sense of eros. His astounding mastery of the Greek philosophers came from Latin translations, his engagement with the intellectual circles of Milan that were pervaded by Platonism, and his exposure to a Christianized Plotinianism through bishop Ambrose of Milan. Furthermore, various forms of "Platonism" had infused the intellectual culture of the day in which Augustine avidly participated.

His mother, Monica, however was convinced through a dream that in spite of Augustine's quest for academic advancement he would be converted to Christianity. She followed

Augustine relentlessly in pursuit of her vision of his conversion. Augustine himself seems to have realized that her devouring love had an element of "unspiritual desire" in it for in his *Confessions* he wrote: "She loved to have me with her, as is the way with mothers, but far more than most mothers." Monica's dream was realized when Augustine was converted to Christianity in 386, the year before her death.

The first decades of Augustine's personal life were marked by his ambition, achievement, and entering into a quasi-marital relationship with his concubine. Concubinage was viewed as a socially sanctioned alternative to marriage when class disparity between the partners precluded a legal marriage according to Roman law. The relationship began when Augustine was studying in Carthage at the age of 17. Little is known about his mistress. They had a son, Adeodatus ("Given by God"), and lived together for the next 17 years. Apparently Augustine's mother, among others, urged him to put his mistress aside and contract a legal marriage with a woman of his class in order to advance his career. Monica argued that once Augustine was legally married, and then was baptized, he would be cleansed of his old relationship. The lack of sources for these events has contributed to the scholarly controversies over them. Fifteen years later in his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote: "[M]y mistress being torn from my side as an impediment to my marriage, my heart, which clung to her, was racked, and wounded, and bleeding. And she went back to Africa, making a vow unto Thee [God] never to know another man, leaving me with my natural son with her." Unwilling to wait for the proposed legal marriage, Augustine, as he says, "a slave to lust," found another mistress. Yet even years later, the pain of separation was still raw: "Nor was that wound of mine as yet cured which had been caused by the separation from my former mistress, but after inflammation and most acute anguish it mortified, and the pain become numbed, but more

desperate." Soon after the dismissal of his mistress he also suffered the loss by death of his mother, his son, and two of his closest friends. It has been suggested that the rending of these relationships contributed to his developing conviction that God's love is the only safe love.

Insight into Augustine's development is provided by his *Confessions*, written between 397 and 401, after becoming a priest. Augustine felt he had to assess himself, and he did this by interpreting his past life as it led to his conversion. The *Confessions* are Augustine's effort to find himself. His conversion alone was not enough to sustain him. He had to work through his emotions regarding the death of his mother, for example, and reached the conclusion that the idealized figure who had haunted his youth was finally just an ordinary person, a sinner like himself. Augustine could have cut himself off from his past – a not unusual reaction to a conversion experience. Instead he called on his memory to understand his present. He dealt specifically with his feelings in relation to his personal growth and the nature of human motivation. Hence his account of stealing a pear is his paradigm for the sinful human condition. One would think that a cosmopolitan person like Augustine could have come up with a more lurid example! But, as he noted, it was not the pear he wanted to enjoy, but rather "the theft for its own sake, and the sin." He "derived pleasure from the deed simply because it was forbidden." He recalled how in his pagan life he had enjoyed crying at the theater, but had no reaction to the news of his father's death. In his reflections Augustine set the tone that would permeate medieval culture and theology up to the Reformation period and in many respects up to today. That tone is introspection.

Introspective self-scrutiny, seen in the *Confessions*, reflects the soul's longing for God, a longing to return to its maker, a longing experienced as restlessness, a pressing sense that in all

things there lies something beyond, something that calls to God. The sense of not being at home in the world, the sense of alienation is fundamental to Augustine. But of course it is not unique to him or to Christianity. It is the Hellenistic tension between the transient and the permanent, the temporal and the eternal. It is what Plato expressed in the longing to escape the shadows of the cave and enter the sunshine of the intelligible world. It is the goal of immortality expressed in Plato's *Symposium*. It is even more clearly expressed in the writings of Plotinus whose writings reflecting Plato and Aristotle influenced Augustine. Van Fleteren in his article, "Ascent of the Soul," notes that in antiquity "ascent of the soul proceeds from the sensible world to the interior self and then to God. This motif underlies most of Augustine's early works, and two of his three major works, *Confessiones* and *De Trinitate*." Before his conversion Augustine had immersed himself in Hellenistic philosophy, and toward the end of his life in his major work, *The City of God*, he affirmed that Platonists excelled all other philosophers in logic and ethics. He relates in his *Confessions* that he had achieved intellectual ascent to the top of the Platonic "ladder of love" and saw "that which is." But in Augustine the longing for and ascent to God is transposed from human restlessness to a response to God's love and condescension; it is, in the opening lines of the *Confessions*, the movement of the Holy Spirit in the human heart: "for you have formed us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in you." Later in the *Confessions*, he notes the difference between Platonic ascent and Christian ascent. The former is drawn upward by that erotic gravitational force, itself unmoved, that we saw earlier in Aristotle, or the draw of the Beautiful as we saw in Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*. The latter ascent is made possible by God's prior descent in Christ. In a famous line in the *Confessions*, that echoes Aristotle's theory that bodies gravitate to their places due to their weight,

Augustine says "my weight is my love." His Christian twist on Aristotle is that God's gift of love inflames him and thus like fire he is borne upward.

Divine Providence had led Augustine, he says, to "certain books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. And therein I read, not indeed in the same words, but to the selfsame effect, . . . that, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." What Augustine did not find in the Platonists was "that the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). For Augustine, the Incarnation makes possible human ascent to God. Salvation, then, is not a human achievement but the gift of God's love. The realization of the Platonic eros depends upon the gift of agape through God's Incarnation.

Augustine's pre-conversion search for philosophical certainty was aided by his discovery of Neoplatonism. Instead of the forces of good and evil, Neoplatonism spoke of being and nonbeing. In this schema, evil is seen as a defect, a lack of being. Persons are pulled downward or direct their attention downward away from being toward nonbeing, and therefore are not what they ought to be. But as attractive as this philosophy was intellectually for Augustine, he was unable to put it into practice. Neoplatonism showed him the good, but did not enable him to reach it. He wondered how Christian monks, who to him did not appear very bright, could control themselves, but he with all his publicly acclaimed brilliance could not. The strict early Christian sexual ethic remained a stumbling block to Augustine's conversion. Yet Platonic thought helped prepare him for acceptance of the gospel. It was, Augustine says, God's design that he read the Platonists before the Scriptures.

The other major influence was the church in the person of Ambrose of Milan, a brilliant rhetorician who had embraced Christianity and then been acclaimed bishop.

Ambrose exhibited in his own person to Augustine that he did not have to sacrifice his intellect to become a Christian. Ambrose's Platonic worldview and his use of allegory in interpreting Scripture overcame Augustine's view that the Bible was inferior literature to the Latin classics. A further impetus to conversion was the story recounted by his countryman, Ponticianus, of the conversion of two of his friends on reading Athanasius's *Life of St. Antony*.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine recounts his conversion as a highly emotional event. He withdrew into his garden and flung himself down under a fig tree weeping for release from the anger and judgment of God, and heard a child chanting "Take up and read; take up and read." Interpreting this as a divine command, he opened the Bible and read the first passage he saw, Romans 13:13–14: "Let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Instantly his gloom and doubt vanished.

Augustine's contributions to Western theology and church history are legion. Most noteworthy is his grounding Christian faith in the concept of love. He attempted to subsume Christianity as a whole under the aspect of love, from the doctrine of the Trinity to service to the neighbor. The key biblical passage is 1 John 4:8: "God is love" (*Deus dilectio est*). In *On the Trinity*, Augustine introduces chapter 8 with the assertion that "he who loves his brother, loves God; because he loves love itself, which is of God, and is God." He continues:

> Embrace the love of God, and by love embrace God.... [B]egin from that which is nearest us,... our brother. And listen how greatly the Apostle John commends brotherly love:..." Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not, knows not God; for God is love." And this passage declares sufficiently and plainly, that this same brotherly love itself (for that is brotherly love by which we love each other) is set forth by so great authority, not only to be from God, but also to be God. When, therefore, we love our brother from love, we love our brother from God; neither can it be that we do not love above all else that same love by which we love our brother: whence it may be gathered that these two commandments cannot exist unless interchangeably. For since "God is love," he who loves love certainly loves God; but he must needs love love, who loves his brother.... [A]nd we love ourselves so much the more, the more we love God.

Augustine's point is that the first realization of love to God is authentic love to the neighbor. Christianity is purely and simply the religion of love. Again, that love is not an abstraction, a pursuit of an idea, but expresses itself in love for the needy as seen for example in Augustine's use of church property to support the poor and exhortations to end their misery. Augustine articulated this motif so powerfully that it became axiomatic for Roman Catholic and much of Protestant theology to affirm Christianity is a religion of love.

As noted earlier, Augustine used the Latin *caritas* for Christian love. *Caritas* is the word from which we get "charity." The English "charity," however is too weak to convey Augustine's sense of *caritas* as "grace," "favor," "love," and "benevolence." *Caritas* in Augustine's sense is primarily love to God made possible because God first loved humankind. Love to God is the central virtue; all other virtues are expressions of it. With this theological orientation Augustine is free from all legalistic ethics. Only love is enjoined upon the Christian; where love is, no other requirements are necessary. Hence, Augustine's famous ethical injunction: "Love God and do what you will." *Caritas* is the root of all that is good; its opposite, the root of all that is evil, is *cupiditas*, the word from

which we get "cupidity" and also "Cupid," the Roman god of love. *Cupiditas* has the sense of passionate desire, lust and wrongful appetite. Both *caritas* and *cupiditas* are terms for love. The difference between them is that *caritas* is directed to the sole true and real possibility for happiness, God; whereas *cupiditas* is (mis)directed toward things assumed to provide happiness but which are only transient. Both terms refer to "love" but are polar opposites – *caritas* ascends to God, Being itself; and *cupiditas* descends to inferior beings and then in its continual descent it reaches nothingness, nonbeing. Augustine's fundamental assumption – gained from his acquaintance with Neoplatonism – is that all love is acquisitive or an appetite. That is, persons desire what they believe will fulfill them. In short, Augustine perceives that the eudaemonism – the drive for self-fulfillment – of ancient philosophy has apologetic value. That is, the pagan question of how one may attain happiness is answered by the gospel proclamation that God's love is an imperishable gift. Everyone wants to be happy. By linking love closely to the desire for happiness, Augustine finds it possible to regard love as the most elementary of all manifestations of human life. There is no one who does not seek his or her happiness. For Augustine this is synonymous with the claim that there is no one who does not love; and that a person "is" what he or she loves. Here is the foundation for both the theology of ordered love that will develop in medieval scholasticism and the drive to union with God expressed by medieval mystics.

Equally important for Augustine is the awareness that no one is truly happy who lives in fear of losing the object or source of happiness. Once again, he sees the answer to the crisis of philosophical and existential anxiety in the gospel that *caritas* will not fail because it is God's grasp of the person rather than vice-versa. In this regard Harrison notes that one of Augustine's favorite texts is Romans 5:5: "God's love has

been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Anything may be perceived as an object of good *for me* – thus even in evil the person loves nothing other than what he or she thinks is his or her good. In *The City of God*, Augustine writes:

> When the miser prefers his gold to justice, it is through no fault of the gold, but of the man; and so with every created thing. For though it be good, it may be loved with an evil as well as with a good love: it is loved rightly when it is loved ordinately; evilly when inordinately. It is this which some one has briefly said in these verses in praise of the Creator: "These are Thine, they are good, because thou art good who did create them. There is in them nothing of ours, unless the sin we commit when we forget the order of things, and instead of Thee love that which Thou hast made."

The fact that persons neglect the order of creation is due to the fall and sin, not the Creator. Creatures, being incomplete due to fall, always desire their completeness. Thus, to Augustine, self-love and the love of God must coincide. Persons always seek their own happiness, their own good; self-love seeks what is good for the self. If that good is sought in the creation rather than the Creator, it is self-deception, delusional. That love is inordinate, that is, disordered love. Only by loving God may we truly learn to love ourselves. We shall see that this is also the point made centuries later by Bernard of Clairvaux. In *On the Trinity*, Augustine states: "The man who knows how to love himself, loves God; while the man who does not love God, though he retains the love of self which belongs to his nature, may yet properly be said to hate himself, when he does what is contrary to his own good.... It is therefore a fearful delusion, by which, though all men desire their own advantage, so many do what only works their ruin."

This leads to consideration of the opposition between loves, between *caritas* and *cupiditas*. *Cupiditas* is sin because it is misdirected or disordered love; it is love directed to inferior objects which can never fulfill us; it is curved down toward the earth rather than upward toward God. God is above us, and thus we are to direct our love upward toward the good that is God. Earthly goods confuse us, and drag our love downwards toward them. *Cupiditas* then is the search for the good, which while good, is nevertheless incapable of providing final satisfaction. The difference between *caritas* and *cupiditas* is not the way love is expressed but the object of the love. *Caritas* is directed to the ultimate; *cupiditas* mistakes the penultimate for the ultimate. Here again we see the influence of Neoplatonism with its view that humans are incomplete and that therefore all human desires and strivings are directed to the attainment and possession of goods and values to overcome the recognized lack of being and therefore to perfect oneself. Being itself is the highest good; to turn away from the highest good, from Being, is to turn toward non-being. Augustine was thus using Hellenistic philosophy to express to his audience the biblical view that sin is not just breaking rules or laws but breaking relationships by turning away from God and the neighbor, breaking the chain of being. Since only God is the highest good, the immutable good, only God can give persons complete fulfillment. When love is directed to lower goods in the search for fulfillment it then becomes idolatrous, it mistakes the creature for the Creator; by loving perishable goods, sin is a turn or perversion toward privation and death. In his *Enchiridion* Augustine concludes: "[L]ust [*cupiditas*] diminishes as love [*caritas*] grows, till the latter grows to such a height that it can grow no higher here. For 'greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' [John 15:13]. Who then can tell how great love shall be in the future world, where there shall be no lust for it to restrain and conquer? For that will be the perfection of health when there shall be no struggle with death."

The distinction between true and false love raises the question of Augustine's understanding of the creation. He rejected Manichaeism, an attractive rival religion of his day, with its radical dualism of the opposition of good and evil, spirit and matter that led to denigration of the material world. Augustine affirmed the goodness of creation because it is God's creation. Hence love of the creation is not in itself sin if this love is rightly understood. He clarified this by making a distinction between enjoyment (*frui*) and use (*uti*). *Frui* is the love that "enjoys" its object, whereas *uti* is the love that "uses" its object. The analogy Augustine used to illustrate this distinction is that of a voyage to our homeland. The ship is "used" as a means to get us to our home that we "enjoy." The ever-present temptation is that the voyage may so appeal to us that we forget home and enjoy the trip to the extent that it becomes an end in itself. The distinction between the love that "uses" and the love that "enjoys" raises another question that is more fraught for contemporary life than it was for Augustine: ecology. Certainly Augustine cannot be indicted for modern ecological destruction, but ideas such as the lesser goods of creation are for "use" not "enjoyment" do have consequences. When the right attitude to the world is to "use" it as a means to ascend to God, there may arise a "forgetfulness" of the goodness of creation and the world may lose its meaning as God's world. It may be argued that that was not Augustine's intention for he himself had vigorously rejected the dualistic anti-materialism of Manichaeism. His intent, briefly stated, appears in *On Christian Doctrine*: "[T]he whole temporal dispensation was made by divine Providence for our salvation. We should use it, not with an abiding but with a transitory love and delight . . . so that we love those things by which we are carried along for the sake of that toward which we are

carried." Burnaby in his essay "*Amor* in St. Augustine" elaborates: "What Augustine frankly and thankfully recognizes is that God's goodness has so ordered his creation that the life which gives itself in love to God and neighbor is not and never can be a life lost. 'When you love him, you will be where your being is secure (*ibi eris, ubi non peris*).' " Rist (*Augustine*) writes: "Augustinian grace has come to perform the role of Platonic eros; the difference is that grace is unambiguously divine, no mere *daimon*, but the Holy Spirit; and the fact that love is God entails that it is omnipresent."

The earthly city is not the true home of the Christian, but rather the vehicle ("the ship") for our travel to our true home in the heavenly city. The world, our earthly city, is given as a means and vehicle for our return to God; it is to be used not enjoyed. The world, if enjoyed, drags us down and away from God. In *The City of God*, Augustine wrote: "Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord." According to Daniel Day Williams, Augustine has bought into the Platonic metaphysic of a hierarchy of being with Being itself (the Highest Good) as immutable as well as absolute. The consequence is to relegate all other being to various positions in the great chain of being, characterized by transience and incompleteness. Since love of God is love of the immutable, every other love has a lesser place in Augustine's system of values. The issue in the succeeding history of Western Christendom became whether this disjuncture is spiritualized toward an ascetic otherworldliness or understood as the critical perspective for life in this world. One major aspect of the Augustinian heritage was an emphasis upon Christians as pilgrims in an alien land. In Augustine we find the themes of pilgrimage and alienation that become so influential in Western Christendom

and culture. The motif of ascent to God will be illustrated in art and literature by images of the ladder to heaven. To be sure, Augustine emphasized that human ascent to God depends first of all upon God's descent to humankind; the descent of Christ enables human ascent to God.

D. W. Robertson concisely summarizes Augustine's contribution:

> At the heart of medieval Christianity is the doctrine of Charity.... Since this doctrine has extremely broad implications, it cannot be expressed satisfactorily in a few words, but for convenience we may use the classic formulation included in the *De doctrina Christiana* of St. Augustine: "Charity is called the movement of the soul to the enjoyment of God for his own sake, and that of the neighbor for the sake of God; cupidity on the other hand is the movement of soul to the enjoyment of self and the neighbor and whatever pleases the body not for the sake of God." The opposite of Charity, as St. Augustine describes it is cupidity, the love of any creature, including one's self, for its own sake. These two loves, Charity and cupidity, are the two poles of medieval Christian scale of values. For St. Augustine and for his successors among medieval exegetes, the whole aim of Scripture is to promote Charity and to condemn cupidity....