

A poet said, 'Not where I breathe, but where I love I live.' A theologian said, 'Love is the most theological thing of all.' God says, 'I am love.' Our heart and mind say, 'This is all I know, and all I need to know.' The human person resonates at the word 'love' no matter how bedraggled the inner spirit. Ultimately that human spirit leaps highest when God's love-agape-comes to heart and mind. This book is about this miracle. The writer has seen strong, strong love work in wonderful ways, in many lands and cultures. He, like others grown wise from many years of love's joy and its suffering, speaks to men and women of his own times. His insights are powerful for it is out of the mystery of *agape* that he writes.

**AH,
STRONG,
STRONG LOVE!**

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AH, STRONG, STRONG LOVE!

Geoffrey C. Bingham

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PRESCRIPT TO LOVE TO 'AH! STRONG, STRONG LOVE!'

For the Person Wishing to Know More of Love

The purpose of writing this book—as is the case with most books I have written—was to clarify my thinking along biblical lines. Clarifying of the mind is a personal thing—a thing of the heart. One wants to know what love is, and how to live in it, especially as we are commanded to love God and to love one another. The process and exercise of clarifying the subject may not appeal to all. A proof-reader is primarily looking for things to do with the flow of writing, the syntax and grammar, typographical errors and the like, and so reading is a drawn-out and often painful thing. One proof-reader spoke of 'wading through it all', and that was a fair enough statement. The writer hopes that when all the work of proof-reading, correction and editing is completed that the book will be more easily read.

Having written a book like this I feel as though my exercise has been completed. I have made my way through the subject, and now the best thing to do

would be to take the essence of the material and re-write it in a simple flowing style, thus vastly reducing the size and the notes one has made along the way. I am sure the abridged volume would be more readable and assimilable. The problem with this kind of writing is that a thoughtful reader, and one who is theologically critical—in the right sense of that term—will want to know how I arrived at my conclusions, especially if those conclusions are of significance. Ideally I would wish to write two books—the one in which I made my way steadily and in detail to a proper conclusion, and the one which was the simple essence of the writing and researching adventure. I often think, ‘Alas! I can write neither successfully. The first book is for “waders” and the second I cannot write because I would find it difficult to reduce its substance and still be convincing.’

The writing in which I feel most at home is that of poetry and fiction. In poetry one can escape from discursive composition and convey deep theological reality: in fiction one can skilfully convey theological truth without using the language and argumentation of theology. Character studies tell their own truth, short fiction can convey through minor plots, whilst sustained fiction—the novel—can use the interchange of characters and narrative to draw out principles that are theological, but which are not stated explicitly. Some of my friends say to me, ‘Stick to poetry and fiction; they are your *forte*. Your theology is too complicated and drawn out.’ I bow to them politely because I respect all critics and know how much I need them. It may be that some remain silent, preferring to take pity and not comment. At the same time I have the

practical proof of innumerable people who have read almost all my books and gained considerable profit from them. Some have said, ‘I learn just about all my theology from them.’ So I persist, and time and posterity may give a modest place to my homespun endeavours.

Take this present book, for example: such truths come through study of the Scriptures and historical theology which are so dynamic as to move me deeply in my heart and mind. I am confronted not by ideas but by God. My thinking is changed not by deduction or induction, but by the Word of God Himself. He is speaking to *me*. This I cannot convey to the reader. I hope something in my writing resonates for him, so that he—or she—picks up the vibrations. When I later return to read what I have written it seems there is no resonance, that the music I heard when writing is now only flat silence. I am disappointed. When I try to animate what I have written the text gives no response. The animation is pathetic, and is not life. Then I think, in hope, ‘Ah yes, but my reader may be just in that position of life and experience that he—or she—will find this apt and thrilling, just as I did.’ In fact I know that some will find the material exciting and enriching, and probably they will be folk whose minds are not already satiated with much teaching, and overmuch theological reasoning.

I always keep in mind the fact that for many years I have written material for pastors, teachers and leaders who are not theologically sophisticated, who like to ponder what others have researched, and then use it. With them are folk who love to gain all biblical knowledge possible, and out of that gathering they also gain

wisdom. More and more of the whole picture becomes known to them and is seen by them. I respect the person who differs from me and my theology. Their life-experience has been different to mine. For my part I must write from what I know, and in the only way I know how to write. If I am permitted more years of life, then I trust I will improve both in knowledge and the ability to write, but most of all I covet the wisdom that comes with the knowledge God gives. Wisdom is a great treasure, and yet wisdom can only be communicated from one heart to another. That is why all theology must be primarily of the heart.

The essence of all theology is the matter of love. Love has the primacy since God is love. I hope and pray that you will read this book with the end in view of growing in love—in true *agape*. For those who like to read the last chapter first, and so know the goal of their reading, I recommend that they—you—pass immediately to ‘Postscript to Love’, the conclusive writing at the end of the book. It will not give you the plan of the book (which, anyway, you can find in the Table of Contents), but it will give you the essence of all the material, and can then act as a key to the whole volume.

Geoffrey Bingham

Chapter One

COMING TO REALISE GOD'S LOVE

I have many wonderful memories of people who have come to see the love of God. One of these is of a young woman who was a member of a women's study group. It was quite large—well over 100 women—and she was a young person of about eighteen years. Almost from when I began speaking she began to weep, and as the message proceeded her weeping became uncontrollable. After the message older women tried to comfort her, but did not succeed. When I asked if I could help, she simply said, ‘Oh, Mr Bingham. I am not weeping because I am sad. I am weeping because I'm glad. I never knew He loved me like that.’

‘I never knew He loved me like that’ is a statement I have heard time and again. I am sure it has been uttered innumerable times down through many centuries. It would have to be that way, since the simple fact is that God Himself is love.

I remember another occasion when, following an address, a middle-aged woman sat as though rooted to her chair. Folk talked to her because she kept trembling with joy, and they could not understand. Having

heard the message of love she said to me when I approached her, 'Oh! I never knew He loved me like that!' After chatting I suggested she might like to cross the room for a cup of tea, but she shook her head. She didn't want to move. She thought that perhaps the tremendous peace and joy she knew might be broken by a physical movement!

Another memory comes to mind of a woman whose life had been made a misery for her by a treacherous husband. She and he had lived a simple, frugal existence together, careful not to incur unnecessary expenses or indulge in luxuries. The day came when the husband—to her immense surprise and shock—revealed that he was having a liaison with another woman. He had, he said, saved tens of thousands of dollars through the years of their marriage, and now he was going to expend it on his woman and himself. His wife, who was a Christian, could scarcely believe what she heard. Of course she suffered much emotional pain and shock, but about that time she came to see the love of God in a way she had not previously known it, and the revelation was so strong that it took her through the stress into a place of light and joy. She said she had never known the love of God in that way. That love has continued to sustain her and give her richness in life.

There are other stories too, innumerable stories of people who have come for pastoral help, and I have known that I could not help them from my small store of human wisdom. At the same time I have known that God could wonderfully help them if they would see Him as love. I knew that 'God is love' would have to come to them as a revelation, and not as some fine theological explanation from me. It always came to

the point where I would have to try to show them God's love in the Cross. If they could see that, then a change took place in them—a most wonderful change.

I remember a man who had been divorced, was then on his second marriage, and although he had come into some Christian experience, and his wife was a Christian, yet history was repeating itself. Just as he had physically beaten his first wife, so now he was being cruel to his second wife, and he deplored it. I said to him, 'You know, your trouble is that you will never let anyone love you.' As I spoke the words it seemed he was propelled across the room, as though some unseen person had flung him there. He shouted, 'I never let anyone love me?' It was a question but it was also a startled exclamation. He had suddenly realised that all his life had been a rejection of the love of others for him, yet underneath he had longed for love, and was angry that it did not seem to be coming through to him. He listened intently as I told him what he had heard many times, namely the love of God for him in the death of Jesus. His eyes lit up, and his body was flooded with a love and joy that he could scarcely contain. He had hatred for his parents, for his former wife, for her second husband, and of course, for himself. Now that was all gone. Nor was it a passing freakish experience. Years later he came to tell me how the new life of love had lasted. His case was one of many in which I have seen men and women come into the love of God.

As we know such stories can be multiplied many times, and innumerable are the accounts of them. Those who do not know this love shake their heads in unbelief or cynicism. So far as they view life, the

human scene, the lives of people and their own lives, there seems to them to be little evidence of a great love in this world. Of course almost everyone has had experiences of love, of surprising acts that happen and leave people wondering. There is the love of parents for children, family love, love of friends, and that kind of love which we call romantic and sexual, i.e. marital love. History also has its tales of great loves, some of which have become classics in biographies, poems, stories, music and opera.

The question we are considering is: how can love come to us in our human living, love that is so immense that we sit in sheer wonder and cry, 'I never knew He loved me like that!?' Granted that such happenings occur, we ask the further question, 'Is this a genuine breakthrough into a love which then becomes habitual in practice, i.e. it is not an experience which passes quickly, and is gone?'

We All Like Being Loved

Apart from people who have become cynical about life, or do not believe that the love others offer can be genuine, most of us like being loved. Indeed it is heart-warming and makes for a more pleasant life. Of course there is a selfish love which gives only in order to receive and so we are suspicious about it, and seek to defend ourselves from it. Where, however, there is spontaneous, warm and affectionate love, we rather like to bask in it.

Even so, some people are altogether wary of love for some of the reasons given above. They seem to

lack love for themselves, are cautious of being caught by another's love, and look around the universe for proof that true love exists. One of their complaints is that God is not loving. If He were then He would not allow heavy sins, deep crimes, dreadful wars, human suffering, and the birth of deformed children. If He were—as is generally supposed—all powerful, then surely He could prevent any possibility of suffering being part of the human scene and the world of nature.

At first sight this argument does seem reasonable. To try to change the mind of one convinced of God's failure in love would be an impossible task. The evidences of a faulty creation are too strong to gainsay such an argument. Many apologists for God have written strong arguments to show the love of God, but I doubt whether they could have much affect when one looks at all the misery of history, especially when much of it has been caused by religions.

Even so, there are certain weaknesses in reasoning that there is no genuine love. If minds were not bitter they would have to agree that history also has its stories of sacrificial love, of parental love that persists with children who have been born with diseases and defects, and wonderfully cares for them. The argument for a world in which there is no love certainly has its problems. Too many have loved deeply against terrible odds to be able to generalise that there is no love.

Love of Life—Whatever!

For the most part—given in all the suffering humans have—people still wish to live. It may be that they

hope better times are ahead, but whatever the reasons, they still wish to live. I recently heard the announcer on a radio ‘talk-back’ session ask for listeners to voice their thoughts about abortion. The usual views were put forward. One listener thought that the only foetuses which ought to be aborted were those detected by modern sonic methods as being malformed. A woman rang up and said she would have been one of those foetuses but was glad she had not been aborted, since she so enjoyed life. ‘I know I am malformed,’ she admitted, ‘but, oh how wonderful life has been!’ She certainly loved life.

Life Without Genuine Love

There are, of course, well-formed people—many of whom are greatly gifted—who do not enjoy life. Some hate it, but on the whole most of us wish to live as long as possible. Deep anger may make us homicidal or suicidal, but when love is operative then life can be tolerable, and even very wonderful. Even so, when the love we meet is faulty, is selfish, and when it even betrays us, then we ask whether the love that Paul described as ‘bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things’ and as ‘never failing’ really does exist.

It is the hope and intention of this book to show that true love does exist, and that it is not only better than the best of human love, but is a love which humans can know, and by which they can rise above the faulty love which we mortals give and receive from one another.

Chapter Two

LOVE FROM THE BEGINNING

A stranger to the Christian Scriptures could be well excused for thinking that love is simply a matter of body ‘chemistry’, of attraction to persons or things because they are likeable, and that it begins and ends in those kinds of situations. Whilst the evolutionary doctrine of ‘survival of the fittest’ may raise some problems as to the possibility of genuine love ever evolving, yet a person might think that the human race evolves upward, and love—even unselfish love—may develop as the human race ascends from its less loving beginnings. Some folk might simply see love as an element of developing relationships, but then the very term ‘relationships’ assumes human beings are societal creatures, and that interrelationships are part of being human. Animals do, of course, have patterned relationships but scarcely in the form known to humans, although some animal lovers tend to read back into animals the kind of love which we call ‘human’.

The Christian Scriptures have a lot to say about love, and so can be a useful source for any discussion on love. They—like other historical documents—can give us the mind and thinking of men and women

from the past. When we talk of ‘the Christian Scriptures’ we really mean those writings which were first Hebrew ones—written by the people of Israel—which are called by us ‘The Old Testament’. Then came the writings called ‘The New Testament’ written by the early Christians. Together these two Testaments form the Christian Scriptures because they essentially are one whole.¹ The Old Testament commences with ‘In the beginning’ and goes on to describe the creation of the universe, including Man.² An apostle of Jesus—the one whose name was John—speaks of ‘That which was from the beginning,’ and talks about the commandment of love as ‘an old commandment which you had from the beginning’.³

From these three statements we may safely conclude that love was from the beginning, i.e. from the beginning of Man’s history.⁴ That is, love has always been. This love would have to be the love of God.

¹ See *How To Study the Bible* (G. Bingham, NCPI, 1980) for a simple explanation of how the Christian Scriptures came into being.

² By ‘Man’ we mean humanity which sprang from the creation of the first man and woman.

³ By ‘beginning’ John could have meant the beginning of the apostles’ experience of Christ, with Christ, but he refers to an ‘old commandment’ i.e., the commandments of the Old Testament which both Paul and James say add up to love to one’s neighbour and which Jesus said add up to love for God and one’s neighbour.

⁴ Some theologians would balk at such a statement and call it simplistic. They would point out that it is difficult to find an explicit statement of God’s love in the Genesis account of creation. This is true enough, but the whole of the Old Testament adds up to an account of God’s love—especially His covenant love—and a Trinitarian teaching emerges in the New Testament, which, when it is justifiably read back into the Old Testament writings, shows God’s purpose in and for creation was one of love. See especially Eph. 1:5, ‘He destined us *in love* to be his sons through Jesus Christ’. John 1:1–4 also indicates what happened in the creation through the Word (*Logos*), and it certainly was a matter of Divine love.

The Scriptures claim that ‘God is love’. He was—and is—always love. The apostle Paul tells us that before the foundation of the world God ‘in love predestined us to be his sons by Christ Jesus’. Thus we can conclude that His action in creating the world was done only in love, and the future He planned for Man was also only in love. In this sense, everything is essentially a love matter.

If we look about us everything does not seem to be essentially a love matter. By the word ‘essentially’ we mean ‘things as they really are’, and not just ‘things as they appear to be’. For example, most people know that they should love and not hate. When they hate they know they are going against what they really are, i.e. against what they are *essentially*. So, whilst many things in society may give the appearance of not being of love, it is because human beings are going against their true created nature. They are doing acts which are not loving ones. The apostle John said that he who hates his brother is a murderer, i.e. that in hating he is going against what it is to be a true human. John, then, would call hating ‘a death state’. He also spoke of a coming to life—‘We know we have passed from death into life, because we love the brethren’. One is in death when one hates: one is in life when one loves.

Everything Springs From Love

I am arguing that since God is love, He must then create everything in love. It is reasonable to suppose that had Man continued with God in a love-fellowship, then the world would not know the hate-problems,

the selfishness problems, the problems of human perversion, and the anti-God problems that have arisen in its history and brought tragedy and suffering as a consequence. Honest enquiry into the human scene would show us that most of our suffering stems from human lack of love, human self-love, jealousy, striving to be top-dog, and the drive for personal security in the face of the needs of the rest of humanity. We repeat that if Man had lived in true love with His Creator and with all human fellow-creatures, then love could have made life on this planet more than simply tolerable. In that sense love is the most practical of all things.

If it be true that ‘everything springs from love’, i.e. that to love is more natural than to hate, giving more normal than just getting, and care and concern for one another the true order, then something of a terrible nature must have happened to bring human selfishness into the human scene. The Scriptures and the theologians who study them call this ‘the fall of Man’. By this they mean Man fell from a high position to a low one. He was made in ‘the image and likeness of God’, i.e. was like God in every respect—short of being God Himself, and of having deity in himself—and yet he turned his back on his own true being with the aim of not only being like God, but becoming as God. Being *like* God must have been wonderful since Man could have enjoyed his simple humanity. To be *as* God was a foolish matter since a creature cannot be *as* its Creator, nor can he take up the vast responsibilities that only God can carry. In this sense Man—when Man thinks of himself to be *as* God—carries with him the illusion that he is self-sufficient, self-competent, self-saving and self-secure. This, of course, brings him into headlong

conflict with the millions of other self-sufficient, self-competent, self-saving and self-secure human beings—so-called.

Everything—the ‘everything’ which once sprang only from love—does not, since the fall of man, spring directly from the love Man knew when in fellowship with God, but from human self-love. To this is added another problem: Man did not cease to be in the image of God when he broke away from Him, and it is that image of God—called the *imago dei*—which troubles him when he does not love. He is in some kind of dilemma as he has a drive to love purely, but his bid to be independent and love himself is another drive which counteracts and overcomes the drive of pure love. The apostle Paul called this ‘suppressing the truth’—this suppressing being done by acts contrary to the truth.

Is Every Situation Without Love?

The facts of the matter are that we can see love everywhere around us, and this seems to contradict my assertion regarding the fallenness of Man. Wives and husbands love one another, parents love children and children love parents; children love one another, and in society there are many expressions of love. We see compassion and care in many forms, and surely these are love. The answer must be: yes, they are forms and expressions of love.

When we come to examine the acts of love, we must determine whether they spring from enlightened self-interest, whether they are—or are not—acts of

self-giving love, for that alone is true love. It may also be that some folk do bring through love that does not spring from themselves, but from God Himself, in which case they are being true to the *imago dei*.⁵ At this point we will have to leave the question suspended as to whether every situation is, or is not, without love. That there is much love in the world cannot be denied. Whether that is lasting love is a question we will try to answer. We are simply thankful that there is much love in the world—whatever form it may happen to take.

Love in All Its Forms is Dynamic

It is fair enough to say that the world has never seen so much hatred and bitterness as in the past four or five decades: the painful Sino-Japanese War, the dreadful World War II, the cruelties of which destroyed many millions of human beings, and the Post-War period when numberless refugees were exterminated or left to rot in internment camps. There were also the wars which resulted from conflict between Communist and opposing ideologies and resulted in the Cold War. Whilst Communism seems to have collapsed, the bitterness of nations fighting for their own sovereignty has seen fresh outbreaks of cruelty and hatred.

⁵ In a later chapter we will discuss the idea that humanity is—for certain reasons—in two streams, one stream being those who love God, and one stream being those who do not. Even so, we cannot say that sinful Man may not do certain acts of love which God leads him to do. This is part of the mystery of the conflict fallen Man knows. Jesus said, ‘You being evil know how to give good gifts to your children,’ and he showed even evil Man knows what is good to do. Whether evil Man does such is a matter to be contemplated.

Even so, the world has rarely—if ever—seen such expressions of care and concern for the peoples of the world in which there have been harsh famines, floods, earthquakes, and other disasters. Nations have rallied to the aid of other nations, and have given generously to stave off death and relieve immense suffering. Such a flow of international help is unique in the history of mankind. To say that in all of this there is no love must be to go against the evidence that care and compassion are world-wide.

For all of this we could give many explanations. We could say that Man has a drive to care, to compassion and active love because the image of God is in him; because he is in the image of God. We might even claim that the drive to love comes from the teaching of Christianity, even if its clarity becomes blurred from generation to generation, and from person to person. Perhaps the moral idea of the goodness of loving may be a spin-off, or even a vestige of the faith of our godly forbears: it is not an easy matter to decide. We could say that somehow Man—now more secular than spiritual Man—gains certain self-credits and emotional profits from his love in these forms. We could say that some love love rather than that they *do* acts of love in a pure way, and that their motivations for what they do are mixed.⁶ We could also say that Man in his guilt is out to justify himself on every score, and that probably the most powerful of all scores is that of love. Whatever

⁶ There is certainly a lot of social protest today against injustice, inhuman treatment of persons, and inequalities in society, and doubtless protests are a form of seeking to help others. Often, however, practical personal giving and practical personal helping where it is needed is neglected. Is protest, then, enough in itself?

may be the mixed motives and the drives that are conscious and unconscious, we cannot but be grateful for the fact that in our day there seems to be a growing international mind bent on showing signs of love to those who are in unfortunate and suffering situations.

It may well be said that the amount of help and welfare concern is minuscule when placed against the vast quantity of suffering people. This is probably true but when we think of the growing army of welfare workers, sociologists, psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, medicos and other humane workers, then we see a powerful movement that is trying to deal with human pain and anguish. Much of it must come within the scope of love, however faulty purists may judge that love to be. One thing is sure, the pressure to love is upon us as a human race. Whether, in the long run, this sort of love really effects something of lasting nature and value is another question, and later we will address it.

Chapter Three

THE SOURCE OF LOVE

Only One Source to True Love

It does seem to be universally acclaimed that love matters greatly. Probably cultures that have been affected by the Judaic-Christian teachings would more regard love as essential to true living—or at least a virtue to be desired—than would cultures with a non-Judaic-Christian background. This is not the case with all cultures and societies. In some communities and religions people live by fear, cruelty, superstition, rivalry and dread of supernatural powers which are tyrannical. In such communities chance happenings of love may warm the heart of the participants, but love may not be a basic teaching in the religion or ethics of those nations. It may be that the image of God in all people must break out—i.e. evidence itself—from time to time in what we might call ‘love-happenings’. Whatever the case, I am sure that it can be shown that love is not something towards which we naturally evolve, but that its source is God Himself. God is love. True love stems from Him: human expressions of true love come from Him.

John the apostle said twice ‘God is love’, and set out the simple statement ‘love is of God’.¹ By this he meant no creature was, or is, love, and that true love never originates within any creature. No creature can initiate love, though most can imitate it. If this be the case then God alone *is* love, and God alone is the *source* of love. Doubtless this goes against much human thinking. Almost every one of us thinks that he—or she—can summon up love from within oneself. According to John this is not the case. John and Paul both reason that human beings love only when they come to know God as love. This claim needs to be seen for what it is, but let the statements—below—of John and Paul be sufficient for us for the moment, so that we may see that God first makes the move which brings us to love.

John said, ‘We love because he first loved us,’ and Paul said, ‘The love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who [himself] is given to us.’ If what these apostles say is true, then it is impossible for human beings to love purely if they are apart from God. All love that is worked out in the human scene must be less than genuine love, however fine, practical and useful it may appear. Without wishing to be critical of human love it has to be said that ultimately love which is only human—which springs only from the human source—must prove inadequate. As a human being, a writer and a theologian, I can understand how indignant a reader may become when he reads what I am

¹ The statements ‘God is love’, and ‘love is of God’ are so familiar to us that they have become almost innocuous in use, yet they are probably two of the most powerful and significant statements in the history and literature of Man.

saying here, but I stand by my assertion, and will endeavour to explain and justify it.

The Matter of ‘God is Love’

If we could say ‘Love is God’ then we would be assuming that we know what love is, and so we really know who and what God is. The problem lies in our knowledge of love. Whilst most would claim they could define love and know what it is, the writers of the New Testament would deny this. When John the apostle said, ‘Love is of God,’ he added ‘and he who loves is born of God and knows God.’ We must follow his statement closely. He is not saying, ‘Wherever you find a person loving another then that person has been born of God and knows God,’ since the kind of love with which the person is loving may not be God’s love. It could be self-love, loving for pleasure obtained by the act: indeed it could be anything. No; John is really saying, ‘You can only love if your love is of God. That will not be the case unless you have been born of God. To be born of God is an act of God just as much as to be born of human parents is an act of their humanity.’² That new birth comes when we see God as love, or—to put it in a slightly different way—when we see God as love, for then we are born of Him and so go on to love others.’

All of this may come as a shock to many of us who

² John makes this clear in his Gospel (1:12–13), ‘But to all who received him [Jesus Christ, the Word of God], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.’

have thought we have loved. It may well be that we have loved, yet that love may have only been the kind of love which is recognised in our community as being good, i.e. good enough, when in fact it was not genuine love³—the love that can come only from God. If true love comes only from God then we must first come to know God, that is we must come to that experience of being born by God into the experience of true love.

How Do We Know That God is Love?

That is a good question. We will try to answer it by the reasoning of the early apostles, and in particular John, Paul and Peter. In this Chapter we will give only a cursory summary of the three apostles in their setting out of *agape*. In later chapters we will greatly enlarge the teaching of these three men, especially as their teaching is found in their Epistles.⁴

(I) THE ANSWER OF JOHN THE APOSTLE

John seeks to explain the love of God by saying two things⁵, (a) God sent His Son into the world that we might have life through him, and (b) that He sent His

³ Later in our reading we will see that the apostles Paul, Peter and John warned their listeners and readers against insincere love. Even in that first community of believers there was the danger of imitating Divine love instead of living it out in the community (Rom. 12:9; II Cor. 6:6; I Pet. 1:22; I John 3:16–18).

⁴ See Chapters 18–22 on ‘The Community of Love’. The Pauline position is given in Chapter 19, the Johannine in Chapters 20–21, and Petrine in Chapter 22.

⁵ John’s argument is to be found in I John 4:17–19.

Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins. In fact (a) and (b) are together. Man only has true life through the Son, who being sent by the Father becomes the propitiation—i.e. the atoning sacrifice—for our sins. In essence this means all human beings are dead to God, and really dead in themselves until Christ gives eternal life to them, and this he cannot do unless first he dies on the Cross for their sins. The reader might not understand what this means, or may have some understanding of the death of the Cross and yet object to it. Whatever the case, John’s argument is plain enough. God’s love lies in the fact that He sends His Son to die so that all who believe on him and his atoning sacrifice may have eternal life.

Because ‘propitiation’ and ‘atoning sacrifice’ are not terms we use today, we will need—later—to explain them, in which case we may then see the love of God. For the moment we are simply portraying John’s argument, i.e. ‘You see God’s love and you will know He is love, and that He loves you.’

(II) THE ANSWER OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

Paul is strong on explaining the love of God. In line with John he shows that God’s love is flooded into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who himself is given as a gift—the Spirit who is called ‘the Spirit of love’. The passage of Romans 5:1–11 tells us that God has not left guilty persons to suffer for their sin—i.e. to go on feeling their accumulated guilt—but has brought them to peace with Himself. It is true that all human beings are sinners, yet God showed His love through His Son dying for our sins. We were enemies, but God did not

react and hate us. We were not good and righteous, yet God averted His wrath on our sins by providing His Son to bear the pain, shame and judgement of our sins. He gave to men and women the gift of reconciliation, i.e. brought them to peace with Himself. These actions show His love. His Spirit's coming to our hearts is what makes those acts intelligible to us.

In other places Paul tells us of God's love to us as Father. He receives us as sons, helps us by the Spirit to spontaneously call Him 'Father!' and so to walk as His children, living in His family. He speaks of the Father not withholding His Son but giving him up to death for us. He speaks much of the Son—Jesus Christ—loving us and voluntarily giving himself up to saving death for us.

(III) THE ANSWER OF PETER THE APOSTLE

Peter's showing of God's love is much along the same lines as those of John and Paul. Christ's saving death was planned by God before time, and brought to pass in time.⁶ He says, 'Without having seen him [Jesus Christ] you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy.' That is, true love comes to our hearts when we see the Father's love in the death of His Son and we love the Son with 'unutterable and exalted joy'. Peter also shows that love for the brethren is the fruit of God's love for us in Christ (I Pet. 1:22; 2:17; 4:8; 5:14; cf. 3:8, *philadelphoi*).

⁶ See I Peter 1:3–6, 18–20; 2:24.

Conclusion to the Origin of Love

If, then, we see God's act of love in history through His Son Jesus Christ, we have come into the new birth by which we know God's nature as love. This recognition of God's love simultaneously brings us into the experience of it. Even so, love is not something we receive from God such as a power or an influence, or even an emotion. Since God is love then it must be God Himself we receive. In other words we do not receive an abstract thing but the Being of God. The Father, the Son and the Spirit as the One God enter into our lives and dwell there. Jesus said this was how it would be. Of the Holy Spirit he said, 'He dwells with you, and will be in you . . . if any man loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'⁷

Later we will speak more of the matter of God dwelling in us, but we are able to see that love does not derive from us. Love comes to us in the form of God Himself. Such love we cannot manufacture from ourselves. Indeed it is not in ourselves, and we need to understand this fact. We repeat, 'Love is of God,' and 'God is love.'

⁷ See John 14:15–23.

Chapter Four

NO DIVINE LOVE IN OUR HUMANITY

The Gift and Loss of Love

When primal Man was made in the image of God he must have been endowed with God's love. There must have been love in created humanity. Man must have been a loving creature. Even so, his love—as such—was untested. The Woman—so to speak—was drawn from the Man and so she was one with him, one in him, yet her oneness with him was not tested—nor his with her—as their oneness with God was as yet untested. The Man evidently loved her powerfully since he said of her 'This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' She was already—by creation and nature—*one* with him.¹

We have seen briefly that the temptation at the time of the Fall was that the primal couple should become *as* God. If they had been truly '*as* God' then they would

¹ When we say Woman was drawn from Man we mean that she was not created separate from him and in the way in which he had been created. Thus it can be said they have the one centre of subject consciousness even though each is a person. Each is necessary to the other by virtue of the mode of their creation. This is of great significance both theologically and psychologically.

have become love. Had this been the case then the history of mankind might be thought to have been glorious, but a creature cannot be *as* the Creator: Man cannot become love. At the best he can be loving. Whilst the image and likeness of God was not obliterated, certainly Man turned to his own way, seeking to rule his life as though it belonged to him and not to God. This misunderstanding brought disaster. The history had then begun of division between the Man and the Woman, and the division was shown—and is continually shown—between their offspring. Man had lost the gift of love when he separated from the source of love—God Himself. Coming back to God he can receive this gift of love afresh.

The Beginning of the History of Hate

The division between the Man and the Woman is shown in the way the Man blamed both God and the Woman for his act of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Woman blamed the tempting serpent. The first son of the marital union of the couple became the murderer of his brother, and this through jealousy of him. We see much of this in history. In his day Paul can describe the human situation by saying, 'We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, hated by men and hating one another.' In other places he speaks of Man's enmity with God, and of terrible enmity within the human race.² This is the sort of thing reported to us every day by the media but rationalised

² See Titus 3:1–3; Rom. 3:10–18 amongst many such descriptions of loveless Man.

by us, as though it were not part of our own intimate circle of life.

The apostle John takes the case of the murder of Abel by Cain and tells us there are two streams in humanity, one being ‘the children of the devil’ and the other being ‘the children of God’. It appears that all was not lost, even in the beginning: there were—and have ever been—those who love God as also there have been those who hate Him. Those who love God love other human beings. Those who hate God hate His children, although in one sense they may love what is their own.

The aim of our book is not to ferret out the evil that is in Man: history is a strong witness to all that. Our aim is to be realistic about human hatred and human evil and try to discover the way out of the human dilemma. It is a fact of life that human beings today are shocked by the treatment they receive from one another, whether it be within their families, their nations, or in their world. The greed, the avarice, the competition for existence which kills many, the cruelty which does not have to be, and the hatreds which grow out of relational fractures, all tell us Man is bereft of the love that would alter the human situation if Man were *as God*, i.e. if he were *love*.

Man With and Without Love

We have said that love is of God, and not of Man. How, then, can there be two streams in the human race? How can there be one stream which is basically in the business of selfishness and hatred, and another in the

business of doing righteousness and loving even those who hate them? The writer of Hebrews gives us at least part of the answer. In the 11th chapter of his Letter he tells us that the human race is divided into two streams—those who have faith in God, and those who do not. It seems that these two streams are the same as John’s two streams—those who love God and those who do not.

This seems to be natural enough. If one loves God then one has faith in Him, and one’s behaviour is in line with doing right and loving as God loves. If one does not have faith in God then one must have some other object of faith—either one’s self, or other persons, or the humanly manufactured substitutes such as idols and gods. No matter how fallen Man is, he will love something! The image of God in him will drive him to love of some sort. Not even the most bitter of human beings can thrive on hate!

Love’s Objects are What Matter to Human Beings

Whilst this chapter is claiming that Divine love cannot be found in humanity, i.e. does not have its source within human beings, yet it is evident that human beings can love passionately. This passion has to do with the objects loved. Sometimes the passion is on the lowest possible level—addiction to alcohol, money, drugs, pornography, power, prestige and the like. Human beings also love wonderfully, without doubt, and their love can rise to remarkable heights and can endure even terrible suffering for the beloved object, whether

that be a person, a nation, a thing, a principle, an ideal or a system. Even so, we must insist that all such love is not Divine love. It begins on the human level and it stays there.

The love of objects is a sort of one-way traffic. Objects cannot respond relationally, but then persons can. The question is whether the relationality that begins on the human level can ever really satisfy human beings in their depths. Of course a certain satisfaction is obtained from reasonable human relationships, but is total realisation of love ever obtained? We hope to show that only when God's love resides in human beings can love be really fulfilling.

The Persistence of Idolatry

The persistence of idolatry is the proof to us that human beings love, and can love passionately, but their quality of love—if not its forms—is determined by the object of love. In idolatry the object of worship and devotion is generally a fantasy. The idol as envisaged by the devotee is simply not a reality. Anything which is devised, and which is not created, is the product of envisaging. God alone is love, so that God alone can satisfy the deepest yearnings and desires of the human heart, since Man was created to love, and love freely in response to the evocation of Divine love.

The subject of the idols and their devotees form a large part of the Jewish writings. Much teaching is given about their deceit, their inability to satisfy, as also about their terrible tyranny as they demand the total allegiance of their worshippers. No less demanding is the idol of self when self worships self. What

keeps idolaters at their worship is the illicit nature of their devotion. Whatever is illicit carries its own excitement, albeit the 'let-down' that follows, idol-worship is generally devastating. The attraction about the idol is that it is mysterious. It has hidden powers. It can deliver the goods. Against the idols God is dull, grim, even severe, and certainly legalistic to the last degree. At least to the idolater this is how it seems to be.

Human beings tire quickly of one idol, and so the range of their imagination and devotion can be vast and varied. However, as age and death approach, the idols prove to be feeble. Man sits in the midst of his pitiful idols and has no true understanding of life, no joy, peace and security. At the last the life of expended love and passion is shown to be to no purpose. The emptiness of the idols is exposed and the dissipation of human love is total.

Conclusion: There is no Divine Love in Our Fallen Humanity

There is plenty of love in humanity: never let it be said otherwise, but there is no Divine love in it, unless the person lives in the stream of the faithful, the believers who love God because He first loved them, and who, in loving God, love one another because God dwells in them. Of itself fallen humanity has a love that at core is selfish. Humanity under grace has Divine love³, and can love selflessly. Failure to go on

³ Whilst we talk about 'humanity under grace' we have not yet shown what this is. This will be one of the most significant of the points we intend to make.

living in grace will bring reversion to egotistical love, highly disguised as true love though it may be.

Chapter Five

THE WORDS AND FORMS OF LOVE—I

The Way We Use the Word 'Love'

Down through human history the theologians, philosophers and practitioners of life have devoted themselves to the idea of love, and have formulated various words to cover their concepts of love. Hence we have such words as passion, adoration, fondness, tenderness, infatuation, affection, affinity, oneness, amity, friendliness, affability, amiableness and so on. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (London, 1956) has more quotations on the noun 'love', the adjective 'loving' and the verb 'to love', than of any other word. It is certainly a word used more in modern songs than any other.

In our day one of the simplest treatments of the word is given by C. S. Lewis in his book *The Four Loves* ([Pub.]London, 1960).¹ His is by no means the most important treatment of the subject, but it is simple and easily understood, and has made its impression upon many since its first printing

¹ Over all a fuller treatment is given by Leon Morris in his *Testaments of Love*. The books quoted immediately below fill out the meanings of the Greek words for love.

in 1960. For wider comment the reader is referred to other titles in the note below.² Lewis takes the four Greek words for love—*storge*, *philia*, *eros* and *agape*—and treats them for their different values. Roughly speaking he says that *storge* is that form of affection found amongst newly born animals and children and their parents. He shows that affection has many modes and many situations. *Philia* he sees as being along the lines of friendship with all its variations, whilst *eros* is primarily related to the love known in man-woman relationships. *Agape* is Divine love, the love of God which comes to humanity, and when a person is redeemed sets that one loving others.³

Perhaps this classification of the words is not strictly correct. Leon Morris in his *Testaments of Love* points

² J. A. Delanghe, *The Philosophy of Jesus: Real Love*, (Philadelphia, 1973); C. Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament* (St. Louis and London, 1963); Denis de Rougement, *Love Declared* (New York, 1963); Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice* (New York, 1960); Gene Outka, *Agape* (New Haven and London, 1972); D. D. Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (Welwyn, 1968); A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London, 1953); James Moffatt, *Love in the New Testament* (London, 1932); M. C. D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love* (London, 1962); Leon Morris, *The Testaments of Love* (Grand Rapids, 1981). Especially valuable are the articles in *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (ed. Colin Brown, Exeter and Grand Rapid, 1978), by W. Gunther (pp. 538–549); *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Kittel, Grand Rapids, 1964), article by E. Stauffer (pp. 21–55). Karl Barth's valuable section on love in his *Church Dogmatics* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1958) Vol. IV, Part 2, pp. 727–840 is immensely valuable. Other articles on love in *Histories and Theologies of the Old and New Testament* are also valuable. See also my *Constraining Love* (NCPI, Adelaide, 1985), and *Where I Love I Live* (NCPI, Adelaide, 1986).

³ Some writers include the Greek words such as *epithymia* which is linked with desire, but desire in a good sense such as Paul's desire to depart and be with Christ, and in a bad sense, i.e. it has a lustful use as in Colossians 3:5, 'evil desire'. Paul Tillich uses the word *libido* which can mean lust, but in Freudian psychology has the idea of a strong sexual drive. It is not used in the New Testament.

out that *eros* is not used in the New Testament, possibly because of its contemporary connotation with human man-woman love. Nygren in his *Agape and Eros* claims that *eros* was used for forms of love which transcend even man-woman loves, and reach highly altruistic goals. Theologians differ on their views of how *agape* came to be used for the Christian idea of love, and most simply say it was the word which was available, which did not have connotation with *eros*.

Without wishing to side-step the linguistic issue, it seems clear enough that the word *eros* was not thought suitable, whilst the word *agape* was a more neutral word, and since it did not have the meaning of *eros* it was one which could be taken and used by the Christians who infused it with the concept of Divine love.⁴ What we have to see is that no word could, of itself, convey the love of God as it is found in the gospel simply because that thought-content was new. That is what we mean by talking about infusing a word with a new content. It is simply a matter of communication. Whilst a language may have acceptably good words for theological and philosophical reasoning yet the words may have a different content for different users of them. For example, Islam has ideas of sin, repentance, law, propitiation and the like, but the same words have a different meaning and content for Christians who use them. Thus a Christian and Muslim using the same words would have different ideas—different

⁴ I do not mean that the Christians set about to change the contemporary meaning of *agape*, but that for them the word would contain the concept of Divine love. Constant use would infuse the word with that meaning, as has, in fact, happened in history.

contents to their words—hence they would not be communicating their ideas to one another.⁵

When Christianity came with its gospel of love, it came with a radically new concept of love⁶, and no word was able to support that concept because such a revelation of Divine love had not come to the human race prior to the incarnation of Christ, his life, death, resurrection and ascension. Thus the word *agape* had to take on board—so to speak—the new luggage of the gospel, i.e. the revelation of Divine love. Doubtless a great deal of the meaning of God’s love is found in the Old Testament, and the use of *agapan* in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the LXX) to translate such love at least gave a beginning to its New Testament usage. Certainly *eros* was avoided as an unsuitable word, and even *philia* was not greatly used. It is best, then, to say that the Christians took over a rather harmless word and poured into it the new understanding of Divine love. Doubtless wherever truth comes through to a person as a revelation, the words used for that truth are then part of the new communication.⁷

⁵ I found this to be the case when I learned Urdu in Pakistan, and had to teach it to Bible College students. Their ideas were unconsciously Islamic so far as I could understand their use, although they took them to be wholly Christian. For me it raised the whole matter of communicating the gospel in an Islamic land. Many have claimed that Islam is a heresy of Christianity, in which case the difference in meaning of the theological terms used is understandable.

⁶ We are not saying that the love of God in the Old Testament was less than His love in the New Testament, but the full understanding of His love awaited the coming of the Son, the establishment of the New Covenant, the work of the Cross and Resurrection, and the ascension of the Son to the right hand of God. As a result a revelation of God’s love was given—and received—which had not been given before in this way.

⁷ This raises the whole matter of communication. The thought of a culture is expressed in its own words, and other meanings cannot be immediately imported into its words. The Holy Spirit is the Agent by which words are given the content the speaker hopes to convey. For further reading see my book *How, Then, Shall We Tell?* (NCPI, Adelaide, 1981).

In John’s Gospel chapter twenty-one, Jesus appears to use the two verbs—*agapao* and *phileo*—interchangeably.⁸ It was possible that *philia* could have become the Christian word for love, but then it was not strong enough to convey God’s love for man.⁹ What is certain is that the term *agape* came to be the word most prominently used for love. In the New Testament the verb *phileo* and the noun *philia* are scarcely used whilst *agape* is the strong word for love that is continuously used—utterly divorced as it was from the connotation of *eros*.

Having said all we have about words for love, yet the heart of the matter is the fact of true love, Divine love, as against all forms which are not genuine love. What, then, is this genuine love? In order to understand what is genuine *agape*—as we have said—we must know and experience the nature of God. It is also necessary to recognise what is not *agape*, i.e. that which goes by the name of love, but is not Divine love, as such. We have seen above, briefly, the meanings of the words *storge*, *philia* and *eros*. It is to this last

⁸ The verb *phileo* is used in John some 12 times for loving in much the same sense as the verb *agapao*. It is also used in the synoptic Gospels in much the same way. Some see Jesus asking Peter whether he merely had *affection* for him, and yet did he not also have *love* for him. This is a permissible exegesis, but as Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic, probably there was no fine distinction between the two words, if indeed two different words were used. Whoever reported the event probably did not see much difference between *agapao* and *phileo*. In the Epistles and the Revelation *phileo* is used only four times, and the use of the term ‘brotherly love’ (*philadelphia*) is used only four times in the Epistles.

⁹ Leon Morris (op. cit) notes that in the New Testament *agape* seems to be used 116 times and *philia* once. The total for *agapao* words is 320 and the *phileo* words, 55.

word that we turn in order to understand more fully its use.

The Nature of Eros

Philip S. Watson who writes a Translator's Preface to Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros* points out that Plato spoke of a 'vulgar eros' and a 'heavenly eros'. The latter was 'a human love for the Divine, a love of man for God.' Watson says 'Eros is an appetite, a yearning desire, which is aroused by the attractive qualities of its subject; and in Eros-love man seeks God in order to satisfy his spiritual hunger by the possession of enjoyments of the Divine perfections.' This should tell us that *eros* was not used only for the love between a man and a woman, although that was one of its uses. Leon Morris (op. cit.) says *eros* is 'love of the worthy, and it is a love that desires to possess'. Ethelburt Stauffer sees *eros* 'in its highest sense is used of the upward impulsion of man, of his love for the divine'.¹⁰ Paul Tillich calls *eros* 'aspiration towards value'¹¹, whereas *agape* is 'indifferent to value' (Watson, p. ix). Watson adds, '*Eros* does not seek to be accepted by its object but to gain possession of it.' Paul Tillich comments that *eros* 'is considered the lowest quality of love. It is identified with the desire to sensual self-fulfilment.'¹² Stauffer says, 'Eros is determined by a more or less impulsion of man towards its object... seeks in others the fulfilment of its own life's hunger.'¹³

¹⁰ TDNT, I, p. 37

¹¹ *Systematic Theology* (Chicago, 1963) Vol. III, p. 137.

¹² *Love, Power and Justice*, p. 28.

¹³ TDNT, p. 37.

These various comments tell us that *eros* is a self-centred, self-seeking form of love, which, even if it has high aspirations has them on its own behalf. D. N. Morgan says, 'Eros inescapably remains *self-fulfilling*, *self-rewarding*, *self-possessive*' (his emphasis).¹⁴ To this Paul Tillich adds, 'We have, following Plato, defined *eros* as the driving force in all cultural creativity and in all mysticism. As such *eros* has the greatness of a divine-human power. It participates in creation and in the natural goodness of everything created.'¹⁵

We can see, then, the vast scope of *eros* from its 'vulgar' forms in selfish sexual expressions to its highest attainments in human life. At the heart of it all is the ego of Man, the determination to attain to the best, and do the best, but always with a desire to possess it. Whilst Karl Barth does not—as such—name *eros* explicitly early in his essay '*The Problem of Christian Love*'¹⁶ (p. 734f.), but leaves that for a later discussion (p. 747ff.), yet he speaks of 'this other kind of love', saying,

'It does not have its origin in self-denial, but in a distinctively uncritical intensification and strengthening of natural self-assertion. It is in this the loving subject finds itself summoned and stirred to turn to another. It is hungry and demands the food that the other seems to hold out. This is its reason for its interest in the other. It needs it because of its intrinsic value and in pursuance of an end. As this other promises something—itself in one of its properties—there is the desire to possess and control and enjoy it. Man wants it for himself: for the upholding, magnifying, deepening, broadening, illuminating

¹⁴ *Love, Plato, the Bible and Freud* (Englewood Cliffs N.J., 1964).

¹⁵ Op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁶ *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, 1958) Vol. IV, part 2, p. 734.

or enriching of his own existence; or perhaps simply in a need to express himself; or perhaps even more simply in a need to find satisfaction in all his unrest.’

Later we will look at Barth’s evaluation of *eros* when he describes it explicitly, but it is not difficult to see why the early Christians refused to use the term *eros* for the love of God. Later we will need to compare *eros* and *agape*. As yet we have scarcely begun to define *agape*, i.e. Divine love. In English where the word ‘love’ covers all forms of love we have difficulty in separating *eros* and *agape*. This difficulty is enlarged when the term ‘erotic’ is used because it has become associated with sexual desire and acts, whereas in Greek it was not thus limited. In English there should be understood a sexuality that is clean and good, and the word ‘erotic’ should not only indicate strong passion and illicit sexual actions.

Chapter Six

THE WORDS AND FORMS OF LOVE—II

The Nature of Agape: Agape is Not Eros

Man’s search for love is inescapable because in the Fall he rejected the love of God. By ontological necessity¹ and in an endeavour to save his essential humanity he had to worship, he had to find an object of worship, and so he became idolatrous. There can only be one love—the love of God—i.e. that love which we call *agape*. Thus *storge*, *philia* and *eros*, if they were in pure form would be *agape* and since we have come to use them under the term ‘love’ then they could ostensibly—

¹ By ‘ontological necessity’ we mean that Man, being created a worshipping creature, and a creature of love, had to love and be loved. Love and worship cannot be separated, so that having rejected God as his object of worship Man had to have a surrogate god, since nothing less than a god could be the object of love. Because Man had become self-centred his god/s must minister to him—give him a love-return, and allow him the worship so essential to his being. ‘Ontological necessity’ means that by creation the pressure is always on Man to conform to that which is right. Paul says Man continually suppresses the truth in contrary acts—acts of unrighteousness—but according to fallen Man these acts are the expression of his own rationalized ontology.

when redeemed—be used as expressions of *agape*.² We will discuss this point later at greater length.

Meanwhile we have to understand that since God is love (*agape*) then man's love at creation, and by creation, was derived from God. That is, the only love Man knew at the time of his creation was God's love which in these Christian times we call *agape*. *Eros*, then, cannot be a true word for God's love. In fact *eros* is a form of love devised by Man and hence does not have ontological reality. It is a *de facto* love which is not genuine love. We have seen that it can take high forms, but underneath it is still seeking to satisfy the self of a person. Basically the one in *eros* is the one in self. Ultimately *eros* prevents relational union, and relational intimacy. There is a fine quote by Karl Barth where he compares *eros* and *agape* in relationships

While *agape* transcends humanity, the man who loves in this way is genuinely human; he gives a true expression to human nature; he is a real man. The same cannot be said of *eros*-love. In most cases this does, of course, consist in an address to one's fellow, and perhaps with considerable warmth and intensity. But as in relation to God, so also to his fellow, the man who loves erotically is not really thinking of the other but of himself. His fellow is envisaged only as an expected increase and gain for his own existence, as an acquisition, a boot, a prey, to be used by him in the pursuance of some purpose. In these circumstances how can he really be a comrade, companion and fellow? . . . In the duality apparently sought and found by the

² By 'pure form' I mean that all forms of love that are not *agape* must have been—prior to the Fall—legitimate expressions of *agape*. Whilst so far we have said that *eros* is a form of self-love, we know that when *agape* moves man and woman in love for one another it loses the character of fallen *eros* and takes on its nature as true *eros*, i.e. the kind of love portrayed for us in *The Song of Solomon*, for there love is simple, unselfconscious, naive and beautiful. It is always love-for-the-other, never love seeking to possess and get for itself.

one who loves erotically there lurks the isolation which he has never really left and in which he will finally remain. Erotic love is a denial of humanity.³

By 'denial of humanity' Barth is saying that that one is only truly human when one loves in the way of *agape*. It was in this and for this that Man was created. If *eros* was the way fallen Man went about loving—and goes about loving—then *eros* is man's substitute for *agape*, but he does not even know this is a fact. Only when *eros* fails him, and when he fails in *eros* does the idea come to him that *eros* is not enough, but normally Man thinks that in *eros* he has true love, but then *eros* is always human love apart from God.

What, then, is *Agape*?

We have open to us various ways to discover the nature of *agape*. One method is to see—and quote—the theological conclusions that scholars have come to out of the research they have done. For example, they can show that *agape* is not what *eros* is, and how it transcends *eros*. Another is to make a study of the uses of the word in its many contexts as we find them in the Scriptures—*ahab* in the Old Testament, *agapan* in the Septuagint, and *agape* in the New Testament, along with the uses of the verb *agapao*—and so come to a conclusion about the nature of *agape*.

The method I am about to use does not avoid the two methods given above, but it sets out to understand the two foundational statements of John in his

³ Barth, op. cit, pp. 745-746.

First Letter, namely in 4:7 'love is of God', and 4:8 and 16, 'God is love'. Whilst there is theology in these two statements they are not primarily intended to be simply theological. They are set in a practical situation.

In 4:7 John says, 'Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.' We have already touched on these verses in Chapter Three, 'The Source of Love' but now we need to enlarge upon them. We must remember in relation to them that most of John's Letter has been about love and loving. In 2:7–11 he had said that the command to love is an old one, but he—as did Christ⁴—has brought it to them as a new one. In 3:10–18 he had spoken of loving the brethren and not hating them. If they loved truly then they would carry it out in a practical way by helping to supply the needs of a brother, and not just saying they loved the brother. Now John is calling for all the brethren to love one another. As in 2:7–11 and 3:10–18 the love is to be practical and is to be agapitic and not just erotic.⁵

John is saying that loving one another should not be difficult for the love they are expected to show to one another is *of* God, i.e. *from* God. The one who loves has been born of God, and so knows God. That is, he knows God is love. Knowing God is love he must love others: we would add, 'Not in the way that human beings love, i.e. the *eros*-way, but the way God loves, the *agape*-way.' In chapter 4 verse 8 it is said that if he does not love others it will be evident that he does not

⁴ See John 13:34; 15:12–17.

⁵ The two adjectives should be helpful for us in our study. 'Agapitic' is here coined. 'Erotic' has long been in use.

know God. He will not have been born of God. Many times in this Letter John refers to being born of God⁶ and that new birth should be understood in the light of John 3:1–14. As in John 1:12–13 the birth is not from human sources—as is ordinary human birth—but it is from above from the Father, by the Spirit and through the Cross, the death of Christ.⁷

God is love, but new birth is essential to knowing He is love. To know God is to know He is love. Even so, new birth, of itself, is not the way of knowing God and knowing He is love. God has shown—manifested His love—and it is seeing the manifestation which brings one to knowledge of God as love, and to new birth. Doubtless seeing the revelation and being born anew are in the one act, but there is no birth that of itself brings us to knowing God as love. Central to all is the Cross. It is the Father sending His Son into the world in order that we may live through him that is the act of God's love. That act of sending leads to the act of causing His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.⁸ When we see God has dealt with our sins

⁶ See 2:29; 3:9; 5:4; 5:18, and possibly 5:8; as well as here—4:7. Note the effects of being born of God.

⁷ It is notable that John 3:14 refers to the death of Christ as essential to new birth. One must believe in him as 'the snake lifted up'. In Paul, too, the new creation is always linked with the Cross (cf. II Cor. 5:17–21; Gal. 2:20; 6:14–15).

⁸ Rather than interrupt our discourse above let us look at the meaning of the statement 'the propitiation for our sins'. Some translations have 'expiation' rather than 'propitiation', but whilst expiation refers to the working out of penalty caused by crime or sin, propitiation refers to the averting of the wrath of God which is upon sins. Leon Morris in his book *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (London, 1965, pp. 144–178) has shown convincingly that expiation and propitiation differ, and that only propitiation can set the sinner free from God's wrath. This is done when Christ bears the wrath on sins, but his bearing of them is his doing the will of the Father. It was the Father's intention to show His love by propitiation.

on the Cross by means of propitiation, it is then we receive the gift of life. Without the propitiation of our sins we cannot have forgiveness and cleansing of our sins, and we cannot have life. When we receive these we know by this act of love—the death of the Cross and the fruits of it given to us gift-wise—that God is love, i.e. that He is *agape*.

We know He is love because He has loved us in and through Christ. His practical acts of sending His Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins and through propitiation giving us life are the acts which show us He is love. The effects of cleansing, forgiveness, and receiving new life are the way in which we know that love. When we experience them, we experience God as love.

The Experience of God as Love

If anyone thinks that by nature⁹ he—or she—is alive and needs no life from God, and if that same person does not think his—or her—sins need propitiation, then that one will never know God as love. This has to be stated categorically. Every human being is dead—dead to God—because of the fall of the race in Adam. Every human being is dead in his—or her—sins: the existence we lead is a death one, terrible as that may sound. If we do not think Jesus came to give life which

⁹ When we use the term ‘by nature’ we mean ‘by natural birth’, i.e. by the mere fact of bringing a human being into this world. When we use the term ‘by grace’ we mean God has done something which could not happen ‘by nature’. To be ‘born again’ means one has already been born, i.e. ‘by nature’ and now one needs to be born anew ‘by grace’.

is abundant to replace our death-existence, then we will not see and know God’s love. If we think that God could deal with our sins—i.e. their power, penalty and pollution—without propitiation, then we will not know His love for us. Propitiation is an act which God does because all human beings are under His wrath because of their sins. Every person is a sinner, has guilt, is under judgement, and must suffer punishment for his—or her—sins. The passage we have been studying above tells us that the Father sent the Son into the world: the Father made him to be the propitiation for our sins. In practical fact it meant that the Father took the initiative¹⁰ in the act of the Cross which was an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Doubtless the idea that we are relationally and spiritually dead to God is not one we have in society today. Nor is the word ‘propitiation’ known by other than theologians, but John insists that only when we know we need life and receive it, and only when we know we needed propitiation for our sins and God provided it, do we know God to be love. Of course we have left out a whole background to these matters of giving life and making propitiation. I preached a sermon years

¹⁰ In the Old Testament propitiation is made by an atoning sacrifice. Leviticus 17:11 gives us the heart of the matter, ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life’. Note that God creates the provision for atonement, for propitiation. In the case of Christ’s death it was He who made the provision of the blood of Christ to effect our reconciliation with Him (cf. Rom. 5:10–11). P. T. Forsyth commented on the word ‘given’ in Leviticus 17:11, ‘Given! Did you ever see the force of it? “I have given you the blood to make atonement. This is an institution which I set up for you to comply with, set it up for purposes of My own, on principles of My own, but it is My gift.” The Lord Himself provided the lamb for the burnt offering’ (*The Work of Christ*, London, 1948, p. 90).

ago entitled 'The Wrath of Love' and it was perhaps one of the most difficult I have ever preached. When I was part of the way through it I wanted to drop everything and run. The audience seemed stony; I seemed unable to communicate but when it was preached many ordered copies of the recorded cassette. Since then innumerable people have listened to it, and few without being deeply affected. The point of mentioning this cassette is that it dealt with the holiness of God, the awfulness of human sin as it violated that holiness, and the immensity of the wrath poured out on the Son; for when he bore our sins in his body on the Cross he bore the wrath that is at once the guilt of them and the anger of God on such evil, thus releasing Man from the terror of coming judgement and punishment, and the shame of moral pollution.

P.T. Forsyth once wrote, 'Atonement in the Old Testament was not the placating of God's anger, but the sacrament of God's grace. It was the expression of God's anger on the one hand and the expression and putting in action of God's grace on the other hand . . . The sacrifices were in themselves prime acts of obedience to God's means of grace and His expressed will.'¹¹

Knowing God's Love is Knowing and Receiving the Fruits of Propitiation

We conclude then in this section of our discussion, that when we look at the marvellous act of propitiation, then we see into the nature of God, i.e. His

great mercy on us by not sparing His Son but delivering him up for us all, and for setting him forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood, thus setting us free from condemnation and making us 'at-one' with Him. Doubtless we will never plumb the depths of that liberating and live-giving act but to receive its benefits is what brings the experience of love to us.

¹¹ Forsyth, op. cit., p. 90

Chapter Seven

THE WORDS AND FORMS OF LOVE—III

Knowing Agape Further by the Fruits of Propitiation

(I) JOHN AND THE FRUITS OF PROPITIATION

Whilst John in I John 4:7–10 is speaking of knowing the love of God by seeing that He has sent His Son into the world to give life and to effect propitiation for sins, he is primarily wanting his readers to know God's love in order to love one another. Thus in verse 11 of the same passage he concludes, 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.' He adds in verse 12 that if we love one another then God dwells in us and His love has come to its full goal in us—a point we will need to take up later when we think about the outworking of love. In verses 13 and 14 John develops the idea of us dwelling in God and concludes in verse 16, 'So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.' This is, of course, a tremendous statement, but it is leading on to

John's main point—the reassuring fruits of propitiation-love, so he says in verses 17–19, 'In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgement, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us.'

What John is saying is that as regards the day of judgement—the day we fear because of the punishment due to us because of our sins—it will hold no fear for us, for we are as guiltless in regard to judgement, now—in this world—as he, Jesus, is guiltless in regard to it. This is an astonishing statement. It means the outcome of the act of propitiating love is that it has cast out from us all fear of judgement. No wonder we see that love, and no wonder that we see it as perfect! As a result we now begin to love for the first time because He took the initiative and showed us His love by the incarnation of Christ and the work of the Cross. Now the words of verse 7 come with great force, 'Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.'

Let me stress this point: if we fail to see God's love in sending His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, then we will not know love, we will not dwell in love and have love dwell in us, we will not dwell in God and have God dwell in us. If we receive the revelation of His love then we will know God, we will know He is love, and so we will surely love others. Thus by seeing love, living in love and loving others, we will have come to know the true meaning of *agape*, as against the other ineffective human love called *eros*.

(II) PAUL AND KNOWING AGAPE THROUGH PROPITIATION

In Romans 3:19–31 Paul gives his brilliant exposition of the righteousness of God which justifies sinners who believe in Christ. By ‘justify’ we mean ‘account righteous’¹, i.e. the believing sinner loses all his guilt of sins forever and so is no longer under condemnation. Paul shows in Romans 3:24–25 that ‘they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation² by his blood, to be received by faith.’ The matter is simple enough: by believing in the atoning death one is justified. This—as in I John 4:9–10—is the revelation of God’s love (*agape*).

From 3:25—4:25 Paul pursues his argument for justification and the fact that it is all of grace and not of human works. Romans 4:24b–25 says plainly enough, ‘Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification’. Then in Romans 5:1–11 Paul speaks of the fruits of propitiation, i.e. the fruits of justification. In verse 5 he says clearly, the love of God ‘has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.’ If we look carefully at the context of this statement—i.e. verses 1–11—then we see that as a result of the Cross

we have peace with God, we stand in grace, and we rejoice in the hope of one day sharing the glory of God. These are tremendous statements! Then Paul contrasts what we were with what we have become through the atonement. He says ‘We were weak’, i.e. unable to do anything for ourselves, yet ‘at the right time Christ died for the ungodly’. We were ungodly but he died for us. Whilst it is unlikely anyone will give his life for a righteous man, though possibly he may for a good man, yet ‘God shows his love for us in that *while we were yet sinners* Christ died for us’.

Nor in making the comparisons of what we were, and now are, is Paul finished. He adds, ‘Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, *much more* shall we be saved from the wrath of God.’ This is very much like John’s saying that all fear of the judgement day—the day of God’s wrath—is cast out by the Cross. He then goes on to say, ‘For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, *much more*, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.’ The outcome of all this is that ‘we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation’.

All these things add up to a glorious love-act of God, and the fruits are that we know God is love. In verse 8 God shows His love through Christ dying for sinners. In verse 5 all that love has come to our hearts by the Spirit, for as in I John 4:10 we see the love of God in the propitiation, so in Romans 5:6–11 we see it in the Cross. Love being poured into our hearts by the Spirit is the equivalent to it being brought to us by a

¹ Because we are concentrating on the matter of God as love, seeking to know His *agape*, we will not devote much time on the subject of justification as such, but as with John in the fourth chapter of his First Letter, so in Romans chapters 1 to 8 Paul develops the principle of justification in great detail, and readers who have not done so are recommended to read these chapters, and if possible, to be helped by a good commentary on the text.

² Some translations have ‘expiation’ here (*RSV*) or ‘a sacrifice for atonement’ (*NRSV, NIV*), but Leon Morris’ point remains—the word is ‘propitiation’.

revelation of the work of the Cross. So, then, John and Paul are virtually saying the same thing.

(III) PETER AND GOD'S LOVE AND KNOWING GOD'S LOVE

We previously made reference to I Peter 1:8, 'Without having seen him [Jesus Christ] you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy'. The love for Christ comes from the fact of his suffering for us (2:24), 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed'. Again, in 3:18, Peter says, 'For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.' In 1:18–20 the apostle also points to the Cross,

'You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake.'

All of these references tell us that the work of Christ on the Cross is what makes believing persons love him. As in I John 4:7–19, so in I Peter 1:22–23 the apostle shows that knowing the love of God results in love in the heart—that love working itself out in love for the brethren,

'Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth [believing the gospel] for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God

(IV) OTHER APOSTOLIC WITNESSES TO GOD'S LOVE

The Epistle to the Hebrews says little explicitly about God's love³ but its emphasis on the work of the Cross is central to its message, especially as it incorporates the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31–34, i.e. the message of forgiveness through the death of Christ. James talks twice about those who love God (*agapao*), Jude opens with the prayer for mercy, peace and love to be multiplied to his readers. Jude speaks about keeping oneself in the love of God. Whilst none of these seek to show the love of God, yet the principle of love is inherent in the Epistles. Likewise in the book of the Revelation: mentions are few but they are there, but again knowing the love of God is presupposed. All in all, the whole of the New Testament witnesses to the love of God, and the necessity for us to respond with love to Him and to others. We will later have occasion to look at love in the Gospels.

Conclusion to Knowing God's Love by Propitiation

We are now aware that the mere saying of 'God is love' does not bring home the truth of His love to us. We must not even be spectators of the work of the Cross but we must be the recipients of its grace before we can know that God is love, and know Him as love. We must be aware of the awfulness of sins, the great violation they cause to the holiness of God, the terrible

³ In 12:6 the writer speaks of the Lord disciplining the one He loves, and in 6:10 and 10:24 he speaks of mutual love in the community.

consequences of them in our minds and souls and spirits, and the vast demands made upon Jesus on the Cross to bear our sins, to be under God's wrath for our sins—wrath which is the very essence of our guilt—and to bring us to justification and so freedom from our sins and their guilts.

Only in this situation, and only by going through this process can we come to know God's self-giving love. We may spend many years contemplating the vastness of this love in the dimensionless work of the Cross, but we will never come to know the whole of it. We will know enough to know He is love, and to live in that love, loving Him and all others.

Chapter Eight

GOD IS LOVE

Everything is of Love

Love is of God, and of no other being or thing. Any love that is not of God is not true love. Everything must begin with love and go on being in it, and find its goal and fulfilment in it and by it. There can be no other way. God is love, and this is another way of saying that everything has its being from Him, goes on being by virtue of Him, and must find its goal—its *telos*—in and by Him. Whilst it is evident to us that every thing and person does not now seem to be of love yet in the ultimate this must be how it must be. By 'the ultimate' we do not mean necessarily 'at the end of time as we know it', though that may well be true. God who is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, is not bound within our happenings in time. He is sovereign in all things, and it is His love which controls all things, even the things we see as calamity and evil. Everything He does is of the light which is Him.

This must be true since John tells us not only is God

love, but He is light.¹ Our human way of saying this is that love is holy, and that holiness is love. Love and light are impregnable. No one and no thing can make a dint in God. This is not so because He has enormous metaphysical power but because love must defeat all that is its antithesis, and light must defeat all that is darkness. For example, Paul says, ‘but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light.’ He is surely saying that light destroys that which is darkness. Jesus said, ‘And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.’ It is clear that Jesus is saying that the exposure of darkness-deeds destroys them, and thus must be the meaning of Paul’s statement also. God is light and no darkness can stand against Him. This principle has tremendous implications for the history of the human race.

When, then, we come to love it must be the same. All that is the antithesis of love is destroyed by love.² Thus when Paul says, ‘Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,’ he is stating the principle of

¹ The reading of John’s First Letter tells us the two things we have just mentioned, (i) God is light, and (ii) God is love. In this Letter to walk in light is to walk in love. Not to love is to be in darkness and to stumble. Not to love is to hate and so to be a murderer at heart like Cain. So then whilst light and love may have different word-meanings they are as one in John’s writing. If we consider the statements on light and darkness in the Gospel of John we know where, and from whom, he learned these things.

² That which is the antithesis of light is the same as that which is the antithesis of love.

light and love, as God is both. There is no more powerful demonstration and proof of this than the Cross. There all that is darkness was destroyed by the light of the world—Jesus. There all that is hatred was destroyed by the love of the Son. Yet all was done in a way which seemed to be under the powers of darkness and hatred. Jesus was ‘crucified in weakness’ as Paul said, but it was that weakness which defeated the power of darkness and evil. To quote Paul in principle, though not in context³, ‘God has commanded the light to shine out of darkness.’⁴ Note it is not *on* the darkness that the light shines, but *out* of it, i.e. the light within the darkness suddenly shines out and destroys the darkness.

Light and Love the Power of God

Often we have pagan notions of God. Pagans see their gods as powerful, having occult wisdom, and occult powers that are strong. While it is true to say that God is omnipotent, for power is certainly ascribed to God in the Scriptures, yet like all other elements of God

³ See II Corinthians 4:1–15 where Paul is saying that ministry is only powerful when it comes under fierce persecution. In a way of speaking the act of the Cross is being enacted or re-enacted in every proclaimer of the truth. Such must be weak, such must accept the evil that comes against them in order to overcome that evil with good—‘always carrying in the body the death [the killing] of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh’.

⁴ Note that Paul is quoting from the creation account in Genesis 1:23 where darkness was upon the face of the deep and God said, ‘Let there be light.’ It is true that as the earth was without form and void, so is man until God utters the word and light comes, and beauty and form are created. This is the meaning of ‘new birth from above’, or ‘a new creation’.

such as wisdom, glory, and might, we tend to understand them by working from the human analogy to the Divine reality, and so we invest God with sheer magnification of what is human. Hence our false ideas of God who is not to be compared with anything He has created, who is ineffable, i.e. beyond comparison and unknowable. Only when revelation comes to angelic and human creatures can they see and know the attributes of God, and then they cannot refrain from uttering their reality in worship. Time and again such worship breaks out in heaven, but it is notable that it does so from some event or events which are of light, such as the judgements on evil, and of love, such as the events of protecting the elect people, and bringing them to their destined end—the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb—and into the Holy City.

Coming to Know God by Revelations of Light and Love

We saw in I John 4:7–8 that by new birth one comes to know God, and to know Him as love. The ‘natural man’ cannot know God, i.e. Man cannot know God by fallen nature. The Father initiates the miracle of new birth through the Son, so that believing in the Son causes that miracle to happen. Even so, the Son who is believed in is Christ incarnate, Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ ascended, and Christ glorified and reigning. The agent of this act is the Holy Spirit, the one who moves where he wills, who having searched the deeps of God now brings them as a revelation to the elect person of God. Jesus told his disciples that the

Holy Spirit would give them a revelation of himself—the Son—and of the Father, since the Father and the Son are one together. New birth, then, brings to the person the knowledge of God as light and God as love, and that is all any one needs to know.

The result of this new birth is that the believing community is told, ‘You have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge . . . everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also . . . Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us, eternal life.’⁵ If the new birth and the anointing by the Holy One—i.e. the Holy Spirit—are the one, as surely they are, then the believer knows God as light and love, and what is more the believer *has* the Father and the Son.

It is an amazing statement—‘*has* the Father and the Son’. It is repeated in somewhat the same manner in II John 9 where the term ‘doctrine’ really parallels ‘all knowledge’ in I John 2:20, ‘Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine *has* both the Father and the Son’. It seems incredible that a human person *has* the Father and the Son. What, then, is meant by such a statement?

The Meaning of ‘Having’ and ‘Abiding’

The teaching of abiding is a strong one in the New Testament and cannot be fully treated here because it

⁵ This translation is from the New Revised Standard Version.

would involve a long unfolding. 'To abide' means 'to dwell in', 'to live in', or 'to make one's home' in another. In John 14:17 the disciples are told the Holy Spirit who dwells *with* them will be *in* them. In 14:23 the Father and the Son will 'come to him and make our home with him' who obeys the Son. In John 15:1–10 the disciples are asked to abide in the Son and have the Son abide in them. They will do this by keeping Jesus' commandments for this is the way he abides in the Father's love.

Paul uses the term 'in' in his Letters rather than 'abiding', but it amounts to the same thing.⁶ John in his first two Letters uses the term many times. In I John 2:6 the believer abides in Christ; in 2:10 he abides in the light; in 2:14 the word of God abides in believers; in 2:24 the believers are to let what they heard from the beginning—the truth—abide in them, and then they will abide in the Father and the Son; in 3:15 no murderer has eternal life abiding in him; in 3:17 lack of practical loving denies that love abides in one; in 3:24 keeping God's commandments means one abides in God, and God abides in him, and the knowledge of God's abiding is brought to the indwelt person by the Holy Spirit; in 4:12 God abides in those who love one another and in 4:13 mutual loving informs us that God abides in us and we in him; in 4:15 God abides in the person who confesses Jesus is the Son of God, and the person abides in the Father; in 4:16 the statement is, 'God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him'; in II John 2 'the truth . . . abides in us';

⁶ Paul uses terms such as 'Christ lives in me', 'Christ in you', and speaks of the Holy Spirit dwelling in believers (cf. Rom. 8:9–11; II Cor. 1:22; II Tim. 1:14), and of Christ dwelling in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16).

in II John 9 anyone who does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not *have* God, but he who abides in the doctrine *has* both the Father and the Son.

The term 'abiding' is one of a faith-relationship, and is unseen. It is not a mystical term, although there is an element of the mystical in it. At the same time it is intensely practical—having to do with the truth, remaining in the truth, keeping God's commandments and refusing to move out of the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Our main purpose in looking at abiding is because we wish to look at God as love, since we abide in Him and He abides in us, we abide in love and love abides in us. It is this fact and experience which leads us to an intimate knowledge of God who is love and to the practice of *agape*. God is love and we have no love if it is not Him who abides in us. Our love to others is at the same time the very love of the Father.

Chapter Nine

GOD IS LOVE IN HIMSELF

The Love of the Triune God

In the New Testament the Persons of the Triune Godhead are named as 'the Father', 'the Son' and 'the Holy Spirit'. Whilst the doctrine of the Trinity is inherent in the text, generally the term 'God' is used for the Father and not just inclusively of the three Persons. John's First Letter is an excellent example of this. If we take the fourth chapter we see in verse 2 that the Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of God'. In verse 10 it is said that God sent His only Son into the world, and in verses 14–15 it is said that the Father sent His Son as the Saviour of the world, and whoever believes that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. Thus it would seem that 'God' and 'Father' are synonymous. This does not mean Jesus is not God, but it means that he is not the Father. To be 'the Son of God' in the Johannine sense must mean he is God, but that is not the way John uses the term.

The Father is Love

The First Epistle of John certainly supports the doctrine of the Triune God as indeed does John's Gospel. That is not what we are out to prove here, but examples of the Tri-unity of the Persons can be found throughout the Johannine writings. For example take I John 5:5–7 (AV); in these verses we see God mentioned as Father, Jesus mentioned as the Son of God (i.e. Son of the Father) and the Spirit named in the same context. Again in 4:2 the Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of God', and in 4:13 he is 'his [God's] own Spirit'. The Son in 4:9 is 'his only Son', and in verses 10 and 14 is 'his [the Father's] Son'. At the same time the important distinction is made in 4:7–19 that God is the Father, and God is love. If what I am asserting is so, then it would be right for us to conclude that (i) the Father is love, (ii) the Son is then the Son of the Father, i.e. the Son of His love, and (iii) the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father, i.e. is the Spirit of the Father's love.

Note also, that when John says in his first epistle, 'God is light' (1:5), he is speaking of the Father since in 1:3 the term 'Jesus his Son' is used. We can conclude then that John in this Epistle is saying that the Father is light. This being so, Jesus might be called 'the Son of light'¹ and the Spirit 'the Spirit of light', although there are no such explicit references by nature of the

¹ It would not be difficult in the New Testament to make out a case for Jesus being the Son of light. John's Gospel shows him as 'the light of men', 'the true light that enlightens every man', 'the light of the world' (John 1:4; 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9; cf. 12:35). In 12:36 Jesus tells his disciples, 'While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.' Whereas they can be sons of light, only he can be the (unique) 'Son of light'. Similarly a case may be made out for the Holy Spirit being 'the Spirit of light'.

case. We can conclude, then, that the Father is love as also the Father is light. Of course the Johannine writings speak of the love of the Father, since Jesus is the Son of his love in the sense that ‘the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand’ (John 3:35), and ‘the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing’ (John 5:20). This is the same Father who loved the world and gave (sent) His only begotten Son that whosoever believes on him might have eternal life (John 3:15). In John’s First Letter we are enjoined to ‘See what love the Father has given us’, and the terms ‘love of God’ (2:5; 3:17) and ‘love of the Father’ (2:15)² are present.

Jesus is the Son of His Love

As we have seen, ‘the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand’ (John 3:35)³ and ‘the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing’ (John 5:20). Paul in Colossians 1:12–13 speaks of ‘the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light,’ and adds, ‘He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and

² Some translations (e.g. *RSV*) make 2:5 to be ‘love for God’ and 2:15 ‘love for the Father’ but the *NRSV* makes them ‘the love of God’ and ‘the love of the Father’ and this seems to be confirmed by 3:17, ‘God’s love’ and 4:12, ‘his love’. In other words 2:5 and 2:15 are subjective genitives and not objective genitives.

³ This approximates to Matthew 11:27, ‘All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’. Thus the intimacy between the Father and the Son is apparent. In Matthew 28:18 all authority is given to Jesus by God, as in Psalm 2:6-8 the Son is given authority over the nations, so that Matthew 28:18–20 must be interpreted in the light of Psalm 2 and its Father-Son principle.

transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,’ i.e. ‘the Son of his love’.⁴

The term ‘my beloved Son’ as used at the baptism of Jesus by the Father (Matt. 3:17; 17:5: *ho huios mou ho agapetos*), differs somewhat from Colossians 1:13 where ‘beloved Son’ is ‘the Son of His love’ (*tou huiou tes agapes autou*).⁵ We will return to Matthew 3:17 and 17:5 shortly but for the moment will concentrate upon ‘the Son of his love’. Whilst most commentators would agree that it is virtually the same as ‘beloved’ in Matthew 3:17, 17:5 and Ephesians 1:6, yet some would find something distinctive in the different form especially in its Colossians context. H. M. Carson⁶ says,

The phrase ‘his dear Son’ is literally ‘the Son of His love’. This is a richer expression than would be the case if the epithet beloved, *agapetos*, were used. The Son who is the only-begotten of the Father is not only the external object of the Father’s love, but is also the embodiment and expression of that love in his gracious dealings with men. Thus to be translated into the Kingdom of His Son is to move from the loveless condition of darkness and death into a spiritual realm where we have the love of God upon us.

H. C. G. Moule⁷ comments,

⁴ Note that here God is the Father of light and that the Son is the Son of His love.

⁵ The statement in Ephesians 1:6, ‘his glorious grace which he freely bestowed upon us in the Beloved’ (*en to agapemeno*) comports with Matthew 3:17 and 17:5, and also with Colossians 1:13. As with them it is an elective title for Christ.

⁶ Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *Colossians and Philemon*, (Leicester, 1960).

⁷ Cambridge Bible for Colleges and School, *Colossians and Philemon*, (Cambridge, 1902).

[*his dear Son*] Lit. and far better, **the Son of His love**. Lightfoot, following Augustine, takes this most precious phrase to mean, in effect, *the Son of the Father who is* (I Joh. iv. 8, 16) *love*; the Son who accordingly manifests and as it were embodies the Father's love (I Joh. 4. 9, 10). But surely the more probable meaning is that the Son is the blessed object of the Father's love; the supremely Beloved One (cp. the parallel passage, Eph. 1. 6). Far from 'destroying the whole form of the expression' (Lightfoot) this interpretation is full of ideas in point here. The 'kingdom' is what it is to the happy subjects because of its King the Beloved Son, in whom the subjects are therefore not subjects only but sons, and beloved. See Eph. 1. 6 and 7, in connexion, for a strong suggestion in this direction.

John Eadie enlarges on the love-connection between the Father and the Son,⁸

'The Son of His love' . . . It signifies the Son who possesses His love—or excites it in the Divine heart. The meaning is the same in either case, for He who possesses the love is the cause of it towards Himself. Sustaining such a relation as Father, He is the object of boundless and unchanging affection. This love corresponds to the nature of Him who manifests it and Him who enjoys it. The love of God to one who is His own Image will be in harmony with the Divine nature of both—infinite as its object, and eternal and majestic as the bosom in which it dwells. This love of the Father to the Son prompted Him to give that Son as Saviour, and then to exalt Him to Universal Empire. John iii. 35.

Eadie also rightly refutes the idea that here we are taught Christ is Son, not by nature but by adoption. He was Son before he became incarnate, and could never become less than Son because of his incarnation.

In John 17:22–24 Jesus twice mentions the love of the Father towards him, and at least one reference is to love before creation,

'The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even *as thou hast loved me*. Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me *in thy love for me* before the foundation of the world.' (My emphasis).

Other references to the Father's love for the Son are John 10:17 where Jesus said, 'For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again,' and John 15:9, 'As the Father has loved me . . .'

The Son, then, was always the beloved Son: he was always 'the Son of His love'. As such he wished to do the Father's will and was loved for that.

The Son of His Love

We certainly know that love was mutual with the Father and the Son. We have seen that the Father loved the Son, and now see that the Son loved the Father. Apart from the vast general evidence that we have of the Son delighting to do the Father's will, we also have an explicit reference to the love of the Son for the Father in John 14:30–31, 'I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father'. The principle motivating all his obedience is thus shown to be love. 'I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak' (John 12:49).

⁸ Greek Text Commentaries

Jesus the Son gives great evidence that he is the loving one amongst men and women, i.e. he not only is loved by the Father and loves the Father but he is 'the Son of his love', in that he loves. Time and again he shows his love for his disciples and others. The principle of this is set out in John 15:9–10,

'As the Father has loved me, so have I 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'.

Doubtless the love of the Son was in some sense evoked by the Father's love, but the Son loved through obedience and abiding as the verses immediately before us proclaim. It was not possible for him to love men and women without first loving the Father, so that the Father's love for him was that love by which he loved others. Thus John recorded, 'having loved his own . . . he loved them to the end' (John 13:1). This is the *agape*—the Divine love—of which we have been speaking. It is the love that Paul describes when he says, 'the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself up for me,' 'Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God,' and 'the love of Christ constrains me.' Paul shows that such *agape* was from God alone when he spoke of 'the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

The Spirit of Love

Paul refers to the Holy Spirit in Romans 15:30, 'I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit . . .' In Romans 5:5 this is the

Spirit by whom God pours His love into the hearts of His people. Yet love is not simply a flowing down of love by means of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit himself brings that love into the heart because he, too, is a gift to the recipient of love. His being there is the way love is in the heart. In I John 4 the apostle speaks of God as love and says (4:12) that 'if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us', and goes on to show that our knowledge that we abide in God—who is love—is 'because he [God] has given us of his own Spirit'. These words were formerly said in I John 3:24, 'And by this we know that he [God] abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us'.

All things of love are linked with the Spirit. In Galatians 5:22 the fruit of the Spirit is love as also other things that accompany love. In Colossians 1:8 the community 'love in the Spirit'. In Ephesians 3:16–19 it is when believers are strengthened with 'all might by His Spirit in the inner man', that Christ dwells in the heart through faith, and knowledge of the love of Christ becomes the experience of the community, so that together all are filled 'with all the fullness of God'. In all these cases the life of love is dependent upon the Spirit.

In Romans chapters 14 and 15 Paul is urging his readers to show love towards the brethren who are weak in faith. They must put aside arguments which will cause the weaker believers to stumble. They are to 'pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding'. This is because 'the kingdom of God is not [matters of] food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'. This kingdom of God—as we saw in Colossians 1:13—is 'the kingdom of the Son of

His love', and it is the Spirit of love who aids those who are in the kingdom.

So, then, we are assured that the 'love of the Spirit' is present in the church, and in the hearts of believers because he is 'the Spirit of love'. What we have not read explicitly is that the Father loves the Spirit, and the Son loves the Spirit, but since the Spirit is 'the Spirit of your Father', 'the Spirit of God', 'the Spirit of the Lord' and informs us that we abide in God—the Father—and God abides in us, then his intimacy with the Father is such that he is surely loved by the Father. Since, also, he is 'the Spirit of Jesus', 'the Spirit of Christ', 'the Spirit of the Lord' and 'the Spirit of the Son', then he is one intimately with the Son. We really cannot think of the Father and the Son apart from the Spirit, and because 'the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God', then he is surely the Spirit of the God who is love.

When we see that the Triune Godhead is composed of the Father who is love, the Son who is the Son of His love, and the Spirit who is the Spirit of love, then we begin to see how the Three Persons are one in love and why John says, 'love is of God', and 'God is love'.

Chapter Ten

THE TRIUNE GODHEAD AS LOVE

God is One

The early church was faced with the fact that the God they knew was the God of Israel, and the man Christ Jesus was the Son of that God. They also thought of the Holy Spirit as 'the Spirit of God'—a term known in the Old Testament, and one which also came to be 'the Spirit of Jesus', 'the Spirit of Christ' and 'the Spirit of the Son' in the New Testament. They certainly never thought of Yahweh being a God joined by two other Gods, namely Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This would mean three Gods conjoined, or it would mean one God of whom the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were modes of His being. This kind of thinking was not theirs.

When Moses had asked God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you." '

The 'I AM' could mean 'I will be what I will be', 'I am

he who is', but probably has the idea 'I will only be understood by my own subsequent acts and words of revelation'.¹ Basically the Name (YHWH) which had been known by Abraham (Genesis 15:7), was in its context of Exodus 3:14ff., an assurance that Israel's God was other than the gods of Egypt and stronger than Pharaoh, and would cause His people to arrive in Canaan and dispossess the tribes there. So then, it was a strong name promising covenantal fulfilment. It was a name which pointed to a theological and not to a philosophical meaning; it was a practical name. It was the name of the God Who acts!

THE NAME EXPLAINED IN TERMS OF ELECTIVE AND COVENANTAL LOVE

There is a happening in Exodus 33:12 to 34:9 which in one sense is the opening up of the name, i.e. the character of God, the meaning of 'the LORD [YHWH]' to Moses, and so to his people. Exodus 32 talks of the terrible apostasy of the people as they devised the golden calf and worshipped it. God would have blotted out Israel, with the exception of Moses and his family, of whom He would have made a new nation—His new covenant people. In chapter 33 Moses appears as the one to whom God spoke uniquely 'face to face' as a man speaks to his friend (v. 11). This being so, Moses requested the Lord to give him a special revelation of Himself, of His glory: otherwise he would not lead Israel to the promised land. God told him he could not show His entire glory to Moses, but would hide him—Moses—in the cleft of a rock, 'and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen' (v. 23). In 33:19 the first explication of the name of the LORD is given to Moses:

¹ This is the interpretation of Alan Cole in the commentary *Exodus* in the Tyndale Old Testament Series (Leicester, 1973, pp. 69–70).

And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name "The LORD"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.'

This means that the truth of the name of the LORD is that He will be free to show grace and mercy as He wills. In chapter 34:6–7 this meaning is enlarged:

The Lord passed before him [Moses], and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

Moses was deeply moved at this revelation of the character of God, the meaning of His name, and he 'made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshipped'. Knowing the nature of God he could now pray:

'If now I have found favour in thy sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thy inheritance.'

If we spend time understanding the elements of God's proclamation of His glory—the meaning of His name which was the revelation of His self—then we will be astonished and moved beyond all description. To know the great themes—'merciful', 'gracious', 'slow to anger', 'abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness',

‘keeping steadfast love for thousands’, ‘forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin’, ‘by no means clearing the guilty’, ‘visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and the fourth generation’—is to know the nature of God.² It was to Moses—and is to us—surely to know that God is love. Moses with great equanimity and assurance could now lead the children of Israel to Canaan. No matter what happened the words of the proclamation would ever ring in his heart and mind—words which were the revelation of the unchanging God of the covenant.³

Israel Must Love the One Who Loves and is Love

As the children of Israel were being taught, God spoke to Israel through Moses (Deut. 6:4):

² Studying this text personally and privately, and setting out to write on these various elements of God’s nature, was for me personally a revelation so glorious and enriching that its effects have remained upon me, its truth indelibly marked upon my mind and spirit. I have often imagined how deeply scored was the truth of God upon the devout in Israel. Nothing of the revelation of God in Christ was any less than that given to Moses. To say it was more seems to be impossible, but certainly it was an expanding of Exodus 34:6–7, as though it were not just God’s back which was revealed by Him, but the glory also of the now unhidden face!

³ The widest implications of this revelation involve seeing the elective love of God towards Israel—a vast subject in itself, and of this we will speak later. It also involves God’s elective love towards the world. If we match John 3:16—‘God so loved the world’—with Ephesians 1:5–6 where God destined all His elect, both of Israel and the nations to be accepted ‘in the Beloved’, i.e. in His Son, His Chosen One, His true Elect, then we see that in the New Covenant all the nature of God as set forth in Exodus 34:6–7 is revealed to the new people of God. This ‘nature of God’ is not limited to Israel.

‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD [YHWH] our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.’

This statement is capable of being translated ‘the LORD our God, the LORD is one’, ‘the LORD is our God, the LORD is one’, and ‘the LORD is our God, the LORD alone’. What Moses was trying to communicate primarily was not the unity of God within Himself—i.e. the *essence* of God—so much as the fact that He was the only God, and there was no other, and that He—the one God alone—would be in and by His being and acts the One over all. It comes fairly close to what Paul was later saying in I Corinthians 8:5, ‘For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father . . .’ Of course, Paul introduced the idea of God being Father, just as John introduced the idea of God being love.

In looking at the above details we must not miss the point that God demanded the unwavering love of Israel because of His unwavering love to it. It is the principle of I John 4:19—‘We love, because he first loved us’—working out in a covenant of grace, the covenant with Israel. Later the new covenant of grace through Christ its Mediator would transcend even the old, and love would be seen in the Person of the Son of God. Even so, Israel had a glorious revelation of God as love. Thus the Ten Commandments to Israel are not a legal demand. God has ‘brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’, and so they are to love Him, and they are not to have any god but Him. Their obedience is to be the response of gratitude: their love is to be because He first loved them.

Monotheism—belief in one God as against two or more—can be a philosophical, rather than a theological idea. Each people would think of its god as the powerful one—for it—and so it would in that sense be monotheistic, even whilst acknowledging the fact that other nations claimed suzerainty for their gods.⁴ It is not just that here is one God and no others exist, but what the true God is within Himself: i.e. who He really is. In Israel He was always the God who acted. It may be that the I AM THAT I AM in some way is the same as ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’, as the Lord God described Himself in Revelation 1:8. To this John the apostle added, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’. Again, in Revelation 4:8 God is described as ‘who was and is and is to come’, and in 11:17 and 16:5 as ‘who art and who wast’. These are terms which do not speak of God’s eternity as a measureless measurement, so much as of His constant acting and working in the past, present and future, i.e. the past, present and future as we know and describe them in time. All past, present and future belong to Him: He alone works effectively in those time modes. A commentary on this way of His being are references such as Isaiah 41:4, ‘Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am He’; Revelation 15:3, ‘Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord

⁴ Perhaps there is no people so fiercely monotheistic as the people of Islam. To them the one God is so high, so transcendent, and so powerful, as to demand full worship and the destruction of all other rivals to his immutable glory. Yet that one God has no Son, no full relational traffic with the world which he has created. Within him is no inner social being, no oneness of Father, Son and Spirit. He is the bare monolithic God of a monotheism that has no powerful exposition of relational love.

God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages!’; and Revelation 21:6, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end’. All of this is contained in the ‘I AM’, and ‘The LORD our God is one LORD’.

The Three Persons are One God

The term ‘person’ as we have it today has a long history in theology. We cannot undertake a study of it here, but we will have to understand the term more theologically than psychologically. We understand a person as an individual, as one set apart from the all, even if also being one of the all. Each person has one subject centre of consciousness. How can three persons, then, be one God?

If our answer is that the Three are love, then that may seem to help us. We know of two—a man and woman—being one. There must also be cases of two women being one, or two men being one—and this without homosexual connotation. David and Jonathan were knit together as one being. So we may—in our natural, human way—visualise the Three Persons coming together, joined together by love as though it were some metaphysical ‘Holdfast’ glue. We would then use the human analogy⁵ and say that three

⁵ The use of human analogy to discover something of the Divine nature can never be sufficient. Whatever is truly and perfectly human is derived from God who is other than human. That is why we cannot read human elements back into God. In any case, we do not find true and perfect humanity except in the man Christ Jesus. Anyway, who he is and what he does is not analogous of God, but homologous, i.e. of the same order, since he was man who was at the same time God.

persons can become as one, e.g. a man, his wife and a child of theirs.

As we know, three humans have never really been wholly one, in and of themselves. Things within them and from outside of them come to divide them from time to time. We know enough about human love to know it does not succeed in making or keeping people as one. So then, we cannot conclude that it is Divine love that brings the Three Persons together and keeps them together as one—as one God. Whilst such a proposition sounds good and sufficient, it is not so. How can the Three Persons be one unless they are constitutionally, substantially and essentially one? That is the question we have to answer, and we need to give ourselves fully to it.

The Three Persons are One God as Love

When we say that the Three Persons are one God as love, we do not mean that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are loving—although this is true—and so their love keeps them together and makes them one. No: the Triune Godhead subsists as such because the Father is love, the Son is the Son of His love, and the Spirit is the Spirit of love. They have never been separate Persons who have ‘come together’. Theologians rightly talk about the ‘eternal generation’ or ‘ingeneracy’⁶ of the Son,

⁶ ‘Generation’ was a term used increasingly from the time of Origen to express the relation of the Son to the Father, and scripturally lies in the correlation between the Father and the Son in the Gospels. Origen saw generation as an eternally continuous act, whereas others—e.g. Cyril of Jerusalem—saw it as a single event before time. The Cappadocian Fathers were careful to distinguish the two words ‘uncreated’ (*agenetos*) and ‘unbegotten’ (*agennetos*), and they saw in ingeneracy the particularity of the Son, i.e. he was of the Father, but not the Father.

i.e. the Son has not been created but has been begotten of the Father. So the Athanasian Creed has it, ‘The Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created, but begotten’. Luther said,

Again, if I now pass beyond and outside creation or the creature into the inward, incomprehensible essence of the divine nature, I find, as Scripture teacheth me (for reason is naught here), that the Father is a different person from the Son in the one undivided eternal Godhead. His distinction is that he is the Father and hath not divinity from the Son nor from anyone. The Son is a distinct person from the Father in one and the same fatherly Godhead. His distinction is that he is the Son and hath divinity not from himself nor from any one but only from the Father as eternally born of the Father.⁷

In I Corinthians 8:6 Paul says, ‘yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.’ We see, then, that the Son is begotten of the Father, and so is ‘the Son of his love’, i.e. he is begotten of love.

In regard to the Holy Spirit, the Athanasian Creed says, ‘The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding’, and Luther in the same section quoted from (above) says,

The Holy Ghost is a distinct person from the Father and the Son in one and the same Godhead. His distinction is that He is the Holy Ghost that proceedeth eternally from the Father and the Son together, and He hath Godhead neither from himself nor from anyone, but from both the Father and the Son together, and all this from eternity to eternity.

⁷ The quote is by Barth from *Von den letzten Worten Davids, 1543, W.A.*, 54, 58, 4, in his *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 365.

What we see in all this is that the Father is the fount of Deity (*fons divinitatis*) and so is love (I John 4:8, 16), and the Son is thus ‘the Son of his love’, and the Spirit ‘the Spirit of love’, proceeding as he does from both Father and Son.⁸ As we will see, this relationship of the Three Persons is not only important for understanding love, but for the outworking of that love in relationships. Our conclusion is, then, that the Three are not separate Persons coming together, but that God is the Father with His centre of consciousness, and that same centre of consciousness belongs to the Three because the Son and the Spirit both derive from the Father, from that one subject centre of consciousness. Hence, they are One as ever they have been.

⁸ Whilst it does not immediately concern us here, the church has been divided in its Western and Eastern elements by the introduction of the Filioque clause inserted into the article on the Holy Spirit in the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed. The Eastern church was happy with the teaching that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father, but not from the Father and the Son. The Western church has always thought in terms of the double procession. Some Western theologians would speak of the Holy Spirit proceeding *from* the Father, *through* the Son.

Chapter Eleven

LOVE IN THE TRIUNE GODHEAD—I

The Divine Relationships

How do we come to know the relationships which exist in the Triune Godhead? Can we be spectators to the acts and events of the Three Persons? The answer to these questions is that we can come to know all of the relationships of the Divine Persons in so far as God wishes us to know them and allows us to understand them. The way by which we come to know is the Self-revelation of God, and in particular the words and acts which are His which He chooses to declare to us. It is an axiom of Christian theology that God is Self-revealing. To quote again Luther’s words,

‘Again, if I now pass beyond and outside creation or the creature into the inward, incomprehensible essence of the divine nature, I find, as Scripture teacheth me (for reason is naught here), that the Father is a different person from the Son in the one undivided eternal Godhead,’ etc.

The main point is ‘I find, as Scripture teacheth me (for reason is naught here),’ for the Scriptures choose to

give us the knowledge we need in order that we understand—as we need to understand—the nature of God in His internal and external being and doing.

Theologians speak of the ontological Trinity, i.e. the Trinity as it subsists, particularly in regard to its relationships and internal actions. It, then, speaks of the economic or revelational Trinity, i.e. the Triune Godhead in its external works such as creation and providence.¹ Some theologians feel that the ontological and economic are not to be divided into two as these two represent the nature of the Trinity in its one being and doing. We should not find these terms or ideas difficult. Each person has his—or her—own internal and external relationships and doings. For us the enquiry into the nature of the Triune Godhead is an amazing privilege promising us thrilling results: we can actually come to know God as He is, at least to that point that is beneficial and necessary for us to know. Most of all it is thrilling because we can come to know Him as love!

Beginning to Know the Trinity Through the Incarnation of the Son

When—in the history of the Scriptures—we come to the rich passage of John 1:1–18 we do so with the vast

¹ Some theologians insist that the work of redemption is an inner work of the Trinity and this is feasible, but if redemption is a so-called ‘inner work’ then so must be all works done by the Trinity, and perhaps most of all the work of creation. It would further point to the fact that *opera in extra* and *opera ad extra* are useful theological terms, but in fact all are works of the Trinity in its subsisting. The Trinity—in that sense—cannot be the Trinity unless it accomplishes such works, for they are the outworking of its Being—its subsisting.

amount of revelation known as the Old Testament. We have already seen God in the creation of all things, and have come to know Him in His nature as He has made Man in His own image, has given hope of salvation to fallen humanity, has made the universal covenant of grace with Abraham, has created Israel as a nation, and through its history has revealed His own name and glory, and has brought Israel to its present history when the Son of God becomes incarnate. In the course of that history—and because of it—we have had wonderful revelations of the nature of God through His acts, through His dealings with Israel and all the nations, through the prophetic word that has pointed forward to the incarnation of God in the person of one variously called ‘Son of God’, ‘Son of Man’, ‘Messiah’, ‘Davidic Prince’, ‘Suffering Servant’, ‘Righteous Branch’ and so on.

Thus when the Word of God which was always face-to-face with God (*ho logos en pros ton theon*)² suddenly becomes flesh, the rich revelation of the Father and the Son is brought before Man, ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father’. The very words ‘Father’, ‘Son’, ‘grace’, ‘truth’ and ‘glory’ already have a history because of history, but now they are enhanced beyond their former measure and all of this because of the incarnation. The revelation of Exodus 34:6–7,

The Lord passed before him [Moses], and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger,

² ‘Face-to-face’ is a statement charged with great relational meaning. God was not the Word but the Word was God, i.e. the Word was of the same quality or substance of God or otherwise he could not have communicated with God.

and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation',

is now seen beyond the measure it was made known to Moses. Thus all that the man Christ Jesus does—his every revealed thought, and action and word—is the revelation of the Father, since aided by the Person of the Holy Spirit the Son insists on revealing the Father, knowing that in these very actions the Father is revealing the Son. Hence, the statements of Jesus such as 'My Father is working still, and I am working,' 'Truly . . . the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing,' 'My teaching is not my own but his who sent me', 'I do nothing on my own authority, but speak as the Father taught me,' '. . . you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God,' 'I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me,' 'The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.' If we use these words in John's Gospel to be a commentary on the other three Gospels, and so—in a sense—the key to them, then we can see that everything that Jesus did and every proclamation he made was really the Father's doing, so the Father in action.

All Acts of the Godhead are Triune

For the moment we set aside following the revelation of the relationships of the Father and the Son to see that throughout the Scriptures all works are Triune, i.e. done by the Father, the Son and the Spirit. We discover in the text of the Old and New Testaments that the Father created, the Son was acting as mediator of the creating action, and the Spirit was present as the agent in the creating action. Likewise it can be shown that the Holy Spirit was the creative Spirit, as he—with the Father and the Son—constantly sustained—and sustains—the created universe. It is clear that redemption is a work of the Three Persons, as also the ultimate regeneration and glorification of all creation at the time of the *telos*—the goal of history.³ No one Member of the Godhead works without the others. In all these things both the relationships and the works are love (*agape*).

God as the Divine Society in Unity

THE DIVINE FAMILY

It is not usual to speak of the Triune Godhead as being 'Family', yet without doubt there is a Divine Community in the Godhead. Royce Gordon Gruenler in an exposition of John 17:20–26 (Theological Journal *Interpretation*, April, 1990) states,

³ I have not tried to give references for these self-evident things, but they can be traced in any exposition of the Trinity, or the Persons and works of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

'All of creation, but especially its highest human level appears designed of God to serve other levels and members of the larger family of creation, and it be interdependent in some way that is analogous to the pattern which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are interdependent and are at one another's disposal in the most original Household, the Triune Family.'

Where we have father and son on the human level there is something of family in that limited structure and relationship, though we would naturally think of a mother to complete it. For the moment we will leave aside the matter of seemingly missing Mother in this Divine Family. We must say that God is essentially Father, the Son essentially Son, and the Spirit is essentially the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. Thus there is unity in sociality. We have stated that in the creation the Father, Son and Spirit work together so that whilst they have ontological unity—unity of being—they also have economic unity—unity of doing. It is their indivisible unity which is the basis of all relationships, since man is created in the image and likeness of God—the Godhead. We can then speak of the Sociality, Household, Community or Family of God.

This social unity is shown by the relationships the Three Persons have one with the other. If—as we have already suggested—we commence with the Word of God who was in the beginning, and by whom all things were made, we find (John 1:1) the Word was with God, so that here, as in other places, we are pointed to the pre-incarnational being of the Son. He always was the Son, as the Father always was the Father. His incarnation did not and does not alter that relationship. When Paul speaks of God being 'the God

and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'⁴, he is not only saying that God has fathered the incarnation, but that the one who came to be called 'our Lord Jesus Christ' was always His Son.

This being so—and other Scriptures attest to this fact—we affirm that the Father was always the Father, and the Son was always the Son. It may well be that God is the archetypal Father, but—archetype or no archetype—He is Father! The Son for his part is Son! Together these Two have a relationship which is essentially so and is thus ontological. Nor are the Two apart from the Holy Spirit—who as we have said, and will further see—is the very Spirit of the Father and the very Spirit of the Son. So, then, we have the essential Trinity, the indivisible relationships of the Three Persons.

THE RELATIONSHIPS, THAT IS.

THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF THE THREE

Jesus' statement 'I am in the Father and the Father in me,' (John 14:10) gives us the key to all true relationships, i.e. mutual indwelling, or if we may coin a phrase, the mutual inter-dwelling. In John 10:38 likewise he said, 'the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' This is the equivalent of John 10:30, 'I and the Father are one.' When we ask what 'mutual inter-dwelling' is, then we must answer in terms of personal union—persons in union—but to some extent we are limited in knowing what this is since true pure love is the constraint for such union and the very essence of it.

⁴ Eph. 1:3.

We have some knowledge of it where in marriage the two become one flesh, one being. To some degree it is present in a child-parent relationship. We can say that the possibilities of such mutual indwelling are splendid in the human race. All depends on the wills of the partners, and their operations depend upon the states of the persons before God. Human mutual indwelling ought to follow from human relationships with God, since such human relationships are via God—their Source. This can be seen from the quotation immediately below.

UNION AND COMMUNION

Is it possible to have union without communion? This may be possible in human relationships, but not in the relationships of the Three Persons. Theirs is a *comm*-union; they are utterly and intimately the One. The principle of this interpenetration of the Three is shown in John 17:20–24—part of our Lord’s great high-priestly prayer—where we have the further and fuller statement about the Divine mutual inter-dwelling,

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world.

In this, Jesus is showing the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son. For their people—the elect of God—to achieve unity they must dwell in the Father and the Son as the Father and the Son must dwell in them, for this is the way of true unity. We note in passing that the Father gave His Son glory before the foundation of the world, and that Jesus says he has given this glory to his disciples so that they will be one, i.e. will have true unity by it. Jesus desires his disciples to see this given glory so that (i) they realise it is the source and basis of unity, and (ii) that ‘the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them’. No stronger or richer word can be spoken of relationships and oneness with those relationships.

What we have to realise in the matter of mutual indwelling is that each Person of the Godhead is ‘other-person centred’.⁵ The principle which Paul enunciated in Philippians 2:1–5,

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves [or ‘in you’], which is yours in Christ Jesus . . .

is the principle innate in the Godhead. For fallen humanity to think primarily in terms of others is not natural. It is the very heart of the Divine relationships. I think the term ‘other-person centred’ is bettered by the

⁵ I take the phrase ‘other-person centred’ from the book *The Everlasting Presence* by D. Broughton Knox (Evangelical Press, 1982). This work is an examination of the inter-personal relationships of the Trinity, and has been the stimulus for much that I am saying in this present chapter.

phrase ‘other person *concentred*’. A human being who has come to God’s regeneration and turns himself outwards to others discovers a thrilling freedom. It also has to do with servanthood—the heart of the Christian gospel—and it is found in the Divine interrelationships. The Father serves the Son, the Son the Father, the Spirit both Father and Son, and they serve him. Because sin is a self-serving thing and we are sinners through the Fall, we find it difficult to understand the truly selfless serving of love. That is why we cannot comprehend the unity of the Divine Community. All things relational demand the voluntary exercise of our wills in mutuality, such as we find in the Godhead.

All of this which we have been discussing is the nature of God, shown and demonstrated by the incarnate Son in his dealings with the Father, so that we see these relationships are *agape* and not just derived from it. Full inter-dwelling is the very essence of Divine love. It is by this—as we shall see—that our own human relationships work out in the fullness of the Triune God.

Chapter Twelve

LOVE IN THE TRIUNE GODHEAD—II

The Way of Love in the Godhead

There are many ways in which love works out in human relationships. The best way of understanding them is to see how they work out in the Triune Godhead. It is, in fact, the only way since (i) Man was made in the image of God and properly speaking his relationships should derive from, and reflect, those of the Triune God, and (ii) the rebellion of the primal couple has brought relational problems of a deep and terrifying nature, given that human relationships can also—from time to time—have their glories. In fallen humanity there is always an ego problem. There is nothing wrong with a person *being* an ego, but ego-love, i.e. self-love, is a problem when it is this way because it excludes other persons in favour of itself. To use Martin Buber’s term, a person first has an ‘I–I’ relationship, he is living within the enclosed circle of himself—or herself. This is a relational closed-circuit. If that ‘I’ meets a similar ‘I’, then there is an external ‘I’–‘I’ relationship and not an ‘I–thou’ relationship which—if a true one—is an ‘other-person centred’ relationship, in short the relationships we find within

the Triune Society. We need, then, to go to the relationships within the Trinity to see what is relational love in action, and this we now propose to do; but first let us have a simple discursus.

DISCURSUS ON VIEWING THE DIVINE RELATIONSHIPS

A point which, perhaps, we ought to have raised earlier is whether we can say that the relationships with the Father and the Spirit that Jesus had as a man can be used to discover the relationships the Three Persons have on the Divine level. Theological disputes have led some to say, for example, that Jesus' subordination to the Father was only in regard to his manhood, his being on a lower level than prior to his incarnation. In other words, we cannot take his revealed relationships in the Gospels with the Father and the Spirit to be the norm for his unseen relationships in heaven. For the moment we will leave aside the matter of subordination¹—immensely important as it is—and make the assertion that the only way we can understand anything of the Divine relationships is the way Jesus shows them to us in his flesh, and by his flesh. Indeed, we are wholly dependent upon his flesh to show us the Divine relationships. There was

¹ Historical theology shows that in the first five centuries or so there was a battle against the Arians, who held a doctrine of subordinationism, i.e. that the Son was inferior to the Father, and was not of the same substance. Credal formulations called 'Nicene' and 'Athanasian' made the Father, the Son and the Spirit to be 'co-equal' and 'co-eternal', since they were of the same 'substance', i.e. all possessed Deity. Among orthodox believers some maintained the subordination of the Son which had nothing to do with his incarnation, but with his place in the Divine hierarchy of Father, Son and Spirit, since the Son was generated from the Father.

no reason for the relationship of the Son with the Father and the Spirit to change simply because he became flesh. What his essential relationships with the other Two Persons were could not have altered: they were simply shown in different modes. The fact that the Son could bring such revelations of the Father and the Spirit to human beings with faith was because he was in the flesh. It is only the actions and language of humanity that we can understand. When now we pursue the relationships of the Triune God, we can understand their love only because Jesus became man and showed us via his manhood how things were—and are—with the Three Persons.

Divine Love Shown by the Inter-Serving of the Three Persons

There are probably many elements which show the Divine *agape* to us, but I have chosen three main ones so that we may explore the open mystery of Divine relationships. Keeping the quote of Philippians 2:1–5 in mind—

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves [or 'in you'], which is yours in Christ Jesus . . .

—we can conclude that the Divine relationships were on no less a level than the quotation indicates, i.e. the

Persons are centred in one another. The three ways the Persons love one another are (i) by each glorifying the others, (ii) by each giving to the others, and (iii) by each serving the others.

The Mutual Glorification of the Three Persons

God is called ‘the Father of glory’, Jesus is the glorifier of the Father, and the Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of glory’.² We will first discuss the matter of glorification.

DISCURSUS ON GLORIFICATION

What do we mean by ‘glorifying’? In the case of the Son the work of glorifying the Father would be to reveal the nature of the Father, and this by his explicating word and by his actions which reveal the Father. When he said to Pilate, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth,’ he was virtually saying he had come into the world to glorify God. In all the doxologies of Scripture certain elements are *ascribed* to God, but nothing is *given* to Him. Glorification of God, then, is simply the ascribing to Him what is His nature, so that the ascription is His due. When it is said that man is ‘the image and glory of God’ (I Cor. 11:7), it does not mean man is actually a thing of glory *per se* but that he reflects the glory of

² See Eph. 1:17; John 17:1–5; I Pet. 4:14.

God (cf. Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15). When the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1) they are not magnifying God beyond what is, nor adding something to Him, but simply declaring who and what He is. Thus, when the Father glorifies the Son He does not add something to the nature of the Son, but reveals that nature itself: again, this by both explication of the word, and the actions which He initiates in the Son (cf. John 14:10).

THE GLORIFICATION OF THE SON BY THE FATHER

If we may speak of ‘inter-serving’, we can start at John 17:22 and 24, where Jesus speaks of the Father in His love giving him glory before the foundation of the world. We recognise the difficulty our minds have in grasping and expressing the ‘eternal generation’ of the Son³ primarily because it is a relational matter. Whilst confessing that it is a difficult matter in John’s

³ The Nicene Creed endeavours to grapple with the problem, in the thought and language of its day:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten not made,
of one Being with the Father.

This translation is from *An Australian Prayer Book* (AIO Press, 1978), the Prayer Book of the Anglican Church in Australia. The 1662 Prayer Book has ‘of one substance with the Father, for ‘of one Being with the Father’.

Gospel—when Jesus speaks of himself as ‘the Son’—to understand at times whether he is referring to himself as Son in his pre-incarnational or his incarnational states⁴, yet it would seem Jesus can refer to both within the relationship he has with God. For example, in 5:22 Jesus says, ‘The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son.’ When was that given—before or after the incarnation? It seems both situations obtain here. Certainly he has been given both life and the authority of judgement ‘because he is the Son of man’ (5:26–27), but what is pertinent to our discussion is the fact that the Father gives to the Son:

- ‘For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of man’ (John 5:26–27).
- ‘The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand’ (John 3:35).
- ‘All things have been delivered to me by my Father’ (Matt. 11:27).
- Jesus, knowing that the father had given all things into his hands . . . (John 13:3).
- ‘. . . thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him . . . having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do’ (John 17:2, 4).
- ‘I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me, and they have kept thy word. Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is from thee; for I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee’ (John 17:6–8).
- ‘Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost . . .’ (John 17:11–12).

⁴ There appear to be two streams of thinking about the Sonship of Christ: (i) in the Synoptics referring to his Messianic Kingship, as linked with Psalms 2, 89 and 110 and related to his baptism, and the questioning accusation of the high priest (Matt. 26:63); and (ii) in John, where the Sonship is the reflection of a relationship with God the Father, so that Sonship is innately transcendental though worked out through the humanity of Christ (John 1:1–14).

These references tell us what God has given, but with them is another set of references speaking of the Father glorifying the Son, the first of which are the straight statements in John 17:5, 22 and 24, that the Father had given him glory—i.e. glorified him—before the foundation of the world, this being when he was not yet incarnate. In 17:1 he asks the Father for glorification in the hour of the Cross. A short time previously on that same night he had stated, ‘Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified’ (John 13:31). Of course it is the Father who glorifies him. The much discussed verse Hebrews 2:9 can be interpreted as saying either that Jesus was crowned with honour and glory ‘because of the suffering of death’, or ‘for the suffering of death’, but the principle is clear: he was glorified by the Father, and this surely in response to his prayer of John 17:1, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee.’

In the baptism of Jesus there is a glorifying of him by the Father when God announces, ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,’ the saying undoubtedly being a conflation of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, but the glorification proceeds through all Jesus’ ministry. When Jesus said (John 17:4), ‘I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do,’ he is surely saying that he himself is glorified in the doing of that work. John records that the disciples saw Christ’s glory in the miracle of Cana in Galilee and believed on him. Doubtless every work he did displayed and affirmed his glory, even if mostly to sightless eyes.

Certainly Peter sees the transfiguration not merely as a miraculous visual glorification of the earthly

Jesus, but as moral glorification of the Son who does the will of God, for the commentary on that event of II Peter 1:16–19 defines this:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure.

When Paul says that Jesus was ‘raised from the dead by the glory of the Father’ (Rom. 6:4), this parallels Romans 1:4, ‘designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead’. Resurrection is glorification, as is also his being ‘taken up in glory’ (I Tim. 3:16), an event which the apostles witnessed and which was evidently an ascending in the cloud of glory—the *shekinah* (Acts 1:9). The glory of the Session in heaven is described by Christ himself (Matt. 19:28), ‘in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne,’ and the Parousia likewise has links with the Ascension (Matt. 26:64), ‘you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’⁵

In all these ways, then, the Father glorified the Son, and will further glorify him when he comes in that Parousia.

⁵ It is interesting to note that the occasions of Jesus’ baptism, transfiguration, death, resurrection, ascension and ultimate victory over the powers of evil are all linked with Psalm 2, which is the primary reference to his coronation as the Son-Messiah-King and as such acclaimed (designated) Son of God, i.e. Son of the Father.

THE GLORIFICATION OF THE FATHER BY THE SON

We have already seen that the Son’s glorification of the Father is really his witness to Him (John 18:37), this being by his words and his works, e.g. the miracle of the marriage in Cana of Galilee where the disciples see his glory. In other places—especially in the Synoptics—people are led to glorify God for what Christ does as the Son of man, e.g. as in the case of the healing of the paralysed man, ‘When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men’ (Matt. 9:8; cf. 15:31).

In John’s Gospel Jesus speaks of his conscious glorification of the Father, stated in the principle of John 17:4, ‘I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do.’

This is underlined in 14:13, when Jesus tells the disciples, ‘Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.’ The same principle obtains for the disciples as they abide in him: ‘By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.’ Again the manner of Peter’s death was to glorify God (21:19). In the manner of Peter’s confession of Matthew 16:16, Nathanael glorifies Christ: ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ and so, doubtless, glorifies God through him.

Jesus did not seek to glorify himself but waited on the Father’s glorification (8:54; 12:23; 13:31–32; 16:14), knowing that the Father’s glorification of him would be his glorification of the Father. This is brought out strongly in 13:31–32, ‘Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him,

God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once'. In this respect 11:4 is interesting: 'This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it'. Later in this incident of Lazarus being raised from the dead, Jesus tells Martha, 'Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' Also interesting in 11:4 is the fact that it is the Son of God who is glorified, whereas in 12:23 and 13:31 it is the Son of Man who is glorified.

THE HOLY SPIRIT GLORIFIES THE FATHER AND THE SON

Whilst there are not many explicit references to this glorifying work of the Spirit, yet such glorifying action is inherent in all that the Spirit does, since he is called 'the Spirit of the Lord', 'the Spirit of God', 'the Spirit of your Father', 'the Spirit of Christ', 'the Spirit of Jesus' and 'the Spirit of the Son', meaning his ministry and desire is to do the will of the Father and the Son. Hence, as 'the Spirit of his Son' he cries, 'Abba! Father!' (Gal. 4:6; cf. Rom. 8:15), thus revealing God as Father. I Peter 4:14 speaks of him as 'the Spirit of glory and of God'.

It is in John chapters 14 to 16 that the Spirit is spoken of as Teacher, Remembrancer, Counsellor, Convicter and Glorifier. All of these works pertain to the Father and the Son. In 16:14–15 the glorification of the Son and the Father is explicitly stated: 'He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.' Without him we would not know the things of the Son and of the

Father, just as we would not know the Son except the Father taught us of him and drew us to him (John 6:45–46, 65), and we would not know the things of the Father unless the Son were to declare Him (Matt. 11:27; John 1:18; 14:6).

THE FATHER AND THE SON GLORIFY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Nicene Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit as 'the Lord, the giver of life', and this is consonant with Old Testament statements (Ps. 104:29–30; Job 33:4; cf. Ezek. 37:1–14). He is portrayed in the New Testament as 'the Lord who is the Spirit' (II Cor. 3:17–18), and is the giver of life (cf. John 3:1–6; Rom. 7:6; 8:2, 6, 11; II Cor. 3:6; Titus 3:5). The Son—as man—gave great honour to the Spirit, being led by him in all things, and through him accomplishing all things (Acts 10:38; cf. Matt. 12:28). So great a gift will the Spirit be to man that Jesus spends much time in John chapters 14 to 16 speaking of him as Teacher, Remembrancer, Convicter, Advocate and Glorifier of the Father and the Son. The Father will send the Spirit, the Son will pray to the Father and the Father will send him, and then he—the Son—will send him. It is from this high Source that the Spirit is sent forth (John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:7). In Acts 2:33 he is 'poured out' from the throne via the Lordship of the risen, ascended Christ, and in Galatians 4:6 it is God who sends him *out* from Himself (*exapostello*) *into* the hearts of the new children of the Father. Indeed, in Galatians 3:14 he is the prized gift—'the promise of the Father' (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; cf. Luke 11:13; Eph. 1:13).

Much, then, is said of the Spirit in the Acts, Epistles

and Revelation, and whilst little is said explicitly by the Father and the Son in honour of the Spirit, this sense is not lacking. To grieve, vex or quench the Spirit is a dangerous matter (Isa. 63:10), and the Pauline warning comes to the church to hold the Spirit in reverence (Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19), but it is Jesus in the Synoptics who warns against sinning against the Holy Spirit:

‘Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or the age to come’ (Matt. 12:31).

To this, of course, must be added the warnings against having ‘become partakers of the Holy Spirit’ and then apostatising (Heb. 6:4) and ‘outraging the Spirit of grace’ (Heb. 10:29).

More solemn or more honouring words can scarcely be given, but perhaps it was Jesus’ positive statements that nothing would happen until the Spirit came, following his—Jesus’—entrance into glory, that glorified the Spirit (cf. Matt. 3:11; Luke 11:13; Acts 1:4–5, 8; John 7:37–39; Luke 24:49). The whole of this age becomes ‘the age of the Spirit’, so much so that it is the Spirit who gives to John the revelation of Jesus Christ, by taking John up in himself on several occasions and showing him remarkable things. In the seven letters to the church in chapters 2 and 3 of the Revelation, the letters are what the Spirit is saying to the church, even though they are written by Christ. The sevenfold Spirit in the Revelation is shown as being before the throne—along with the Father and the Lamb. He is also shown as the eyes and the horns of the Lamb—all elements

which *revelate* him as of high dignity and great in function. It is not only in this age that the Spirit leads (cf. Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25–26), but the powers of the age to come are in his control (‘and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come’, Heb. 6:5).

All in all, then, we see that the Three Persons of the Triune Godhead are ‘other-Person centred’ or ‘other-Person concentrated’. All of this pertains to Divine love, and hence we have the key to the Sociality, Unity and Family of the Godhead.

Chapter Thirteen

LOVE IN THE TRIUNE GODHEAD—III

The Three Persons Giving to One Another

Just as the Three Persons glorify one another, so also they give to one another. Primarily they give out of their differentiations. Although they are said to be ‘of the one substance’ and so do not differ substantially as regards their Deity, yet the Father is different to the Son because He is Father. The Son is different to the Father because he is Son. The Spirit differs from them both in that he is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son, whereas the Father is not Father of the Spirit, nor the Son the Son of the Spirit. Thus the Father can be said to give of His Fatherhood—His ‘Fatherness’—to the Son, the Son of his filial nature to the Father, and the Spirit gives to both out of his differentiations. All of these differentiations are rich and strong elements of the unity of the Three Persons. This is at once evident if we take the analogy of a father loving his son, glorifying him, giving to him, and serving him: and so on.

THE FATHER GIVING TO THE SON

In John 3:16 the statement ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son’ tells us that the Father is the Giver, and tells us that to love is to give, as also to give is to love. James speaks on the principle of the giving of ‘the Father of lights’: ‘Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.’ This certainly means that there is no giving of His which is not pure, and no gift which is not perfect. To be the Father is to be ‘the Giver’. John the Baptist once said, ‘No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven.’ The ‘gave’ of John 3:16 is the same as the threefold ‘sent’ of I John 4:7–14, and is intensified by Romans 8:32, ‘He who did not spare his own Son but *gave him up* for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?’.

All of the giving we have just described is towards us—the human race—for God loved the world. It is certain that the Father gives to the Son and this reality is borne out in John chapter 17. The prayer, which has been called Christ’s high-priestly prayer, contains fourteen references to what the Father has given the Son, namely ‘power over all flesh’, ‘all whom thou hast given me’ (the elect), ‘the work’, ‘everything that thou hast given me is from thee’, ‘the words which thou gavest me’, ‘thy name’, ‘the glory’, ‘my glory’. The chapter also contains four references to what the Son has given his people. Perhaps one of the most telling verses which connects love with giving is John 3:35, ‘the Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand’, a statement almost paralleled in Matthew 11:27,

‘All things have been delivered to me by my Father’. In John 6:37 Jesus said, ‘All that the Father gives me will come to me.’

We know that Jesus was versed in asking the Father for gifts and that he taught his followers they were to ask the heavenly Father, who would give to them, especially in the context of the Kingdom. Jesus knew the loving giving of his Father, but he also knew the Father had given Himself to His Son—‘thou in me’—and that he, too, had given himself to the Father—‘I in thee’. As we have said, the Father gives continually to the Son from His Fatherhood, and the Son gives continually from his filial gifts and differentiations.

THE SON GIVES TO THE FATHER

As the Father gives all things into the hands of the Son, so the Son receives them, but in one sense only with a view to giving them back to the Father. In I Corinthians 15:24–28 we see the Son putting all things under his own feet, but then it is the Father who is the initiator of this exercise. Paul writes, ‘Then comes the end, when he delivers the Kingdom to God the Father.’ The Son has always asked in order that he may ultimately give the best to the Father. When in his name every knee will ultimately bow to him as Lord, it will be ‘to the glory of the Father’.

The Son himself is always ascribing all he does to the Father, who has given him all things. Thanksgiving is the fruit of giving to the heart that recognises the source of the gifts. Receiving, thanksgiving and giving are always together. Glorifying is also a true form of

giving, and this—as we have seen already—the Son was always doing.

THE SPIRIT GIVES TO THE FATHER AND THE SON

Jesus described the Holy Spirit as ‘another Counsellor’, i.e. another such as himself, and so much so, that the Holy Spirit has been called Jesus’ *alter ego*. Because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord, of God, of the Father, of Jesus, of Christ and of the Son, he attends on the Two Persons, giving out of his Spirithood and his differentiations. Again we have seen that the Spirit is the one who glorifies both the Father and the Son, and this is his giving.

We conclude, then, that Father, Son and Holy Spirit all give to one another, and this is as an element and expression of their *agape*—their holy *communion*.

The Three Persons Serve One Another

In one sense we have already covered this matter of the inter-serving of the Three. To glorify is to worship, and to worship is to serve. In both Old and New Testaments the primary verbs for ‘to worship’ and ‘to serve’ are identical. Worship—we find from Romans 1:21—has the two elements of honouring (glorifying) and thankfulness. Fallen Man ‘exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator’.

We find the Father serving the Son by giving him honour above all creatures in creation, placing all things in his hands, and in glorifying him in the hour of the

Cross, raising him from the dead, elevating him above every principality and power that is named, making him head over all things, not only in this age, but in the age to come, and in the process answering his requests, especially since they related to the Divine plan for all creation. The Son served the Father by obeying His commands, as shown by the following paragraphs:

- (a) The Father commanded the Son to come into the world. Over forty times in John's Gospel Jesus uses the verb for being sent—by the Father.
- (b) Jesus spoke of the Father giving him commands (John 10:18; 12:49; 14:31), and said, '... I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.' In John 12:50 he said, 'I know that his commandment is eternal life.'
- (c) The Father took the initiative in the Incarnation and the Atonement (Rom. 3:24–25; II Cor. 5:21; I John 4:9–10, 14).
- (d) Christ was under the Father's authority (see above, and also John 5:19–20; 8:28; 14:10).
- (e) The Father gave the Son authority (Matt. 11:27; John 3:35; 5:22ff.; 10:27–30; Matt. 28:18; see also Matt. 3:17; Ps. 2:6–7; Isa. 42:1; Rev. 2:27; 3:21).
- (f) The Son learned obedience (Heb. 5:8–9; cf. 2:10), and was obedient (John 9:4; 10:17; 14:30–31; Phil. 2:8).
- (g) He rejoiced in the Father's will (Matt. 11:25–26; Heb. 10:7; Ps. 40:8; John 4:34).
- (h) He said many times that he had kept the Father's will. See John 15:10, 'I have kept my Father's commandments'.

Jesus could say, 'The Father is greater than I' (John 14:28), and, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30), and yet serve, knowing full well the Father likewise served him.

Again, enough has been said to show that the Holy Spirit was servant to both the Father and the Son. Of the Son in his attitude to the Father it was written, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God', which was a quote from Psalm 40:8, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God'. It was also the delight of the Spirit to do the will of the Father and the Son.

The Spirit was with the Son in his conception, in his childhood and growth, in his ministry, in his death, resurrection and ascension, and in all these things he led the Son, until the Son in his turn was able to send him—the Spirit—at Pentecost. Since then he has served both the Father and the Son, so that it is no wonder the Father was called 'love', the Son 'the Son of his love', and the Spirit 'the Spirit of love'.

The Interrelational Love of the Persons of the Triune Godhead

The last few chapters have traced rather methodically the ways of love that obtain with the Three Persons in their glorifying of one another, their giving to one another and their serving one another. Recounting these facts can indeed be a dull occupation, but the dynamics of these love-actions must transcend a factual account. The great love the Father has for the world He created is indeed a passionate affair when 'he withheld not his only Son but abandoned him up for us all'.

And the love of the Son to accede to this with delight and fervour and to carry it out to the giving up of himself upon the Cross to sufferings for sins, the bearing of the wrath upon sin, and the abandonment into the darkness of the terrible limbo of the lost, must be seen in order to understand something of the Divine love of both Father and Son. Likewise, the ministry of the Spirit to, and for, the Father and the Son by his identification with the incarnation of the Son, his part in honouring, serving and empowering the Son, and his participation in the death, resurrection and ascension of the Son thus being the power for these events, as also being the Spirit of glory, tells us of the deep love of the Spirit. No wonder the 'fruit of the Spirit' is so rich, so much the quality of true love.

If we return to our former statements that the Three Persons have one subject-centre of consciousness because the Son is generated by the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father, through the Son, and that these are One together, whilst at the same time being each a Person, then we are faced with the beautiful mystery of love. Again, our statements about the internal relationships of the Trinity effecting their works within the Godhead—*opere in extra*—must be linked with their works which proceed outwards from the Godhead—*opere ad extra*—and these works are the ones we see in the creation of the world, the sustaining of creation, and in the acts of redemption and the final renewal of creation when—having been purged—it is all glorified. This brings us to the conclusion that the Divine relationships are not an end in themselves, that works and relationships cannot be separated. The value of this truth for us is that, as in

Divine relationships love expresses itself and operates in always turning out in concentratedness upon others, so in human relationships *agape* must operate similarly.

This leads us on to the rich and entrancing truth that as God is free in *agape*—'I will love you freely'—so the human race, by faith, can enter into that freedom, a freedom which is indescribable, but powerfully operative. Freedom is the way God is, and His creation of Man intended such freedom for the human race. If this does not exist, and cannot be Man's in experience, then volumes written on the love of God, or the fact that God is love, are virtually pointless to the point of mocking the human race, especially in its fallen state.

Chapter Fourteen

THE UNITY OF LOVE

Knowing the Persons in Experience

There have been endless attempts to explain the Trinity to those who find difficulty with the concept of it, although they recognise the fact of the Three Persons. Common to all believers is the experience of the Father, the experience of the Son and the experience of the Holy Spirit. We will not try here to outline what those experiences are, but it is certain that a Christian comes to know God as Father, God as Son, and God as Holy Spirit. Indeed a Christian lives in continuous experience of the Persons, and yet to him or her they are One God. It would be fair to say that the experiences of the Three Persons are those of love—the love of the Father, the love of the Son and the love of the Spirit.

Perhaps we have not all thought of love in this way. Some Christians say they have views of the Father as remote, stern, demanding, and even judgemental. Perhaps they do not see themselves as children of God—sons of God—even though they are already such in Christ.

Others have a warm understanding of the Father but Jesus remains a somewhat puzzling figure. Yet others confess they know little of the Holy Spirit as a Person. The configurations of relationships may vary from person to person, but what is clear is that we can relate to the Three Persons if we come to know and understand them.

Problems in the Early Church Regarding the Trinity

As we know, the New Testament does not directly teach a doctrine of the Trinity, although it is implicit throughout its pages. The church acknowledged the ‘Father, Lord of heaven and earth’¹, and claimed Jesus Christ to be His Son and the eternal Word. Likewise the Spirit of God was accorded Deity and was never separated in the church’s thinking from God Himself. When the church met the world in which there were varying views about God and creation—theology, anthropology and cosmology—then debate began. In some ways it took the first few centuries to begin to formulate the Christian ideas of God, so that the doctrine of the Trinity emerged slowly, and even more centuries passed as great minds—the minds of the church fathers—wrestled with the doctrine of the Trinity, and in particular its formulation. We are the fortunate possessors of the Creeds called ‘Apostles’ , ‘Nicene’, and ‘Athanasian’.

We need not here seek to go back to their formulation but we do know the church often teetered on

¹ See Luke 10:21; Acts 4:24; 14:15; 17:24–28.

the edge of heretical views called ‘Tritheism’, ‘Patripassionism’ and ‘Sabellianism’ which was also known as ‘Modalism’. What interested Christians was how the Three could coinhere² as One. It is certainly fascinating to read both church history and historical theology to see how the issues were tackled. Since all of this is part of the history of the church we should give some thought to it. Put fairly roughly, the idea developed that the Three Persons coinhered, as though they coalesced and were the one, yet without blurring the distinctions between the Three Persons or making them into One Person. One of the fascinating ideas that developed and which surely was already inherent in the nature of God was that which in Greek was known as *perichoresis*, and in Latin as *circumincessio*. Whilst John of Damascus gave it its first formulation, it had been present in the thinking of theologians prior to him.

The Perichoresis–Circumincessio of God

By the Greek term *perichoresis* and the Latin term *circumincessio* we understand the Divine interpenetration of the Three Persons in a mutuality of relationships in giving and receiving, and the circulatory movement

² Coinherence was the term used early in Christian history and meant that within the Triune Godhead ‘each person belongs to the others’. Augustine pursued the idea that each Person is relative to the others, and the Spirit is the bond of (*vinculum amoris*) the Father and the Son (A. Richardson, London, 1969). It was John of Damascus in the eighth century (745) who brought coinherence to the formulation of *perichoresis–circumincessio*. Some theologians argue along linguistic lines for using the Latin *circumincessio* instead of *circumincessio*.

which ensures that all Persons receive from and give to one another that which is unique to each of the Persons, i.e. Fatherhood, Sonship and Spirithood.³ The differentiations of the Three Persons are no barrier to their interpenetration of one another or giving and receiving but are the very heart of it. The initial idea of *perichoresis* arose from John 10:28–38 in which Jesus says, ‘I and the Father are one,’ and concludes with ‘the Father is in me and I am in the Father.’ In John 17:21 the same idea is in, ‘... thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee ...’ Moltmann comments, ‘The “circulation” of the eternal divine life becomes perfect through the fellowship and unity of the three different Persons in the eternal love.’

Some theologians⁴ do not wholly accept the *perichoresis–circumincessio* because they claim that ‘interpenetration’ and ‘circulation’ are terms which suggest there is not an innate oneness⁵, and that in some sense the Persons do not have to make this unity by interpenetration and circulation. There seems a lot of point to their assertion, but the doctrine of John of Damascus certainly has a rich revelation of the Triune relationships and has a dynamic contribution to make to the modes of human relationships.

³ Jurgen Moltmann in his *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (England, 1981, pp. 174–76) has a superb exposition of the *perichoresis–circumincessio*.

⁴ See H. Berkhof, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids 1979, p. 33–340) who does not seem to see much virtue in the *perichoresis*, but who does not overtly criticise it. If there is any criticism it is the concentration on the matter of the ontological Trinity rather than the economic (revelational) Trinity, since it is not the Trinity as subsistent that should occupy us but the Trinity as active in redemption.

⁵ For example, the Father and the Son are very much one simply by Father–Son relationship.

For our purposes we need not follow the arguments of the Trinitarian theologians down through the centuries, but Moltmann (p. 174) certainly develops the valuable concept of the *perichoresis-circumincessio*,

The unity of the trinitarian Persons lies in the circulation of the divine life which they fulfil in their relations to one another. This means that the unity of the triune God cannot and must not be seen in the general concept of divine substance. That would abolish the personal differences. But if the contrary is true—if the very difference of the three Persons lies in their relational, perichoretically consummated life process—the Persons cannot and must not be reduced in three modes of being of one and the same divine subject. The Persons themselves constitute both their differences and their unity.

If the divine life is understood perichoretically, then it cannot be consummated by merely one subject at all. It is bound to consist in the living fellowship of the three Persons who are related to one another and even exist in one another. Their unity does not lie in the one lordship of God⁶; it is to be found in the unity of their tri-unity.

Finally, through the concept of perichoresis, all subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity is avoided. It is true that the Trinity is constituted with the Father as starting point, inasmuch as he is understood as being ‘the origin of the Godhead’. But this ‘monarchy of the Father’ only applies in the *constitution* of the Trinity. It has no validity within the eternal circulation of the divine life, and none of the perichoretic unity of the Spirit. Here the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another.

I find his attempt to cancel any suggestion of subordinationism reasonable, but not to cancel the principle

of subordination and think his statement ‘the Trinity is constituted with the Father as starting point, inasmuch as he is understood as being “the origin of the Godhead”’, a questionable one, i.e. in saying, ‘But this “monarchy of the Father” only applies in the *constitution* of the Trinity’ a little odd as it seems the term ‘constitution’ is saying there *is* a monarchical position but when it comes to *perichoresis* then it practically is non-existent. It would seem to me that subordination and super-ordination are parts of the differentiations, and that they both present wonderful opportunities for the expression of love, i.e. ‘he that would be greatest among you, let him be servant’, as also Christ’s revelling in the two statements, ‘the Father is great than I,’ and ‘I and the Father are one.’ Nevertheless Moltmann has dealt well with the *perichoretic* situation in the Godhead.

The Perichoretic Love That is Eschatological

When we say that love is eschatological we mean two things, (i) love is not only ontological but teleological, i.e. its bent is towards the consummation of the *telos*—God’s goal for history—such as we read in Ephesians 1:3–14 and I Corinthians 2:6–10, and (ii) it is eschatological in that the last days will see the climactic action in fulfilling God’s purposes of love. That is how wide and high, deep and vast we must see love, and how consummating it is of the love which planned and is executing salvation history, so that Moltmann says (p. 157),

⁶ One Lordship of God’ is precisely the way God is in His revelational or economic work, i.e. His *opere ad extra*. The New Testament certainly speaks of the Father as Lord, the Son as Lord and the Holy Spirit as Lord, and in this sense they present one Lordship to creation.

We have understood the unity of the divine trinitarian history as the open, unifying at-oneness of the three divine Persons in their relationships to one another . . . It then lies in the eternal *perichoresis* of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. The history of God's trinitarian relationships of fellowship corresponds to the eternal *perichoresis* of the Trinity. For this trinitarian history is nothing other than the eternal *perichoresis* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their dispensation of salvation, which is to say in their opening of themselves for the reception and unification of the whole creation.

By the statement, 'their opening of themselves for the reception and unification of the whole creation', Moltman (p. 178) means what he states in the next quotation, particularly in the final fine lines,

The unity of the Trinity is constituted by the Father, centred around the Son, and illumined by the Holy Spirit. So, summing up, we can say the following.

In the history and experience of salvation this illumination is perceived through the Spirit first of all. It is in the power of the Spirit that doxology begins. The perichoretic unity of the triune God is perceived in salvation history and reflected in salvation history. Lastly, the monarch of the Father is perceived in the Trinity because everything in the history of salvation comes from him and strives towards him. *To throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole of creation, into the life-stream of the triune God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.* (My italics.)

In other words, Moltmann is saying—and his reasoning, as we will see is quite biblical—that the consummation of love, especially as we understand it in the *perichoretic* mode—i.e. in the works of the Trinity *ad extra*—is the admission of the elect of God into the very Godhead itself, to be fully partakers of the Divine nature. This extraordinary and wonderful reality

we will discuss, since it is, indeed, the very heart of this book on love, but here we must follow up Moltmann's insight and claim by briefly considering the theology of John Calvin.

John Calvin on 'Participation in the Inner Life of the Godhead'

G. L. Bray⁷ (p. 694) evaluates Calvin,

At the Reformation, the traditional Western doctrine was reaffirmed, but John Calvin began a new development of thought in the work of the different persons. The Cappadocians had stated that the works of the Trinity outside the Godhead (*ad extra*) were undivided, i.e. the God who created the world was the Trinity. But Calvin, following Anselm, who had stressed the fact that the atonement was a work of God inside the Trinity (*ad intra*), said that *Christians are admitted through the Holy Spirit to participation in the inner life of the Godhead*. We are sons of God, not as Christ was, by nature, but by the grace of adoption.⁸ As a result of this, the Reformed tradition witnessed an explosion of works dealing with the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, in a depth which had previously been unknown. (My emphasis.)

It is at this point Calvin and Moltmann meet, i.e. in seeing with the author of the Second Letter of Peter (II Peter 1:4) that we are partakers of the divine nature. Likewise in regard to Calvin, R. S. Wallace⁹ (p. 122) states,

Calvin brings the Trinity into the centre of the discussion on the nature of God, since *revelation admits us into the heart of the*

⁷ In the article 'Trinity' in the *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester, 1988).

⁸ Later we will look at the whole matter of adoption of sons on which Calvin bases his participation in the inner mystery of the Godhead.

⁹ in the Article 'Calvin' in the *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester, 1988).

mystery of the divine Being himself. Often in his theology Calvin reminds us that God has revealed himself fully in Christ, and that we must turn to no other source than the gospel for our knowledge of him. (My emphasis.)

Francois Wendel¹⁰ interprets Calvin's theology generally and then particularly as in the *Institutio* (i.13.13), 'And as for the believers, it follows from the unity of the divine essence and its indivisibility that they, *being now one with Christ, receive the divinity in his plenitude*, so that "the believing soul recognizes the presence of God indubitably and, as one may say, touched him with his hand." ' (My emphasis.)

We conclude, then, that historical theology has given us a rich understanding of the nature of the Trinity as love, and from this we may proceed to understand the nature of the indwelling God, or, as Calvin said, 'the believing soul recognizes the presence of God indubitably and, as one may say, touched him with his hand.'

¹⁰ Calvin (London, 1963, p. 68)

Chapter Fifteen

LOVE FROM BEGINNING TO END

Knowing the Beginning from the End

Paul has a magnificent statement concerning love as it matures believers and brings them to what is ultimately perfect,

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (I Cor. 13:8-13).

The passage sums up what Paul has been saying in the previous few chapters. Gifts of the Spirit come from God to help those in need, and they must be used in love, for they are God's expressions of His love. To use gifts apart from *agape* is a travesty of love. Love is recognisable in and by its beautiful ways. Even so, the gifts will one day cease, as there will be

no more need for them. Gifts are like a scaffolding needed for erecting a building. Once erected, the scaffolding will no longer be needed. Paul is saying that whilst love is excellent in this life, its operations are with a view to the future when all will be perfect. It will only be perfected through love. At present we only perceive dimly what the glorious future will be¹, but what we perceive we perceive by love, and what we will ultimately see will be the perfection of love. Meanwhile we live in this world by faith, hope and love—as these three are presently inseparable—but love is greatest. God is not faith and hope: God is love.

At the close of our previous chapter we saw that God's intention for His elect people is that they shall be inducted into the mystery of the Triune Godhead who is love. To quote Moltmann again,

To throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole of creation, into the life-stream of the triune God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.

'Into the life-stream of the triune God' is an unbelievably wonderful statement. The end, then, shall be glorious. This is also indicated in our Lord's high-priestly prayer in John 17, especially in verses 22–26,

The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me,

¹ A good parallel is I Corinthians 2:6–10 where Paul tells us (i) God has planned a wonderful glorification of us in eternity, (ii) now we cannot compare it with anything we have seen, heard or imagined for it will be far beyond all that, and (iii) even though we cannot understand it all God has given us intimations of what it will be by His Spirit, which teaches us what 'God has prepared for those who love him'.

that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

This passage tells us a few things, namely (i) that the glory Jesus has received from the Father and passed on to his disciples is a unitive glory, (ii) Jesus desires that the world for which God has expressed His love (John 3:16) may know that the Father loves His people in the same way as He loves His Son, (iii) this glory was there before the foundation of the world and came to the Son from the love of the Father, and (iv) Jesus desires ultimately that the love of the Father which is in him—the Son—will also be in all the people of God, as the Son will also be in them.

They are remarkable words, and—in line with the quotes above—they tell us that the *telos* of history will be love—sheer love, since love is *from* God, and God *is* love. All will consummate in love.

Before the Beginning There Was Love

John 17:24 tells us there was love before the foundation of the world, a truth which we would, anyway assume, since God has always been love. In Ephesians 1:3–5 Paul tells us that it was *in love* that the Father destined us to be holy and blameless before Him and

to be His sons. We take it, then, that all God planned before time was *in love*. John and Peter tell us, in effect, that a Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world, although that slaying became an event in time when Christ was crucified. We can say simply that ‘Calvary love’ was in existence before time began.

From the Beginning There Was Love

In his First Letter the apostle John talks about the old command which was there from the beginning. Some chapters ago we discussed this, saying that ‘from the beginning’ could mean ‘from the beginning of Christ’s incarnation and ministry’, but since both Paul and James refer back to the commandments as ‘the law of love’, then it could mean from the beginning of Israel—when it received the Decalogue. But was not love from before time, and so was not the creation planned *in love* and brought into being *by love* and were not its creational laws those *of love*, were they not essentially *in themselves*, love? The Ten Commandments have been seen to comprise two sections, these being (i) love to God and (ii) love to one’s neighbour. What was made verbal and formal in Israel had always been so, even from the creation. To create Man was an act of love. To plan—before time—to redeem him was a great act of grace.² ‘God is love’ means that the world has always been under the aegis of love. Love has always been.

² That God was ‘our Redeemer from eternity’ (Isa. 63:16) must refer not only to Israel but to all the world (John 3:16).

In Time Love Has Always Been

What a wonderful world it would be if we could believe that everything is under the Lordship of love, no matter how things have seemed to be to the contrary. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was saying—amongst other things—that God has always loved the sinner and saint alike, since He causes His sun to shine upon both and His rain to fall on all.³ Providence, and the sustaining of life is for all.

Even so, Man is a moral creature, a race of people who have to make moral decisions, and when they make evil decisions they must receive ‘the due reward of their deeds’⁴, and if they do not, then it only increases their evil.⁵ God certainly brings His judgements on the world, judgements such as at the time of the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Romans 1:18–32 tells us first that God’s wrath is always upon the evil of all men, and then that the form of this wrath is the abandoning of men and women up to their own evil. This is the judgement.

JUDGEMENTS, RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD, ARE LOVE

On the human level most of us are sane enough to see that love which chastises the naughtiness of its children is a healthy love. We may call it ‘tough love’ but then it had better be that! So, ‘whom the LORD

³ Paul tries to show this to the pagans at Lystra (Acts 14:17) and the Greeks at Athens (Acts 17:25).

⁴ Compare with Luke 23:41.

⁵ Compare with Eccl. 8:11, ‘Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil’.

loves he chastens' makes plenty of sense. Yet the matter must go deeper than that. Every sin is a total violation of the entire holiness of God and must be treated accordingly if we are to have a moral world that is under the hand of a holy God. God has a right—indeed, a duty—to be wrathful regarding violations done to His Holiness, His holy love, and His beautiful creation. He will not have both Man and creation vandalised, much less His own holy Name.

We say that judgements are love, and they are this because judgement is what releases the sinner and criminal from the misery of their guilt and places them back again into moral sanity. Guilt brings terrible misery, seeing it is part of the felt wrath of God.⁶ Release from it by judgement means peace again in the conscience and so tranquillity in the heart.

COVENANT LOVE AND JUDGEMENTS

One of the reasons many readers find the Old Testament depressing is because there are so many judgements. God is seen as a gloomy God, one who is almost vengeful. This is a mistaken view of God. The universal covenant with Noah was a covenant of mercy—a promise the world would not be destroyed by flood, *even if it deserved it!* The covenant with Abraham was a

⁶ In Romans 1:18–32—as we have briefly pointed out above—the essence of wrath is that God 'gives them up' to their own evil (see vv. 24, 26, 28). This 'giving up' is a personal act of judgement on God's part, and not simply allowing them 'to stew in their own juice'. Yet even this is *not an end in itself*. God's wrath—so to speak—shuts up those under wrath to the mercy of the Cross—the act where all sins are propitiated in the sufferings of Christ—see Rom. 1:21ff.

universal one, in essence, and promised blessing to all nations, unless they chose cursing. The covenant with Israel—part fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant—was one intended only to bring blessing to that people. In fact it brought much blessing. The gifts spoken of in Romans 9:4–5 include such wonders as 'the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises'.

God certainly loved His special people,

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD *set his love upon you* and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but *it is because the LORD loves you*, and is keeping his oath which he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God *who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him* and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and requites to their face those who hate him, by destroying them; he will not be slack with him who hates him, he will requite him to his face (Deut. 7:6–10).

In this sense, then, God has always loved the world, as He has loved His special people, the men and women of faith of whom the writer of Hebrews speaks in the eleventh chapter. Nevertheless it seems from much of the Old Testament text that God is angry with His people, even overly angry. His love in making a people for Himself must be called both a creative and an elective love, but since it has always been a holy love, Israel must suffer when it ventures into idolatry.

Those in Israel were expected to love God because He first loved them. His love for them was total—as was indicated by Jeremiah 31:3, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love’, cf. Deuteronomy 4:37; 10:15, ‘the LORD set his heart in love’—and therefore their response to it must be total.

A study of Deuteronomy chapters 27–32 shows that the God who loves His people hates iniquity, and there can be no greater iniquity than to love the idols and other gods. There is one love implanted in the human heart by creation and fostered by Divine covenantal love, and to use that love for idols is the greatest of evils: idolatry is the use of implanted Divine love for other than worship and adoration of the Lord who created Israel and gave it its elective security. Passages such as Ezekiel 16 and the Book of Hosea—amongst others—show the loving kindness (*chesed*) and everlasting love (*ahab*) is such that God persists with His people, even in their apostasy. If the curses which are predicted are terrible (e.g. Deut. 28:15—29:29) then it is only because God is jealous *for* His people, and desires their love as He hates the gods who would entice them away. The principle is always steady with Him—‘I will by no means acquit the guilty’, i.e. the unrepentant, obdurate covenant-breakers and those who apostatise. The wilderness was littered with the dead of a whole generation—excepting Joshua and Caleb—who rebelled against God’s covenant love, even when He had said,

And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live (Deut. 30:6).

GOD’S IMMUTABLE, REDEEMING LOVE

What seems so contradictory in the face of such threats—and actions—of judgement upon covenant-breakers is God’s *redeeming* love. His ‘loving kindness’ is matched with ‘long-suffering’, i.e. He ‘suffers long and is kind’ and redeems His wayward people. Hence such statements as,

Nevertheless the LORD your God would not hearken to Balaam; but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you (Deut. 23:5).

I, I am He

who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,
and I will not remember your sins (Isa. 43:25).

For a brief moment I forsook you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.

In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,
says the Lord, your Redeemer (Isa. 54:7–8).

In all their affliction he was afflicted,
and the angel of his presence saved them;
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old (Isa 63:9).

How can I give you up, O Ephraim!

How can I hand you over, O Israel!

How can I make you like Admah!

How can I treat you like Zeboiim!

My heart recoils within me,

my compassion grows warm and tender.

I will not execute my fierce anger,

I will not again destroy Ephraim;

for I am God and not man,

the Holy One in your midst.

and I will not come to destroy (Hosea 11:8–9).

I will heal their faithlessness;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them (Hosea 14:4).

We conclude, then, that God ever loved Israel. Later we can examine the love of God towards Israel, i.e. the modes in which it came, but in our pursuit of the theme ‘Love From Beginning to End’ we know it is a false assessment of the love shown to Israel to call it ‘a developing and evolving love’ and to judge it as being a harsh love, one that was altogether too much coloured by the judgemental. No higher love has there ever been which proclaims in the face of apostasy, ‘I will love them freely’. Only *agape* is truly free.

Love in the New Testament, in the New Covenant, and in the New Man

To cover this vast theme requires more than one whole volume, and we shall not, here, endeavour to do so. What we can say is that in the New Testament love comes to us in sharper lines than we have seen it even in the Old Testament. The incarnation brought love to live among us in the person of the Son. The love of the Father was shown in and by the love of the Son. The death of the Cross is the brilliant unlocking of the love of God to Man, the full revelation of His love that came with the work of propitiation and the consequent gift of eternal life. Much of this we have seen, and we will further pursue it, but love did not cease to be revealed with his death or even his resurrection and ascension. Love is the outworking of salvation

history to its telos, and then, as we began our chapter, so we may conclude it with the words of Moltmann,

To throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole of creation, into the life-stream of the triune God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.

This, then, is ‘the love that never fails’, which is His ‘everlasting love’, and which ultimately admits the elect of God into the mystery of His Being, into intimate fellowship with the Triune God—Him who is love. The flow of God’s love encircles and enhances the life of Man. It transforms the human race until all are ‘like him’ as they see Him face-to-face.

Chapter Sixteen

LOVE HAS COME TO US—I

Love with Faith

Paul's powerful Letter to the Ephesians which spoke so much regarding the love of God, ended with the farewell greeting,

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying.

What fine statements they are—'love with faith' and 'love undying'! The first one reminds us of Galatians 5:6, 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but *faith working through love*'. In I Corinthians 13:2 Paul wrote, 'And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.' Faith without love is nothing.

The second statement—'love undying' also reminds us of something Paul wrote in the same chapter of the

Letter to the Corinthians, when he said, 'Love never ends.' What is 'love undying'? Some commentators connect the word 'undying' with the peace, the faith and the love, and not only with love. 'Undying' (*aphtharsia*) has the meaning of 'incorruption', 'incorruptibility' or 'immortality'. Love never perishes: love never fails.

It is this love which comes from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, just as peace and grace also come from them and are also undying. The question is, 'How do they come to us?' After all, love is not a commodity any more than are peace and grace. The peace we have is 'the peace of God' and the grace we have is 'the grace of God', 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Love and grace are not detachable from God. It means love has come to us in the only way possible—the personal one.

Take, for example, Romans 5:5, 'and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us'. Does Paul mean that God's love is—as it were—a commodity? Doubtless not. With John he would agree, 'God is love', but then John said, 'Love is of God', but since he emphasised that we abide in love and love abides in us and that abiding in God and God abiding in us is exactly the same thing, it would appear that God's love is poured into our hearts as the Person of the Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts. Love comes in his Person. He—the Holy Spirit—is given to us.

This brings us to the whole matter of us indwelling God, and God indwelling us—as the 'three-personned God' to use the poetic phrase of John Donne.

The Inter-Dwelling of the Three Persons With Man Dwelling in God and God in Man

We have already opened up this matter in Chapter 14. Each of the Three Persons is not only 'other Person-centred' but 'other Person-concentred'. Indeed, each dwells in the other. That is the essence of what Jesus said to his Father in John 17:20ff. God is love, and love is operative within the Godhead, and is expressed in relationships. What is wonderful to us, when we understand the mystery, is that we can dwell in the Triune God and the Triune God can dwell in us, and at the same time we can indwell others who will also indwell us. We also understand that it is impossible to dwell only in one of the Persons since they are One and all inter-dwell one another. For us to dwell in God is to dwell in all, as for God to dwell in us is for the Three Persons to indwell us.

THE PRESENCE¹ OF GOD IN HISTORY

The term 'to indwell', i.e. 'to dwell in' brings to us the idea of God coming and taking up His home in us, as also our taking up our home in Him.² Indeed, it is the whole matter of Man living in the Presence of God, and God bringing His Presence to man. We might almost say that history is the story of the Presence of God, and Man's history stretches from his coming

¹ I use the term 'Presence' with a capital 'P' in order to distinguish it as the Presence of God, i.e. His Personal Presence. Whilst the term *shekinah* is often used to describe the 'cloud of His Presence' it is not, in fact, a term used in the Old Testament, although its present common use is quite admirable and fitting.

² See John 14:23.

into being at creation where he was wholly in the Presence of God, and reaching to the end of time when he will again be wholly in the Presence of God.³ By nature of the case Man was at one with his Creator, and must have revelled in His Presence in the primeval Paradise. It seems that the man of faith has a nostalgia for those wonderful days when God walked with Man in the cool of the day. When we say 'man of faith' we mean the person who has received 'faith with love' from the Father.

THE LOSS OF THE PRESENCE

Paul quoted a Greek poem to the citizens of Athens, 'In him [God] we live and move and have our being,' meaning that in one sense no human being is ever outside the Presence of God.⁴ When Man desired—and decided—to be a god in himself (Gen. 3:1–6) then he sought to be 'a presence' in himself:

Came the temptation,
Came the delirious dream,
The suggested liberation,
The heady aspiration
Of autonomous godhead.
And the dazed spirit dreamed
Of man-beyond-man,
Man reaching up and becoming
As the Presence Himself.

³ This theme is developed in my book *The Everlasting Presence* (NCPI, Adelaide, 1990).

⁴ It is painful and intolerable for a hater of God to have to live in His Presence. Since man cannot take a vacation from God he must persist in living in the Presence, but he has to rationalise the fact into a denial that God is present with him, and he with God.

With the temptation the belief,
 The fierce assurance of the seductive—
 The new demanding Presence
 That was no authentic Presence—
 Until the new, the false, *credo* was born,
 ‘I am a Presence in myself,
 From myself to myself,
 And then to all that I will.’⁵

When Man sought his own deity he found himself to be naked, no longer clothed with the glory in which he had been created. God’s Presence in the garden was a torment to the primal couple, and so they hid themselves from Him, yet they had no desire to be expelled from Eden. Even so, it was necessary; Man had forfeited that high privilege: he had to leave Paradise. Cain, the first child of the man and the woman, dreaded being banned from the Presence of God because of his murder of Abel. Cain said to God, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and *from thy face I shall be hidden*; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me.’ (Gen. 4:13–14). The face of God in judgement is better than that God should hide His face.

YEARNING FOR THE PRESENCE, GOD DWELLING WITH HIS PEOPLE AND THEY IN HIM

For fallen Man there was—and is—always the problem of the absence of the Presence and the presence of the Absence. Man is made for God and must make his

quick substitution of some ‘presence’ and this he does with his idol or god—a surrogate ‘Presence’. The loneliness of Man has not gone unnoticed down through the centuries. Man’s loneliness is of the saddest order, for he is empty of the Holy Spirit, he is faithless towards God and so is bereft of ‘faith with love’ and so of the glorious Presence. This alienation of the human spirit has been commented upon by many who find reasons other than theological ones for this dispiriting sense of loneliness and abandonment. The truth is that Man is never in fulness of his life unless he is one with his Creator. His being—his ‘I’—is never truly complete without the ‘Thou’ of God. The Psalmists knew how complete life could be living within the Presence:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,
 who abides [dwells] in the shadow of the Almighty,
 will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress;
 my God, in whom I trust.’ (Ps. 91:1–2).

The Authorized Version for ‘shelter’ has ‘secret place’, and the New English Bible has ‘the Lord is a safe retreat’ for ‘my refuge and my fortress’. ‘The secret place’, and ‘the shadow of the Almighty’ are beautiful terms heard by the human heart. Again it is the Psalmist who says:

Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place
 in all generations (Ps. 90:1).

How lovely is thy dwelling place,
 O Lord of hosts!
 My soul longs, yea, faints
 for the courts of the Lord;
 my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.
 Even the sparrow finds a home,
 and the swallow a nest for herself,

⁵ From the poem ‘The Presence’ in the book *The Everlasting Presence* (op. cit., p. 203).

where she may lay her young,
 at thy altars, O Lord of hosts,
 my king and my God.
 Blessed are those who dwell in thy house,
 ever singing thy praise! (Ps. 84:1–4).

Man must have a dwelling place, or, rather, a place of the *mysterium* where he can go, which is not profane, which is holy, which is different! Those of us who have travelled and lived in other lands know that people of many races and tribes build their mosques, temples, churches and shrines—however crude some of them may be—because they seek some ‘presence’ even if it be not *the* Presence. They seek some kind of holy ground. An intimate part of the history of the people of God has been the holy memorials they have erected when the Presence came to them. The patriarchs had their places where a theophany—a manifestation of God—had happened. Later—for Israel—there came ‘the tent of meeting’, ‘the tabernacle’, and then the temple.

The temple was a place of beauty—‘worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness’—and in Psalm 42 the exiled Israelite longs to be back in his native land where God is in the sanctuary of temple, and he may worship Him there:

As a hart longs
 for flowing streams,
 so longs my soul
 for thee, O God.
 My soul thirsts for God,
 for the living God.
 When shall I come and behold
 the face of God?
 My tears have been my food

day and night,
 while men say to me continually,
 ‘Where is your God?’

These things I remember,
 as I pour out my soul:
 how I went with the throng,
 and led them in procession to the house of God,
 with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
 a multitude keeping festival.

Man From Adam to Abraham

The singing of the Psalmists, the sonship of Yahweh the Covenant Father, the worship, the glory of God, and the giving of the law—along with the promises that give birth and substance to hope—came from within the covenant of God with Israel. Prior to the beginning of that nation there were the patriarchs, and in the Abrahamic pre-history, which is given to us in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, there is the saga of Man which seems to treat two kinds of people. These two were later called by John the Apostle, ‘the children of God, and the children of the devil’. The writer of Hebrews also sees history in much the same light. He speaks of the people of the faith, calling them ‘the people of God’ and this special race commences with Abel. Around them and against them were those who offered wrong sacrifices—such as Cain—and who viciously persecuted the elect of God. These were those empty of the Spirit of God who had to make their way through their lives in existential loneliness and emptiness, seeking to fill the gap between them and God—the awful abyss in their beings—in much

the same way as we do today. Whereas the people of 'love with faith' fixed their eyes on the inheritance—the ultimate holy city of God—the people who were not of faith fixed their eyes on this present world and sought their fulness in it. All lived—so to speak—on the horizontal, but the children of God knew the true vertical dimension that gave sense to the horizontal one and drew them on to their eternal dwelling with the Holy Father. If the idolaters knew a vertical it was an occultic one and such that their spirits called out dread and trembling and an unhealthy hastiness of spirit. They could never attain to authentic 'love with faith', joy and peace.⁶

THE LONGING TO BE THE HOME AND SHRINE OF GOD ONESELF

We said above that Man must have a dwelling place in which God—or his god—dwells. Now we say that *Man must be the dwelling place of God*—or his god. Without a god living in him man is empty. He recognizes that something must come into him from outside, otherwise his loneliness is intolerable. He will not only go to the dwelling place of his god, but once there he pleads for the intimacy of the god to indwell

⁶ Here I am reminded of Whittier's long and beautiful poem which portrays the restless worship of the heathen, and then the rich and calm worship of the True God, beginning with the verse,

'Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind;
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.'

him.⁷ He may even prefer the terrible indwelling of a demon than to be faced with the emptiness of his lone self. It was said of Judas Iscariot that when he had eaten the morsel Jesus gave him at the Last Supper, that 'Satan entered into him'. Likewise in Acts 5:3 Paul asked the erring Ananias, 'why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . . ?' Along another line of thinking the desire not to be alone may well be the drive of human beings for the interpenetration of illicit sex.

For Israel the beauty of God was that He dwelled among His people, in the midst of the camp as they travelled. His glory was shown in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Sometimes in the desert they saw the fire or the cloud of the Presence descend visibly upon the tent where Moses met with God. It was all glory. Even so, there is little in the Old Testament that is written explicitly of an intimate dwelling of God in the heart of man. Perhaps it is implied in David's penitential Psalm 51:6–11:

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow . . .
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

David knew that God could not have to do with an unclean heart. Certainly God dwells *with* His people but the intimacy of *indwelling* is not nominated. This does

⁷ I once was asked by a Parsee woman in Pakistan to exorcise the demons which infested her. She said she had deliberately asked the powers of darkness to come into her and possess her. It was evident they were present, and their exorcism was something quite terrible to behold.

not mean it did not exist, but the closest we come to it is in Isaiah 57:15:

For thus says the high and lofty One
 who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
 'I dwell in the high and holy place,
 and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit,
 to revive the spirit of the humble,
 and to revive the heart of the contrite'.

In the Old Testament we see God dwelling with His covenant people, and His place of dwelling being the holy temple. As yet the human body was not described as a temple of the Holy Spirit although it may well have been implied. It is even probable that Paul understood the body being a temple from the references to the body and the soul that are in the Old Testament, such as in Psalm 12:5; 51:6–11; 100:3. Even so, God's people knew His Presence among them. In the midst of the sonship, the glory, the worship, the covenants, the giving of the law, and the Messianic promises they knew the LORD to be the God of love. He had given them a heart circumcised to love Him in response.⁸ To them had come 'love with faith'.

⁸ See Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and 30:6.

Chapter Seventeen

LOVE HAS COME TO US—II

Love Has Come in the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

As we said in our last chapter, 'love with faith' comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As love is not a thing nor a power detachable from the Triune God, then love comes in the Persons of the Godhead, and their unity dwells in us. Since 'love is of God' and 'God is love', therefore the only love we have is God Himself, *within* us. 'We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren'. When we love the brethren 'God abides in us'. We know that He abides in us 'because He has given us of His own Spirit'. 'God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him'.¹ God cannot be within us, as love, unless we also are in Him. This is how we receive love, and this is how we will in love. This is how we love.

¹ See I John 4:, 7, 12, 13, 16; 3:14; cf. Rom. 5:5.

The Father Abiding in Us; We Abiding in the Father

All of the verses we have just quoted refer to God the Father. The Father is love, and so His very love brings a beautiful intimacy with His children. For their part they cry, ‘Oh, Father!’ and their cry is drawn out of their hearts by the sight of Him as love. Just as in the Old Covenant He came to dwell in the temple with His people, so in the New Testament He comes to dwell in the heart of His children. Regarding His dwelling in the temple He promised Israel, ‘my eyes and my heart will be there for all time.’ He promises no less to His corporate people of the New Covenant. *Corporately* they are the temple, ‘Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you . . . and that temple you are?’ *Personally* each is a temple of God, ‘Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?’²

The Presence, then, dwells within the new community, and within each person. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of worship in both cases.³ The intimacy of God the Father is with all His people as to each one, personally. At the same time the Father not only looks on the heart as His temple, but as His home.⁴ Jesus said,

² See I Cor. 3:16; 6:19.

³ See John 4:24; Phil. 3:3.

⁴ We note that in the Old Testament the Father’s people were called ‘my house’ (Num. 12:7), that Jesus called the temple ‘my Father’s house’ (John 2:16; cf. Matt. 21:13; Isa. 56:7), and the writer of Hebrews speaks of God’s house (3:1–6). The ‘house’ is really ‘the household’—a theme which Paul pursues in Eph. 2:19–22 where household and temple are virtually treated as the one and same thing.

‘If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’ According to I John 4:12, 13, and 16 this must be called ‘the household of love’ for the Father who is love dwells with His beloved children, which causes them to cry with the Apostle John, ‘See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God!’ We also remember that Jesus said, ‘The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.’ So then, the Father dwells in the house of His people, in the house of each person, and He has them—us—dwell in His house and in His Person. All of this is gloriously incredible, wonderfully unutterable. Notice the utter freedom within the house, since He who is the Father loves us freely.

In this regard perhaps no greater statement could be made than that made by Paul—‘One God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.’ This is the environment, the ethos, the security—the truth of living for all.

Christ Abiding in Us and We Abiding in Him

Just as the Lord dwelled in Israel through the symbol and figure of the sanctuary⁵ so ‘the Word became flesh

⁵ The LORD dwelt in the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies in the sanctuary of the temple. The writer of Hebrews points to a great sanctuary, a greater place of His dwelling. The Israelites regarded with great awe the holy sanctuary. In the New Covenant the new community has access to the heavenly sanctuary. That is why we say ‘the symbol and figure of the sanctuary’, since the things of the Mosaic covenant were but the shadow of things to come.

and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.’⁶ He was the Redeemer in the house of our flesh—‘But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.’ His coming, then, was intimately personal, so that he said, ‘it is fitting for *us* to fulfil all righteousness.’ He was our Immanuel—‘God with us’. He partook of our flesh, he felt our infirmities. He who had created us became one with us in our sin, upon the Cross.⁷ If we miss this voluntary insistence upon his becoming one with us, we miss entirely the nature and fact of love. It is this personal becoming one with us which opens our eyes to his amazing love.

Prior to going to the Cross he called on the disciples to abide in him, as he was abiding in them. He said that with the Father he would come and take up his home in them. Baptism, which fully understood was to be into the [one] name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, was to be into Christ⁸, for then

⁶ For ‘dwelt’ the translation is literally ‘tabernacled’, ‘pitched his tent’. Compare with Exod. 25:8, ‘And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.’ Num. 35:34 said, ‘You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell in the midst of the people of Israel.’ This gives great meaning to I Cor. 3:16–17, and 6:13–20.

⁷ See Matt. 3:15; 1:21; Heb. 2:14, 15, 17; 4:15; I Peter 2:24; II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 3:18.

⁸ Whilst in Matt. 28:19 the disciple nations are to be baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, yet the early church baptized converts ‘in the name of Jesus Christ’ (cf. Acts 2:38; 8:12; 10:48; 19:5). It was into Christ they were being baptized (Rom. 6:1ff.; Gal. 3:27), as he was the one who was winning the nations (Ps. 2:6ff.; Matt. 3:17; Acts 1:8), but Matthew 28:19 shows that baptism—through Christ—is into the Triune Name and so into the Triune being. It is notable that in fact ‘*by* one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit’ (I Cor. 12:13). The dative *by* here is, in the Greek *en* and the NRSV has ‘*in* the one Spirit’, thus making it a locative dative and not an instrumental dative. In Matt. 28:19 it is *eis*, in Acts 2:38 it is *epi*, in 10:48 it is *en*, in 19:5 it is *eis*, in Rom. 6:3 it is ‘inter (*eis*) Christ Jesus’, and in Gal. 3:27 it is the same. I doubt whether we can draw any special conclusion from the different prepositions used.

one put on Christ. One was buried with him by baptism into his death and raised with him in his resurrection. He died for all, and in him all died. One was crucified with him, yet lived, but the life was Christ living in the person—‘I live yet not I, but Christ lives in me’. In a beautiful statement Paul said, ‘your life is hid with Christ in God.’ This was double indwelling of the Father and the Son. At the coming glorification of the sons, Paul said, ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’ The same Paul said this who was always speaking about them being ‘in Christ’.⁹ So, then, this was the inter-dwelling.

What we need to see is that the very accumulation of the referential materials to Christ dwelling in us—and we dwelling in him—may be so many that we fail to be gripped by them in other than a cerebral manner. Such references keep coming to us, and are of such lofty and wonderful nature that we cannot grasp them. The importance of them is such as is the importance of the Holy Father of all time and eternity taking up His abode in fallen flesh, transforming it into new personhood beyond the dreams of any one of us. For Christ the ‘King of kings, and Lord of lords’ to dwell in our hearts, minds and consciences, bringing with

⁹ See John 15:1–11; 14:23; Matt. 28:19; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:1–10; II Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:3.

him the high intimations of the Godhead, and yet drawing us to the fulfilment of a Manhood which will enter into the heart of the Godhead—this is for us the material of exulting joy, the delirious experience and reality of an immortality at which man grasped in his attempt to be *as* God, yet lost by the very arrogance of the attempt.

Paul knew the glorious wonder of it, and when he met folk who lacked the delight and power of the inter-dwelling and who were dull and dry with problems of personal and inner conflict, he knew what to suggest, 'Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test.' His prayer for his converts was that they might be strengthened with all might by the power of the Father through His Spirit in the inner man that Christ might dwell in their hearts, through faith.¹⁰

Peter exhorted his readers to the same reality, 'in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord.' John made it clear that if his readers kept the commandments of Christ then he—Christ—would dwell in them, and they would know this indwelling by the Holy Spirit. He remembered, time and again, the night when the Son had promised that both he and the Father would come and make their home in the hearts of Christ's obedient brethren. It was he—John—who told them they would have—or possess—the Father and the Son, especially as they lived in the true teaching of the word. He combined the living in the Father and the Son when he said, 'And we know that the Son of God

¹⁰ II Cor. 13:5; Eph. 3:16, 17.

has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.'¹¹

The Holy Spirit Dwelling in Us and We Dwelling in the Holy Spirit

In the Old Testament we have the statement in Genesis 6:3 when the Lord said, 'My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.'¹² It appears that God's Spirit was among the human race, if not in each one for the purpose of God. Also—particularly—there were occasions when the Spirit of God came down upon His servants, and it was generally assumed it was for a special task or a special office. One upon whom the Spirit came was Saul the king of Israel, but at a certain point the Holy Spirit departed from him, and it seems this fact was part of David's apprehension, lest through his sin regarding Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite the Holy Spirit might depart from him, hence he prayed, 'Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.' The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of patriarchs, elders, judges, priests, kings, prophets and artisans was apparent to all, and there was an awe

¹¹ I Pet. 3:15; I John 3:24; 2:23; 5:20; II John 9.

¹² What this means is debated as the Hebrew of 'abide' is uncertain. Some translations have 'remain', 'strive', whilst the Jerusalem Bible translates, 'My spirit must not for ever be disgraced in man'. Some think it means that the spirit of life will not remain in Man forever, that the length of his life—i.e. when the spirit is present—will henceforth be one hundred and twenty years. Others see the 120 years as referring to time given to the human race before the judgement of the Flood.

that such chosen ones should be so close to God.

There may be reason, then, to think the Spirit dwelt in certain persons. In Genesis 41 Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the Spirit of God?' Again, in Daniel 4:18 King Nebuchadnezzar told Daniel, '[I know that] the spirit of the holy gods is in you.' The prophecy of Ezekiel 36:24–28 is interesting reading for in it God promises, 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; . . . And I will put my spirit within you' Many other prophecies promise the outpouring of the Spirit upon God's people, especially in the last days. Such outpourings would bring life out of death. These prophetic utterances put great hope into the hearts of the true listeners that one day all in Israel—indeed all flesh, sons and daughters, God's old and young, male and female—would have this Spirit poured out upon them and become imbued with wonderful power for the life and propagation of the Kingdom of God.

THE MAN OF THE SPIRIT

In the New Testament, from the beginning of the Gospels, the promise is made of God's repentant people being baptised in the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist is filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. The Holy Spirit alights on Jesus at his baptism, and his ministry is through the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 12:28). Undoubtedly the Spirit dwells in him. On the night of the Last Supper Jesus promises that whilst at present the Spirit was *among* them, he would one day be *in* them. This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost. From that point onwards the sign of being a believer

was the presence of the Spirit within the believer (Rom. 8:9–11; cf. John 3:3ff.; I Cor. 2:14; Jude 19). The natural man (*psychicos anthropos*) was the man without the Spirit and he could not understand the things of the Spirit.¹³

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAN IN HIS PEOPLE

The Spirit was to be another such as Jesus, another Counsellor who stood in his place and empowered them before a hostile world, bringing it into conviction of sin, righteousness and judgement.¹⁴ Just as the Spirit had been dwelling in him—Jesus—so he would dwell in them. From Pentecost onwards the Spirit certainly dwelt in believers¹⁵, and perhaps the most powerful of statements regarding that matter is that God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying 'Abba! Father!' Jesus had said that 'the Spirit of your Father will speak from within you.' What we have said in this book, time and again—that Man needs to have his emptiness destroyed—comes to pass when the Spirit fills the human spirit with himself. The New Testament talks about love, peace and joy coming to the heart of man—indeed flooding it—through the Spirit. By the Spirit prayer is made, unity is known, worship ensues, and the path of life is shown.

¹³ See I Cor. 2:11–14; also Jude 19–20.

¹⁴ See generally the text of John chapters 14 to 16 and specifically John 14:15–17, 25–26; 15:26; 16:7–15.

¹⁵ See Rom. 5:5; I Cor. 6:19; II Cor. 1:22; Gal. 3:1–3, 14; Eph. 5:18; cf. Rom. 12:11.

HIS PEOPLE DWELLING IN THE SPIRIT OF THE MAN

An almost incidental mention of Paul—‘Epaphras . . . has made known to us your love in the Spirit’—tells us that the community lived in ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’. They had ‘the mind of the Spirit’. They walked—i.e. lived—in the Spirit and so they walked in grace, they walked in love, they walked in unity. They prayed in the Spirit and worshipped in the Spirit. The Spirit was their context, their environment, their life. They had his very mind. Yet that living, that having his mind, was really living in the Father and living in the Son so that it was living in the household of God, the true family of the Father.¹⁶

**Conclusion: Love Has Come in the Persons
of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit**

The rich and wonderful teaching which we have drawn from the Scriptures in this chapter are mind-boggling, to say the least. They are very heart-moving when their reality is grasped, for they are the revelation of the One who is ‘the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see’ (I Tim. 6:15, 16). The revelation of this ‘high and lofty one who inhabits eternity’ is also the revelation that He has drawn us by creation and by His eternal salvation plan and history to come into ‘fellowship with the Father and . . . his Son Jesus Christ’, so that ‘our lives are ‘hid with Christ in God’, and we are now ‘partakers of the divine nature’.¹⁷ This is the truth of the Triune Godhead in us—the

Three Persons dwelling in us and we dwelling in them. It is the truth that ‘love with faith’ has come to us in their Persons and their Tri-unity. The Father is love, the Son is the Son of His love, and the Spirit is the Spirit of love, and the Persons of this one love have come to dwell in us, and make us to live at home in them. This is how love comes to Man. *There is no other way.* That is the way love goes from us to others.

¹⁶ See Col. 1:12; II Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:3, 22ff., 5:18; Phil. 2:1; Rom. 8:5–6, 14; Gal. 5:16, 18, 22–26; Jude 20; Phil. 3:3.

¹⁷ See I John 1:3; Col. 3:3; II Pet. 1:4.

Chapter Eighteen

THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE—I

The True Community of Love

‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ is the prayer of the community of Christ. What is in heaven is the true community of love, i.e. the very Godhead, the Triune Community, the Family which is God. It is the source and life of the community of Christ—those who have been baptised in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are translating—so to speak—that which is in heaven to being that which can be on earth.¹ Doubtless this will not be perfect to the eyes of human sight, but the eyes of faith will perceive the remarkable changes God has made in sinful Man in reconciling men and women to Himself, and to one another. Though mostly unseen, the people of God has ever been His miracle wrought by His love. This goes for the people of God since Abel, and for the resurgence of that people through

¹ Note Heb. 12:18–29 where the writer sees the earthly and the heavenly community as combining as one—indeed being one—in the worship of God.

the Atonement, and the coming of the Holy Spirit to Man in a new way at Pentecost.

The History of the Community of Love

John the Apostle makes it clear that there have always been two peoples, the first being the children of God and the second being the children of the devil. The first do works of righteousness and love the brethren; the second do works of unrighteousness and hate the brethren.² The first do the works of their heavenly Father, the second do the works of their father the devil. We have seen that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (ch. 11) calls the first people men and women of faith. They are ‘faith-people’ and not ‘sight-people’. They look on unseen things, whereas the others look only on seen things.³

As we say, these two peoples have been since Cain and Abel. It may well be true that many of the second category are not terrible criminals, deadly sinners in an overt way, but when their hearts are not towards God they are His enemies. If they do not love Him then they hate Him, even though they may not think so. It is not for us to judge to which category men and women belong, but Acts 10:34–35 warns us against hasty judgements, ‘And Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” ’

² See I John 3:10–18; cf. John 8:44ff.

³ See Heb. 11:10, 27; II Cor. 4:18; 5:6–7; cf. I Cor. 2:10; I John 3:2.

Since the command to love is really a creational law, love must have been from the beginning, otherwise the creation of Man in the likeness and image of God would have been untrue. The Triune God has ever been, and has ever been the Creator and Sustainer of the creation. The truly human 'sons of God' must have been the love community. The creation of Israel as the covenant-people of God certainly brought a love-community into being. Often in our enthusiasm to call the church—born at Pentecost—a new and dynamically different people from those of 'old' Israel, we have erred in thinking that the immediate showing of their love was unprecedented not only in quality, but in reality.

This was not true. Israel's structure of law was a love-structure. The two tablets of the Decalogue were of love to God and love to one's neighbour. We have noticed that Paul and James make this clear. God's love to His people, brought the response of love for Him, and simultaneously love to the neighbour, and also the stranger in the land—the non-Israelite. Whatever the virtues of the laws of nations which were not Israel, there were not laws which equalled in quality those of Israel.⁴

When, then, the great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost occurred, it would be expected that love would show itself in visible, active forms, since the Spirit is the Spirit of love and brings his fruits to the community of the Holy Spirit. Yes, love was poured

⁴ Research into ancient cultures has shown us many admirable moral and ethical features and principles, and these are probably a testimony to the fact that all humanity is made in the image of God. Even so, it must be maintained that the law in Israel was unique, and has its genesis in the love of God.

into the regenerated hearts of the new family⁵ as Romans 5:5 informs us. The visible, active forms were the commencement of the daily distribution to the poor, the needy, the widows and the orphans. It was shown in the proclamation of the saving word of the gospel of the Kingdom and salvation. It was shown in the way in which daughter churches of the Jerusalem church responded to the need of the poor Christians of Palestine and collected funds to assist them. It was also shown in the new honour members of the family gave to one another, i.e. in marital, familial and societal relationships. Much of the exhortation of the Epistles confirms this claim.

We must remember that no matter how rich true Israel had been in its love to God, its neighbours and strangers, yet the overt revelation of God's love had not been as dynamic as the love revealed in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Christ the Son. Israel had been saved from Egypt, moulded into a nation by suffering, had been cared for in Palestine by the Creator—their Covenant-Father—but the sacrifice of the Cross which transcended all Israelitish sacrifices and ushered in the New Covenant was something far beyond what Israel had ever seen. John's exposition of that love in I John 3:1; 3:16; 4:7–19; Paul's in Romans 5:5–11; 8:32; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:4–8; 5:2; and Peter's in various parts of his First Epistle, tell us that in history God had powerfully unveiled His love and drawn responding men and women to His heart. The *chesed* and *ahab* of the

⁵ By 'new family' we really mean the family of believing Israel, who having now accepted their Messiah, Jesus, have a resurgence as the true family of God. We note that all were Jews at the time of Pentecost.

Old Testament now blazed in new fashion and clarity as the *agape* of the New Testament.

THE NEW TESTAMENT WAY OF LOVE

Let us, then, state again the order and the principle of love. It is: God is love, loves us, and has revealed that love is sending His Son into the world that we might have life out of death, and that life has come through making His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Having this love revealed to us we respond to God's love and love Him, but we also love all others—'We love because he first loved us'. God comes to us and we abide in Him as He abides in us, and so with, and by His love, we love the brethren. That is the order and principle of love. That is what we must keep in mind as we come to the way of love in the new community.

Ways of Knowing and Doing Love

THE FIRST THING WE OUGHT TO LOOK AT IS THE FACT OF GOD'S UNCHANGING *AGAPE*.

As we have just seen above, we only ever love because God first loved us. That that is what we do, is primarily motivated by God's love for us. This would seem to be the case in the relationship of the Father to the Son when Jesus said, 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.' Here there seems to be a hierarchy of love.⁶ John said, 'the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand.'

⁶ John 15:9. I later wish to develop the idea that all love is within a hierarchical framework.

Jesus also said 'the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing,' '... thou ... hast loved them even as thou hast loved me ... thy love for me before the foundation of the world'.⁷ We can safely say that Jesus' love of the Father sprang from the Father's love of him.

The unchanging nature of God's love is stated in Jeremiah 31:3, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love', and in Psalm 89, 'For thy steadfast love was established for ever'. For Israel this meant that no matter what they did—or didn't—do, and no matter what the vicissitudes through which they would go, God's love would be immutable, and would protect them and bring them to their promised goal. Romans 8:31–39 is really such love: no matter what the believer has to go through in the way of condemnation from outside, persecution, and the opposition of great powers, yet nothing 'will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus'. This is surely the same as 'love never fails'.⁸

If the Father's love did not fail Israel or His Son, then it will not fail us, and will always be the constraint we will have towards others. Our love will never fail; though this must mean His love in us will never fail.

THE SECOND THING WE NEED TO SEE IS THAT TRUE LOVE OPERATES IN, AND AS, OBEDIENCE

Again, this was the case with the Son. He told his disciples, 'If you keep my commandments, you will

⁷ John 3:35; 5:20; 17:23–24.

⁸ I Cor. 13:8.

abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.' 'I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father'.⁹ This was a principle in the Old Testament, as in Deuteronomy 10:12, 13:

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I command you this day for your good?

So love in the community is worked out in obedience to the commandments given to us. In I John 2:3–6 and 5:2–3 (NRSV) the same principle is evident:

Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, 'I have come to know him'¹⁰ but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, 'I abide in him,' ought to walk just as he walked.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. *For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments.* And his commandments are not burdensome.

If we keep in mind the fact that the primary commandment is to love God, and its corollary is that we love one another, then it is obvious that *obedience is love*.

⁹ John 15:10; 14:31.

¹⁰ We remember from I John 4:7–8 that he who loves is born of God and knows him. In I John 2:3 the apostle is saying the test that we know him, and know him as love, is that we keep his commandments.

THE THIRD THING WE NEED TO KEEP IN MIND IS THAT LOVE IS PRACTICAL, I.E. DOES ACTS, AND IS THE TRUE DRIVE BEHIND ALL PROPER ACTS

We assume that this is the case with the Father, the Son and the Spirit. We have seen that with the coming of the gospel and the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the acts of God which showed His love were revealed, and as a consequence the new community began its loving acts, and those acts were always ones of love. John was insistent that—as Christ had taught him—all should love all others. So he pointed out that a child of the Father (a) does righteous deeds—the matter we have pointed out immediately above—and (b) loves the brethren. He takes a case in point, 'But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth'.¹¹

Paul also speaks in his famous lover chapter—I Corinthians 13:1–3:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

We will have need to come back to this later, but when we remember Paul's words, 'Let all that you do be done in love,' then we can see what the Collect says, 'without love nothing is worth'. All the gifts—see

¹¹ I John 3:17–18.

I Corinthians 12:7–11, 27–30—are useless in their operations without love. Of course if they are used in love, then they are very useful: indeed they are the way of love since giving is the true order of love.¹²

THE FOURTH THING WE NEED TO NOTE IS THAT LOVE GIVES WITHOUT SEEKING TO GET IN RETURN, AND GIVES EVEN TO THE DEATH¹³

Jesus said, ‘Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.’ The most one can give is one’s life. So John said, ‘By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren’.¹⁴ Immediately above we have seen that a person may give all his goods away and his body to be burned, but Paul said such was of no value because the drive of true love was missing.

Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels was that we should give, not hoping to receive. Paul recorded a traditional saying of the time, when he said, ‘In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive”’ (Acts 20:35). The same Paul spoke much about giving and II Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 are classics on this

¹² See I Corinthians 16:14. Gifts are part of the action of love for ‘God so loved that he gave’, and in this sense giving is loving, and loving is giving.

¹³ Here we can refer to the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as we saw their love for one another in (a) honouring one another, (b) giving to one another, and (c) serving one another.

¹⁴ See John 15:13–14; I John 3:16.

matter, e.g. ‘For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.’ Paul concludes his discussion on giving with his cry, ‘Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!’ We have seen in I John 3:17–18 that to refuse to give is anti-love, and in I Corinthians 13:1–3 that to give without love is fruitless and delusive.

THE FIFTH THING TO NOTE IS THAT LOVE HONOURS ALL OTHERS

In Chapter 12 we saw that in the Godhead each member gives to the others, honours the others and serves the others, and that these three things constitute love. We saw that to give honour is to state the nature of another and recognise it for its true worth. Thus Man made in the image and likeness of God is to be honoured, no matter how much he may have defamed himself by his sin and foolishness. Every person is still innately in the image of God. So many commands are given to us to honour parents, husbands to honour wives, those well off to honour the poor, all are to honour the powers that be, and we are to honour all men. Paul says, ‘love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour.’

Honouring is an action which gives others their rightful places in life, and the dignity due to them. Perhaps we cannot better Paul’s simple statement, ‘Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity. Honour widows who are real widows.’

THE SIXTH THING TO NOTE IS THAT LOVE SERVES ALL OTHERS

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end . . . Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded (John 13:1–5).

In Chapter 13 of this book we saw that the Three Persons serve one another, and that is part of their love. The event of the foot-washing was an example of serving.¹⁵ This happened to be the same night when the disciples were debating amongst themselves as to who would be the greatest in the Kingdom, and Christ had taught them by word that the one who serves is greatest:

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves (Luke 22:25–27).

On a former occasion he had said, 'The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' Now he was washing their feet which was even a shameful thing for a person to do.

¹⁵ Jesus told Peter, 'What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand.' Jesus was serving through the act which was almost a sacrament, the significance of which the disciples could not then understand.

Soon he would give his life a ransom for many—the most painful and powerful act of love the world has ever known.

Giving and honouring are forms of service, as they are forms of love. First, love is towards God as His servants and then it is to men. Paul spoke of serving God in his spirit. He exhorted the Galatians, 'through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ' That was the thrust behind the passage of Philippians 2:1–9 where Christ became a servant by his incarnation, and it was the thrust of Romans chapters 14 and 15 in the discussion of caring for the brother who was weak in faith. He said, 'For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.' His own stated aim was 'For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.'

These six principles by no means exhaust the whole of love, and the ways of loving, but they are essential to the true knowledge and practice of love, as we shall see in the following chapters.

Chapter Nineteen

THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE—II

The Practice of True Relationships

We have made the point before that the relationships of the Three Persons of the Triune God are love. That is, there being one God the Father who is love, the Son being the Son of His love, and the Holy Spirit being the Spirit of love, so their relationships which are called ‘internal’ (*in extra*) and ‘external’ (*ad extra*) are really the one, i.e. love. That love becomes an active operation as they relate to one another, and as they act together in the works of creation, redemption, and the glorification of the creation.¹ Our second point—which is related to the first—is that Man is made in the image of God and therefore his relationships, properly speaking, will be the same as those of the Triune Godhead. Man being Man and God being God, Man will be dependent upon God for exercising such relationships, since they cannot come directly from himself. In this sense we can say his relationships will be similar to those of the Godhead and a reflection of the same. Thirdly, we have seen that love is not detachable from God but is *Him* personally present in the lives of His children.

¹ We must keep in mind that some theologians see *in extra* and *ad extra* as one. Others see the work of redemption as *in extra*, and the work of creation as *ad extra*.

This knowledge is a great key to the way we go about loving, since loving is really a matter of relationships. We have seen that from the day of Pentecost onwards relationships were rich in the new community. This was—and is—because the Spirit is the Spirit of love, the Spirit of fellowship, the Spirit of unity and the Spirit who opens up to needy fallen Man that great storehouse of love which is the Cross. He is the Spirit who brings the rich harvest of the Spirit in each believer—‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control’. How wonderful are all these elements in, and for, relationships! These fruit of the Spirit are not just abstract—they are powerful in personal and community relationships. If they obtained throughout the whole body of Man they would bring a radical change in our world situation, and they would provide an enormous relief from their antitheses which are the works of the flesh—‘fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like’, all of which cause terrible pain, especially in the matter of relationships.

Paul’s Teaching on Love Within the Community of Christ²

PAUL AND I CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 13

Paul has given us his song of love in the 13th chapter of his first Letter to the Corinthians. It is a

² We have seen previously that Paul—as does John—teaches that we love when we see God’s love, e.g. Rom. 5:5–11; Gal. 2:20. He also speaks of loving abiding in us, especially by Christ and the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 3:16–19; Col. 1:8) so that when we look at Paul’s teaching we are rather concerned in this chapter with its practical expression in the lives of the community, rather than how it came to them via the redemption of the Cross, although the effect of that always continues as love, and that love is practical.

great guide and help to the community of love. One of the matters we have to resolve in studying this chapter is whether Paul is talking about love as it is in God, or love as it is expressed in life by believers. For example, verse 7 says, 'Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.' It is clear that only God's love does this, and so some theologians take it that it is only God who 'bears all things' (etc.). At the same time the chapter is in the hortatory mood, i.e. Paul is exhorting his readers to love in the way set out there. We will later see more fully that there is an order in *agape* and the way it works. We can say here, briefly, that we love because God first loved us, but that the love with which we love is God Himself. Thus, in the Corinthian chapter the person is loving with God's love or—rather—God is dwelling in that person and loving through him or her.

Before looking at the song I must confess I am one of those who thinks the song is clear enough in itself, and to seek to explain, expand and illustrate it is not really needed.

I CORINTHIANS 12:31—13:3

But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but

have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

At the end of the previous chapter Paul has told his readers, 'Earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.' We might think there are two ways, (i) the way of using gifts, and (ii) the way of love. In fact 'the still more excellent way' is (i) using the gifts in love, for love, and as love, and (ii) loving in every way, which is not necessarily connected with gifts. So in the first three verses Paul speaks of those who use gifts but without love. Without love both the gifts and their use are nothing. True giving is love as true loving is giving, but here an *eros* situation can easily arise. It appears that some at Corinth boasted about their gifts and that ego was in the operation of them, or why did Paul ask, 'What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?'

This shows us that Paul did not set out to write a theoretical or abstract song on love, but that it was prompted by the situation at Corinth where some gift-users had missed the point of love.

I CORINTHIANS 13:4–8A

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Without going into a lengthy exposition of the text³ it

³ Such as in Leon Morris' *Testaments of Love*, Lewis B. Smedes' *Love Within Limits*, and Jonathan Edwards' *The Fruits of Charity*. These are excellent references for homilies and sermons on *agape*.

does not take much for us to compare ourselves with the statements it makes. In this section we see (i) in verses 4–6 what *agape* is *not*. In verses 7–8b we see what it *is*. It is certain that *eros* cannot come up to *agape* in practice. That is why we have to say that the love of which we speak is God Himself, for we cannot, of ourselves, come up to this level of practice. Unless we personally and intimately penetrate the text we may think that we fulfil it in practice, when in fact we do not.⁴

The practical question we ask ourselves is, ‘Can I be kind and patient, cease being jealous, arrogant and rude, and can I cease being insistent on my own way, stop being irritable and resentful, and then bear, believe, hope and endure all things—no matter what?’ Well, yes, when my will is one with Him who lives in me and in whom I live. The natural thing to happen when I seek to love the *eros*-way is that the elements of jealousy, rudeness, self-will—and so on—begin to appear. *Eros*-love becomes counter-productive.

I CORINTHIANS 13:8B–13

as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

⁴ We mean that an examination of the text will show that in reality we are generally impatient, unkind, arrogant, rude, overriding others, irritable, resentful and glad when calamity happens to others. These things all override *eros*.

This section shows that the gifts which have so occupied many at Corinth will one day be unnecessary, they having served their purpose. If gifts are primary—i.e. are important in, and for, themselves—and *agape* by which, and for which, the gifts are used is not primary, then what will be there at the end of the ages will be only gifts! No: it is love which never fails, love which is immortal⁵, and since it is God who is love, gifts will have done their work and be no longer needed. He—so to speak—who puts all his gifts as eggs in a gift-basket will then be empty-handed, especially if he has used them without love in this life. He will be bereft of all that is good and right. It appears that Paul thinks the use of gifts is a primary stage which will be outmoded, and that what matters now is *love itself*, for by it—its practice and its action—we are all being matured⁶, and in fact will one day be perfect and will know even as now we are known. He thus concludes in verse 13 that for the present the triad of faith, hope and love is operative, but the one to consider wholly is love for it is the greatest. A simple reason for its being the greatest is that it can be said ‘God is love’, but it cannot be said ‘God is faith,’ or ‘God is hope.’

‘So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.’ We need an even wider commentary on this simple sentence. It is ‘faith working through love’ which has brought us to redemption, and which is our life in redemption, i.e. the life of faith. The gift of

⁵ Compare with Eph. 6:23.

⁶ We are yet to look to the power of love to both make holy and to mature the believer—the love of God and Man.

God is ‘love with faith’⁷, and with faith is also hope, and ‘hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.’⁸ The hope of love is the hope of the *telos*, when love will have triumphed over all evil, and we will be one with God in the eternal inter-dwelling—Man in God and God in Man. To quote again the words of Jurgen Moltmann:

To throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole creation, into the life-stream of the divine God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.

This is why ‘faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love’. Faith believes in God as life; hope looks to the *telos* of that love. Love *is* that *telos*. Rightly comprehended, we have the true power of life in this understanding and its *praxis*.

It is to be noticed that in I Corinthians 14:1 Paul said, ‘Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts,’ thus putting gifts in their correct place—i.e. in the service and expression of love.

OTHER PAULINE TEACHING ON LOVE

In our last chapter we saw the six principles of active love—namely God’s unchanging *agape*; love as obedience; love working in acts; love giving without looking for returns; love honouring and serving others. Paul—with John—was quoted as teaching such things.

⁷ Gal. 5:6; Eph. 6:23.

⁸ Rom. 5:5; 8:18–30; Eph. 1:18; Heb. 6:13–20; 10:23; 11:1–40; 1 Pet. 1:3–5; 3:15.

He said that love never fails, that the believer is constrained to obedience by the love of Christ, that love-giving is a purely free act, that love honours and seeks to serve others (I Cor. 13:8; Eph. 6:23; II Cor. 5:14; 9:6–7; Gal. 5:13).

LOVE AND THE LAW ARE ONE

Along with this Paul says, ‘Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law.’ He then shows that the law—generally known as the Ten Commandments—is in fact, love. The law is summed up in this sentence, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. This thought is repeated in Galatians 5:13–14 where Paul enjoins, ‘through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” ’

THE PROGRESSIVELY MATURATIVE AND SANCTIFYING POWER OF LOVE

In Philippians 1:9–11 Paul writes beautifully:

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

As in the closing verses of I Corinthians chapter 13, Paul speaks of a love-consummation when all will see clearly, and be known as they are known; so here Paul talks of a love that develops and abounds with new

powers to test and discern and know what is excellent, so that holiness of life and fruitfulness of righteousness may build to a rich fullness at Christ's coming. There is a similar passage in I Thessalonians 3:12, 13:

and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you, so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Already Paul had commended the church at Thessalonica for 'your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.' Also he was glad to say, 'But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do love all the brethren throughout Macedonia.' In his second Letter he commended the church 'because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.' The church was certainly on the move in love.

This was not always the case. The church at Corinth seemed to be somewhat caught in party-spirit, wrangling, boasting and even in one case, in immorality. His advice to them is that which we read in I Corinthians 13, but also he tells them, 'Let all that you do be done in love.' He has a strong word for some, 'If any one has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.' In fact Paul is strongly opposed to all that is out of focus with love, and when he comes to such churches he will come with a strong disciplinary word.⁹

⁹ For example I Cor. 4:19–21, 'Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?' (cf. II Cor. 10:5–6).

Perhaps his most touching and gentle word concerning love is found in Romans chapters 14 and 15 where he has regard for the person of weak faith. Such persons are not to be admitted to 'disputes over opinions'. The man with a weak faith is virtually a person with a weak conscience, and Paul considers this person also in I Corinthians chapter 8. In Romans he is saying a person of weak faith should not be confronted by one of strong faith. Every man stands or falls to his Lord—Jesus. In the matter of eating Paul advises, 'If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.' 'Walking in love' is a strong teaching of Paul as can be seen in Ephesians 5:2ff., and Galatians 5:22–26. To the person of strong faith in Rome Paul says, 'Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.' In I Corinthians 8:1 he says, '“Knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.' In Ephesians 4:15 he speaks of this mutual upbuilding in love which is so essential for all—together—to attain to maturity:

Rather, speaking the truth in love [lit. 'truthing it in love'], we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

So, then, Paul has steadfastly before him the matter of 'upbuilding in love'. Love is always building what God has for it in His plan for the church as it, in turn, carries out its allotted task in the whole 'mystery of the plan'. Every act of love contributes to the whole building, and one day it will be seen. That which was not done in love will be burned up—perhaps by the

consuming fire of God's love which disdains the works of *eros*, but rewards the works of *agape* with eternal being and significance.

It would be difficult to survey the whole Pauline *corpus* of teaching on love, but perhaps we could round off this section with a typical Letter, namely the one to the church at Colosse. It virtually commences with Paul commending the fellowship, 'because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints,' and the fact that Epaphras 'has made known to us your love in the Spirit.' He prays for them, 'that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love,' and speaks of them as 'God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,' and enjoins them to 'put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.' They are simple statements but are rich, particularly as Paul has never visited them.

In reading Paul we need to keep in mind that his own heart was set ablaze by 'a revelation of Jesus Christ'. He saw the love of God in Christ, and knew nothing could ever separate him from that. He sought to 'do everything in love', and saw God's love not only in creation, nor even in redemption, but in the goal God had set for him and all elect mankind, namely the 'liberty of the glory of the children of God', i.e. 'the recompense of the reward'. We do well to study him, as he also studied 'the gospel of God' and has brought to us the riches of His grace and the wonder of His love.

Chapter Twenty

THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE—III

Johannine Teaching on Love Within the Community of Christ

By 'Johannine teaching'¹ we mean that teaching which is found within the Gospel of John, John's three Epistles, and the Book of the Revelation.² It should be recognised that whilst John uses the verb *phileo* twelve times in his Gospel, he does not use it once in his Epistles. Five of the times it is used in the Gospel are in the conversation with Peter in chapter 21, and twice in that same conversation *agapao* is used.³ The verb *agapao* is used over

¹ We have already covered something of Johannine teaching about love in Chapters 7 and 9.

² Not all scholars think these five books were written by the Apostle John, but most agree that with the exception of The Revelation the books agree, generally, in content. It is debated whether John the Apostle was also John the Seer—the author of The Revelation. For our purposes we will use the whole five books to pursue the idea of Divine love.

³ We have already said that the uses here of *phileo* and *agapao* may be synonymous, or that Jesus is contrasting the two, in which a rather complicated explanation is required. It does not seem distinctions can be made in the use of *phileo* in John 5:20 with that of *agapao* in 3:35. It may well be that the Epistles were written later than the Gospel, so that possibly the use of *agapao* had outmoded the use of *phileo*. If my understanding that all forms of love are *agape* in essence then there is little need to argue about the different uses of the verbs.

thirty times in the Gospel. We will now proceed to the principles of love as we find them in the Gospel.

Love in John's Gospel

Love is primarily that of God, and for the word 'God' in John we may use 'Father'. Jesus claims he is the Son of the Father, and that God is his Father, i.e. 'my Father', but he also uses the term in a way which includes the disciples as being in and under the Fatherhood of God. This is especially shown in 20:17 when he says he is 'ascending to my Father and your Father'.⁴

LOVE OF THE FATHER FOR THE SON

The Father loved the Son before the world began (17:24) and loves him as the incarnated one called 'Jesus'. In His love He gives all things into the hands of the Son (3:35; 17:2; cf. 5:21ff.; Matt. 11:27). In His love He shows the Son all things that He is doing (5:20), and what the Son says and does he does by the Father (7:16; 8:28; 14:10; etc.). He fulfils the Father's will (4:34; 9:4; 17:4) and the Father loves him because he lays down his life for the sheep (10:17⁵). This love is shown

⁴ It is notable that this is a post-resurrection utterance. The Jews claimed that God was their Father (8:41), and Jesus rejected their claim. The passage might, however, indicate that the disciples were children of the Father, especially if 1:12–13 is taken into consideration, i.e. being born of God by receiving Christ and believing in him. The constant use of 'the Father' might also indicate the disciples were considered to be in the Father.

⁵ This does not mean the Father only loves him because he laid down his life for the sheep, but certainly there is a sense of love when obedience is rendered to the Father. This is also the case with the Son, the disciples and the Father as indicated in 14:15–21 where the Father loves the disciples because they keep his Son's commandments. We will take up this point later in this chapter.

in the intimacy of the Father and the Son, especially in the fact of their inter-dwelling (10:30, 38; 14:11, 20; 17:20–23). Because they are one in love the Two Persons work together to fulfil the will of the Father. This cannot be known by the disciples until the Holy Spirit will come following the departure of the Son to the Father (16:12–15). Then they will understand 'all that the Father has is mine,' and the utter oneness of the work of the Two.

THE LOVE OF THE SON FOR THE FATHER

In fact, this is assumed throughout the Gospel. The Son cannot be loved and then not love in return. That is why the emphasis is constantly placed on the fact that the Son is loved by the Father, is in Him, and is one with Him.⁶ We have seen the principle of God loving the disciples because they obey the commands of His Son, and that can mean no less than that the Father loves the Son for doing the same thing. 'If you love me you will keep my commandments,' spoken to the disciples, means also that the Son loves the Father and thus keeps His commandments. In his humanity Jesus declared, 'I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father' (14:31).

THE LOVE OF THE FATHER FOR THE WORLD

John 3:16 declares plainly 'For God so loved the world . . .' This thought of His loving the world is

⁶ As we have seen in Col. 1:13 the Son is literally called 'the Son of his love'. We know that in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is pronounced by the Father to be his 'beloved Son' both at his baptism and transfiguration (cf. II Pet. 1:17).

continued in the same verse and verses following:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

The matter is clear: God loves the whole world.⁷ Indeed that is what the Gospel is really about in all its action and teaching—God loving the world and bringing eternal life to it. Non-belief in God's action is a refusal to see His love, and to see Him *as* love. Jesus said on one occasion to those who refused to see Jesus to be from God, 'If God were your Father you would love me.'

THE LOVE OF THE SON FOR THE WORLD AND FOR THE ELECT GIVEN TO HIM

No less than the Father does the Son love the world. His statement in 6:51 shows this, 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.' We are about

⁷ That God loves the world does not mean the world loves Him in response. It can be argued that in John's Gospel the word 'world' may have different meanings, i.e. 'the created world' (cf. 3:16) and that system which is opposed to Christ. Jesus would not show himself to the world since it hated him because he testified to it that its works were evil (7:1–8). From one point of view it was the leaders of the Jews who opposed Jesus (8:38ff.). Jesus said that the devil was 'the prince of this world' (12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and in 8:44 he told the Jews who opposed him that they were of their father the devil. All this being said, Jesus loved all humankind in the way his Father did, but that love does not necessarily win all who are told of it.

to see that he loved his own, i.e. his disciples and others who followed him, but his love was not limited to them.

John 13:1 says, 'Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end'. Thus chapters 13 to 17 are chapters in which his love for his own is declared directly to them—'I will love him and manifest myself to him,' 'you will abide in my love,' 'as I have loved you.' He also told the Father of his love for them, praying, 'that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.'

The Son assumes the love the disciples have for him. Doubtless, because he loved them, he expected them to love him. He spoke of their love for him, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments,' 'he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him,' 'if a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him.'

Finally, he spoke of their love for one another springing from his love for them, as also the Father's love for him, 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you,' 'This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you,' 'This I command you to love one another'.

We are bewildered by all these relationships of love, these confessions of love, these commands to love, and the talk of abiding in love. We are bewildered, but we are also brought into great revelation. The First Epistle gives us the key: 'love is of God', 'God is love'.

Hence there is great God-power in the Father loving the Son, the Son loving the Father, the Son loving his disciples to the end, they loving him, they loving one another. All this is a new world. It is the world of wholesome newness. It is the way things really are, but the way of love is a closed secret to those who are not the initiates of grace: the multiplicity of verses regarding love is only confusing—a sort of theological chatter which is not even ‘full of sound and fury’ and it signifies *nothing*. It is the victory of God, albeit it takes a Cross—full atonement—to be at once the actuation and revelation of God’s love. This is how both the Gospel and the First Epistle of John tell the story. The story lies there, inert, a document called ‘a Gospel’, and is ever inert until the Spirit of God takes it, and the unspeakable glory of the secret comes alive to those who moments before the revelation were ‘mere mortals’.⁸

Love in John’s Epistles

In regard to the writing of the Epistle, many years have passed since the events of the Gospel. Doubtless John has grown older—even old—in love. Yet nothing has changed in the matter. The Father is love—this is the great message. It is not said that the Father loves the Son—this is beyond even needing to be said. The apostolic people ‘have fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ’, and it is taken for granted

⁸ The writer, John, claims that those who read the Book, and in particular the signs, will see—God-willing—that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and believing will have eternal life through his name (20:30–31).

that the Father and the Son are one in love.

If there is a new note it is that not only is God love, but that He is light. God is love means there is no love outside Him. All true love comes from Him, and all love—such as loving the world and the things in the world—is false. Thus all that is light is Him—He is love, and all light. The feeble lights men and women light, the lights evil powers devise, and the imitation lights mystics and religionists contrive to invent, are all false and delusive. Light means purity—holiness. Light also means revelation—‘his life was the light of men’. They have no other: all other is below true wisdom, and true wisdom is love working through its plan to the glorious *telos*, when there will be the Holy City of love where ‘the glory of God is its light, and the lamp is the Lamb’. In practical terms, one who loves walks in light, and to walk in light is love.⁹

THE LOVE THAT EMBRACES THE WHOLE WORLD

We cannot repeat our *schema* of love as we find it in the Gospel, but it is the same *schema*. What is clear is that God loves the world. As in 3:16 so in 4:9–14:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins . . . And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world.

As in the Gospel so in the Epistles we might be taken with the idea that God loves only the elect—that He

⁹ Paul, too, has this thought in Eph. 5:1–17: for him to walk in love is to walk in light.

does not love the whole world. He sent His Son into the world, and He sent him to be the Saviour of the world. Love's scope is no less wide than the prophets predicted when they spoke of the nations coming to God. Covenantal love was certainly particularistic but not exclusivist, nor elitist. We might use the term 'brother' thinking that it is more particularistic than 'neighbour', and that even 'neighbour' does not mean 'the stranger' and 'the sojourner'—those to whom love was to be shown in covenantal Israel.¹⁰ We would be wrong in such thinking. *Agape* may 'begin at home' but it is dimensionless and covers the whole world.

As we have previously said, love is shown by the sending of the Son to bring life, and that life issues from no other source than the Cross. The 'propitiation for our sins' is the point of revelation. In 2:2 Christ is 'the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world'. Love is universal in its goal and effects, but then not at all universalistic.¹¹ The world opposes it unto the end, but there are those in the world who see the light of love, and come into salvation and the love of God.

If we take the implications of the Johannine love that embraces the whole world we are immediately brought into the whole matter of salvation history, of the nations being brought under the reign of Christ, and of the light and the love of the gospel being proclaimed and dispensed to all nations. This widest aspect of God's plan is at the same time the revelation—

¹⁰ See Lev. 19:18; 24:17–22.

¹¹ Universalism is that doctrine and heresy which says all will ultimately be saved. This idea has to obliterate many statements made to the contrary. An easy-sounding doctrine, it is full of great dangers.

and actuation—of His dimensionless love. Whilst all of this is implicit in the Gospel and Epistles, it is quite explicit in the Book of the Revelation, as it is in other non-Johannine literature.

God is Light: God is Love

'God is light and in him is no darkness at all', is as we have said, one with 'God is love'. In practice to walk in light is to have fellowship with one another. Fellowship is *communion*: there is no union without communion, but communion is the life of union. It is the life that is lived in light. Our communion is first with the Father and the Son and then—and so—with one another (1:3). To walk in light is to walk 'according to the truth' (1:6). This is 'to walk in the same way as he walked', i.e. the way of obedience (2:3–5; cf. 5:2–3) To not walk in love is not to walk in light, and this means that one does not love, so that:

He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes (2:9–11).

There is no neutral ground where one neither loves nor hates, for 'He who does not love abides in death' (3:14). The sign that we have come out of death into life is that we love the brethren (3:14). To hate is to be a murderer (3:15). Thus love and light are the one: hate and death are the other one. Light then, is two things, (i) obedience to God's commands and (ii) loving the

brethren. Love also is two things (i) obedience to God's commands, and (ii) loving the brethren.

In theoretical theological consideration of these two things—'God is light' and 'God is love' we may pass over the wonder and glory of light and love. Much of John's Gospel is given over to the two themes, although there they are not explicitly linked. It is obvious that to live in light and to live in love are the one thing, and the greatest experience of life. This fact is worthy of much meditation, and much practical experience.

The Love of God Brings Love for the Brethren

It would seem that the whole Epistle is directed primarily at the fact of love of the brethren. The passages of, (i) 2:9–11, (ii) 3:10–24, (iii) 4:7—5:3, and (iv) II John 4–6 are explicit about this. They are first of all reminders of the commands that Jesus gave to his people to love one another. Secondly, love of the brethren follows on the love of God revealed in the incarnation and the atonement. The conclusion is drawn that if one does not love his brother he does not love God, and that, of course, means he is in death and darkness. Doubtless mistaking *eros* for *agape* will be the reason why people think they are loving as the Epistle commands, so that we need to remind ourselves of the egotistical element in *eros* which precludes it from being *agape*—God Himself, God who is love. We have already dealt somewhat with the passages we have just nominated but a further simple survey of them should still prove profitable.

1 John 2:9–11. In this passage John is saying the ancient command—because of Christ—has come in a new way¹², so that there is nothing novel about the commandment. Christ's coming, his atonement, resurrection and ascension, have resulted in a new era—the era of light and love—since 'the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining'. Where there is not love there is only darkness: where light is then there is love, the new day of love.

1 John 3:10–24. The contrast here is between the family of the evil one and the family of the Father. Cain is typical of the family of the devil for he did not do righteous deeds and he hated his brother to the point of murder, and this because his brother's deeds were righteous and his own were evil. In reality members of the world are of that evil family, and will hate the children of God who do righteous deeds and love their brethren, even brothers like Cain. We can assess which family we are in by the fact that we love the brethren. The fact that the Son laid down his life shows us how we, too, may love. On the level of the every day life if we see a brother has need and we have the wherewithal to help to fulfil his need, then it is love to do so.

1 John 4:7—5:3. We have dealt with most of this passage, and it is perhaps the most potent of them all because of the revelation of God as love, especially by the incarnation and atonement. What logically

¹² Perhaps, too, because of the Holy Spirit. It is noteworthy that Jesus 'gave commandment through the Holy Spirit' (Acts 1:2), and this we think was the commission given by him in Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24 and Acts 1:8.

follows—i.e. theologically follows—is ‘Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another’. This will mean that the love of God will be perfected in us—in those motions of loving. This loving will mean we actually live in God and God in us which is the same as living in love and love living in us, in which case we know we are free of fear regarding the day of judgement. Now we cannot say we love God if we do not love the brethren, for only he who loves his brother loves the Father. Knowing Christ is born of God we know we also are born of Him. This is known further by the fact that we obey God’s commandments for love-in-action is keeping commandments.

II John 4-6. This is a concise summary of the three passages above. Two statements are parallel, ‘your children following the truth’, and ‘you follow love’. The light is the truth, keeping commandments is living the truth, and is at the same time, loving.

Summing up the truth of the Gospel and the Epistles it is surely this, that ‘We love because he first loved us’. All our love to the Father, to Christ, to the brethren and to the world springs from God’s love to us. He first loved and we followed. This loving is of the order of God’s love for the world, His love that has planned Calvary from before time and executed it in time, so that the revelation of His love comes to mankind, formerly alienated by the Fall, living at best in *eros*, but never knowing *agape* until the time of the atonement. That is,

unless they be those who by faith have believed in the propitiating God, and have anticipated the hour of His propitiating love through the prophecies and their sacramental faith in the sacrifices offered in view of it.¹³ The recognition of such love brings sinful men and women to believe and receive the love of God in freedom from judgement, and in loving Him, to love one another.

¹³ We refer, of course, to those whom John calls ‘the children of God’ (I John 3:10ff.; cf. John 1:12–13) and the writer of the Book of Hebrews, ‘men and women of faith’ (11:1–40; cf. Acts 10:34–35; cf. Rom. 10:18). We also note Romans 1:18 and 32 where it is apparent that all know the truth of God and His judgements but seek to suppress the truth, and to oppose it in practice.

Chapter Twenty-One

THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE—IV

Johannine Teaching on Love Within the Community of Christ—Continued

The Clash and Battle of Love

When we search the contexts of *agape* in John's Epistles—and for that matter his Gospel—we may miss the fact and action of the battle of love. Love is not mere sentimentality or wholly of the emotions. Love is strongest of all: faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love. As we have said, of these three God only is love. That love has gone out to redeem lost humanity, but it has gone out to do more than that: it has gone out to defeat all evil, restore the creation to its true self, and to glorify it.¹ To do this redemption is required and with it the reconciliation of all things, the filling up of all that has become drained and empty, and the unification and harmonisation of

¹ See John 3:16; I Cor. 2:6–10; Rom. 8:17–30; Micah 4:1–3; Isa. 2:1–4; 11:1–10; 65:17f.; 66:22–23.

the same.² This is the teaching of the prophets as well as the apostles, and it is especially the teaching of John.

JOHN'S GOSPEL AND THE BATTLE WITH THE WORLD

In the Gospel of John there is no doubt that the world is very present in its opposition to Christ, and in its hatred of his followers. Three times 'the prince of this world' is mentioned, and two of these speak of his judgement—12:31, 'Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out', 16:11, 'concerning judgement, because the ruler of this world is judged' and 14:30, 'the ruler of this world is coming'. We have looked briefly at the hostility of the world to Jesus in 7:7, when Jesus spoke to his brothers who tried to provoke him to declare himself openly. 'The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil'. In 15:18—16:4 he warns his disciples of the hatred the world will have for them, even to the point of persecuting them to death. It is clear from 14:30–31 that he anticipates conflict with the ruler of this world at the Cross, and Luke and the non-Johannine Epistle writers confirm that this is what happened.³ Seeing this victory in view Jesus said to his disciples (16:33), 'In the world you

² This is 'the plan of the mystery' Paul so powerfully presents in both the Letter to the Ephesians and the Letter to the Colossians. See Col. 1:19–20; 3:15; Eph. 4:10, 13; 1:9–10; cf. Rev. 21:1–3; II Pet. 3:13.

³ See Luke 22:53; I Cor. 6:14; Col. 2:14–15; and Heb. 2:14–15.

have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.’

JOHN’S EPISTLES AND THE BATTLE WITH THE WORLD

John sees the battle with the world to be connected with love. The world will wean believers away from the love of God by false love and false light. In I John 2:15–17 John says:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world the love of the Father⁴ is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.

This false love can only lead to death as the world passes away. He who is in the will of God and is constrained by *agape* to do that will, will last forever. Again, in 2:18–29 John warns against the antichrist and says ‘many antichrists have come.’ It is the last hour and these things were predicted for the last hour. However, the anointing by the Holy One teaches the falsity of these antichrists. If John’s readers follow the truth which is in them, then they will be alert to these evil beings and will not be deceived by them.

When we ask what these beings are about we realise that they are trying to blind believers to the light, which in its turn is the *agape* of God. We have said—and say it now again most emphatically—love, God’s

love, is the only power that can redeem and glorify the whole creation. No wonder false love and false light seek to nullify this power and hold back the triumphant climax to history. John then warns in 4:1–6 against the spirits which are not of God—‘for many false prophets have gone out into the world’. These have the spirit of antichrist, and only he who is within the believers—Christ—can overcome the world. In 5:4 he repeats much the same idea, ‘For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.’

John emphasises love so much that it counters the world of hatred and lies, but he also knows that there is a drive in Man to worship, and for the most part Man’s worship is of the idols. Idols are seductive. After stating, ‘And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life’ (5:20) John suddenly seems to switch his thoughts and conclude, ‘Little children, keep yourselves from idols.’ In fact, there is no switch; the alternative to knowing God as love is to love the idols. The fact that John can use the verb *agapao* in 2:15 for loving the world (*agapate ton kosmon*), shows that the love given to us in creation is put to such perverse uses as loving the world and the loving of the idols.

Finally, in the Epistles we see the division of the family of the devil and the family of God is that those of the devil hate the brethren, and those of God love the brethren. In John 15:19 Jesus had said, ‘If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of

⁴ *RSV* and some translations have ‘love for the Father’ and this also in 2:5, but whilst it is true that if we love the world we will not love the Father, it is the Father’s love for us—something the world can never give to a person—which sustains us.

the world, therefore the world hates you.’ It was this factor which prompted him to pray to the Father for his disciples, ‘I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one.’ In I John 5:18 the apostle wrote, ‘We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.’

We see, then, that this unending battle goes on, namely that hatred seeks to destroy love, darkness to destroy light, deceit to destroy truth, and all with a view to averting the inevitable triumph of love, for this *agape* is the power that will destroy darkness and oust evil for ever. For this reason we must keep taking into account the reality of love and its power to triumph over the world. How little love seems to be abroad, and how small seem to be its triumphs, but this reading is a ‘sight’ one and not a ‘faith’ one. In reality, God is drawing everything to its final love *telos*, and faith must see it this way.

Love and its Battle in the Book of the Revelation

As we have previously pointed out briefly, the Revelation says little explicitly about love. In 1:5 the ascription is ‘To him who loves us’, and in 3:9 to the church, ‘I have loved you’, and these two references use *agapao*, whilst 3:19 says, ‘Those whom I love, I reprove’, where *phileo* is used. Regarding churchly *agape* 2:4 says to the church at Ephesus, ‘you have abandoned the love you had at first’, and 2:19 to the church at

Laodicea, ‘I know your works, your love’. We have also observed God’s love for His people throughout the Book, in protecting them with His mark, although He allows the beast to have power over the nations. The fewness of *agape* references should not blind us to the great love God has for His people, and indeed for the world which is composed of the many nations.

What we might miss in this Book is that all the actions within it are in and under the hand of the Slain Lamb. The world has many powers and takes on many forms in order to deceive the people of God. There is the red dragon which tries to destroy the Child—Christ—and which seeks to devise a clone of himself, namely the beast, and then support that beast with another, the one later known as ‘the false prophet’. The beast is in liaison with the unholy city called ‘Babylon’ and with her some ten kings of the earth. All are set to destroy true love and light, and the battle is strong.

We cannot here undertake a full study of the Revelation, but at least we must see that from the beginning of time there has been a battle for the nations.⁵ This battle we see to be against God who is love and fallen celestial powers and human beings whose aims are selfish. It is not a mere set of differences, but a fierce, terrible, bloody and relentless conflict which aims to destroy true love and set up a false love in its place. Triumphant in Revelation is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Messiah of Genesis 49:10, the one who wins the nations. He is the Son of Psalm 2 to whom is given the nations. They must kiss him lest he be angry and

⁵ See my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989), which takes the whole matter of the history-long conflict between God and Satan and which is, in reality, the battle between love and hatred, selfishness and *agape*.

they perish out of the way.

In this Book we see that the enemies of love are slain. First Babylon—the gaudy harlot and seducer of the nations who wins the kings by her own brand of *eros*—collapses and is immolated ‘all in one day’! Then the Christ the Great Warrior goes forth on his white horse to defeat the armies of the beast and the false prophet, so that these two are cast into the lake of fire. When Gog and Magog come against the holy city fire comes down from heaven and destroys them, and the devil, too, is thrown into the lake of fire.

In all this time love has been building. As ‘the righteous deeds of the saints’ constitute the wedding gown of the Bride, so the works of the lovers of God constitute the materials built into the Holy City. That City is the place of love—its gates being open night and day—welcoming the nations who have been baptised into ‘the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’. In this new creation, these new heavens and earth, this new environment, all is love. Pain and hurt, wounds and weeping, and death itself have all been eliminated. God and the Lamb who now constitute the new temple, are those who reign in a high and holy hierarchy in the City—they are the ones seated on the throne of the eternal Kingdom.

Love, then, has done its work, but because it is ‘an everlasting love’ it then begins its newer work as the children of the Father are admitted into the mystery of Triune Love, and live in that for ever.

Chapter Twenty-Two

THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE—V

Petrine Teaching on Love Within the Community of Christ

It would seem that the natural apostolic order in regard to love:

- (a) the revelation of the Father’s love through the Cross,
- (b) the response to that love in faith and repentance, receiving forgiveness and justification, and so receiving the love of God,
- (c) the reception of love was also the response of love to God’s love, i.e. love that was evoked, so that the Father and His Son were now loved,
- (d) with this love—*agape*—the believers loved one another, this being the community of love,
- (e) their love then turned outwards to the world, seeking to bring the love of God to all.

If we take the references to love in their order in

Peter's First Letter then it is love for Christ (1:7–8)¹ which is first mentioned—'Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy'. This is a good place to commence understanding love from the Petrine point of view. God's love for Man is not explicitly mentioned although it is surely wholly assumed. The statement,

You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake. Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope² are in God (I Pet. 1:18–21).

is certainly a profound expression of the love of God, and is in the same tone as 2:24—'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed'. No less powerful a presentation of the Father's love is 3:18—'For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God'. There can be no cause for a person to love Christ unless first Christ has loved him—or her—and if Christ the Son has loved, then no

¹ We, too, see that the apostles were not trying to develop a theology of love—as such. They were writing to believers who knew the order of the points of love we have outlined above. They needed constantly to be exhorted along one or other—or all—of these points. So it is not surprising that Peter begins his letter with the fact of their love for Christ.

² Throughout the New Testament faith, hope and love come as an inseparable triad. Love is not mentioned in this present context but surely it is assumed. 'Faith and hope in God' can scarcely be present without love *for* God.

less has the Father whom the reader certainly invokes (1:17), and trusts as 'a faithful Creator' (4:19).

It is this deep love for Christ which forms the basis for Jonathan Edwards' great book *A Treatise of the Religious Affections*. Commencing at I Peter 1:8 Edwards says strongly that true religion consists in affections, and without these any religion is false.³ His first proposition is, 'True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections'. In pursuit of this he says:

That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless wouldlings [weak inclinations which are not genuine intentions], raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God in his word greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion: 'Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord'. . . . If we ben't in good and earnest religion, and our wills and our inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing. The things of religion are so great, there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful. In nothing, is vigor in the actings of our inclinations so requisite as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious.

Peter—and after him, Jonathan Edwards—sees love for Christ as living and powerful *agape* for the one who bore our sins in his own body on the tree. There can be no talk of love for the brethren without first love for Christ, and prior to that Christ's love which

³ Men such as Jonathan Edwards and Peter Forsyth use the term 'religion' to mean the gospel—the truth and practice of the word of God. It is a specific use which today is not always appropriate, as 'religion' is used for many things such as pietistic religiosity, various forms of cults and sects, and even includes some Christian systems that have become stale and moribund. The New Testament terms 'mystery of God', 'mystery of Christ', 'mystery of the faith', all seem to me to equal 'the mystery of our religion' as in I Timothy 3:16 (*eusebeias*). The practical aspects of that are given by James (1:27), 'Religion (*threskia*) that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, and to keep oneself unstained from the world'.

evokes ours in response to his. Likewise there can be no failure to love the brethren if one loves Christ.

Loving the Brethren

The remarkable statement of 1:22,23 follows on the act of love of the Father in making Christ manifest at the end of the ages for Man's sake (1:20):

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

Note the order; (i) purification of your souls, by your obedience to the truth, (ii) for a sincere love of the brethren, (iii) love one another earnestly from the heart. 'Obedience to the truth' means 'believing the gospel preached to you'⁴, so that purification came to those who believed (cf. Acts 15:9; Heb. 9:14; I John 3:3; James 4:8). I Timothy 1:5 speaks of 'love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith'. This purification through obedience was 'for [i.e. *with a view to*] a sincere love of the brethren (*eis adelphian anupokriton*). 'Sincere' is the term used by Paul in Romans 12:9 and II Corinthians 6:6 for 'genuine love', i.e. 'against hypocrisy'. We have seen that *eros* can be mistaken for *agape* and *agape* can be mistaken for *eros*. The word here is not *agape* but *philia* (*philadelphia*) but it has to be sincere, and it is in some sense the basis for *agape*.⁵ All of this having happened,

⁴ As in 1:12, 'those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven'. Obeying the gospel is a strong theme (see Acts 5:32; Rom. 10:16; II Thess. 1:8; and I Pet. 1:2).

⁵ See II Pet. 1:7 where *agape* is added to *philadelphia*—much in the same way.

Peter now enjoins, 'Love one another earnestly from the heart.' This is, of course, the heart that has been 'cleansed from its old sins' (cf. II Pet. 1:9), and so is clear of all elements that were once against others—bitterness, rancour, hatred, malice—and so on.⁶

LOVING EARNESTLY FROM THE HEART

If we are not careful we will miss what Edwards so insisted upon, i.e. fervency in our Christian living, especially in our community. The word 'earnestly' carries the ideas of 'at the stretch', 'fervently', 'extended', 'assiduously', 'intensely', 'intently' and 'deeply'. So in Matthew 8:3 Jesus '*stretched* out his hand'. In Acts 4:30, we have 'thou *stretchest* out thy hand to heal', in 12:5 '*earnest* prayer', in 26:7 '*earnestly* worship', whilst in the now omitted text of Luke 22:44 we see Jesus praying 'more earnestly'. If we carry this idea to our present text we find a love that is of great concentration, intention and performance.

It is then 'a love from the heart'. 'From the heart' is a term that is not often explicitly stated even though it is expected in the faith of Christ that believers will work from the heart. It is used in Romans 6:17, 'You have obeyed *from the heart* that form of teaching to which you were committed'. Israel was expected to love God from the heart (cf. Deut. 6:5; 30:6). The heart is extended to cover 'the brethren' but there is no need for us to limit it to the community of Christ. In 2:17

⁶ The cleansing of the heart is a large subject on its own. God's forgiveness sets us free from the past, and so, free from all the ill humours and other habits, customs and dreads which formed a great part of our behaviour, thus setting us wholly free to love.

Peter exhorts, 'Honour all men. Love the brotherhood.⁷ Fear God. Honour the emperor'. He is facing the community out to the world, and whilst love within the community of Christ is essential, the actions of love such as honouring all men, the emperor, and fearing God are all part of love.

Love That Covers the Multitude of Sins

Undoubtedly 1:22 and 4:8 go hand in hand, but we should see the full context of this second reference—4:7–10:

The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

This sounds familiar. Indeed it is much the same as Paul's exhortations in Romans 12:3–13, the passage in which Paul says, 'Let love be genuine.' 'Unfailing love' here is the same as 'Love earnestly from the heart'. Some translate⁸ 'Above all, remain constant in your love', 'Above all, never let your love

grow insincere', 'Above all, keep your love for one another at full strength', 'Above all, love each other deeply'. These translations tell us the matter is serious: love is 'above all'—something which Paul emphasises in Colossians 3:14, 'And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.' In a slightly different sense he speaks of the highest of all things, love, when in I Corinthians 12:31 he says, 'Set your heart on the higher talents [gifts]. And yet I will go on to show you a still higher path,' and he means 'the way of love'.⁹

According to Peter—as to Paul—if love is missing then the other actions are without their driving force and true quality. The use of gifts here—as in I Corinthians 13—is pointless without love, but when used in love then the gift conveys true love.

How, then, does love cover the multitude of sins? One thing we do know is that the atonement—God's great action of love—has already done that.¹⁰ Is Peter then saying, 'Look at the tree where he bore our sins in his own body, and so never see another's sins except as they are nailed on to that tree'? Is he perhaps saying that 'whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin' (4:1) must mean that the love of God has taken away the attraction of sin?¹¹ Whether or not

⁷ There can be no doubt that in this Epistle 'the brotherhood' does refer to the church. The very word 'brotherhood' presupposes the Fatherhood of God. Throughout the Acts and the Epistles the term 'brethren' is extensively used, more or less replacing the term 'disciples'. In 5:12 Silvanus is 'a faithful brother', in 2:17 all are required to 'love the brotherhood', and in 5:9, 'the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world'. Even so, love is to be extended to all (cf. I Thess. 3:12; Gal. 6:10; I Tim. 2:1–4).

⁸ J. Ramsey Michales (Commentary on I Peter in the *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, 1988); Jerusalem Bible; New English Bible; New International Version).

⁹ The Translation is from Moffatt's *A New Translation of the Bible* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1948).

¹⁰ The Hebrew verb *kippur* is to cover. So in Ps. 32:1 the man is blessed whose sins are forgiven and whose transgressions are covered.

¹¹ There are many ideas of I Pet. 4:1–2 as though one has been crucified with Christ and is in this sense dead to sin, or one has so suffered from sin that he—in Christ—is finished with it.

he is saying this, it is nevertheless so, but the meaning seems to derive from Proverbs 10:12, 'Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offences'. Hatred stirs up the sins of another and makes them public, but love has the opposite effect. It does not stir people up to sin, but encourages holiness, part of which is cessation from acts of sin. It does not broadcast another's sins in the same way that Paul says love 'does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.' In other words, the critical, fault-finding, nit-picking spirit is absent. It is not that sin is overlooked, but that the grace and love which have covered them is understood by the Christian brethren who do not accuse and make heavy and painful the conscience of an erring brother. Love does not make light of sin, but in the face of forgiving grace it aids the needy brother to peace and confidence.

Doubtless all these elements are present and they show us the wonderful power of love towards us. Titus 1:15 is perhaps the best commentary, 'To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted'. The sense we gain from Peter's teaching on love is that *agape* is fervent, steady, all-embracing, active in deeds, and whilst Peter does not actually say, 'God is love,' yet the whole action of love can stem and derive only from God, i.e. from His indwelling the believer and working love through him.

THE KISS OF LOVE

The 'kiss of love'—*philemati agapes*—is a term equivalent to that used by Paul—*philemati hagio*—'holy kiss'

(Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Thess. 5:26). It seems the kiss of *agape* was a salutation of love whereas *shalom* was the salutation of peace. Its use was wide, perhaps welcoming new believers or in hospitality to those from afar. Probably it was just a common form of affection, which was holy, and without the elements of *eros* which so often characterise it today. In 2:11 and 4:12 the readers are addressed as 'beloved', and all this fits with 1:22, 2:17, and 4:8. The 'kiss of love' would be the natural, normal expression of unity and affection, much as a warm hug would be today, i.e. a loving greeting of some kind or another.

This kiss, then, provides a fitting close to a Letter whose broader actions and theology of love we have scarcely touched upon in this brief survey of the Petrine expression of *agape*.

Chapter Twenty-Three

THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE—VI

General Teaching on Love Within the Community of Christ

We need, now, to draw our threads together—those strands we have seen in the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline, Johannine, and Petrine Epistles. We also need to include some biblical elements which have been omitted in our study by nature of our format. Finally we will also need to wed this scriptural view of love with aspects of the Trinitarian theology which we have discussed in Chapters Nine to Fourteen.

The General New Testament View of Coming to Know Agape

It is pointless trying to figure the love of God by starting with the New Testament. Firstly there is the doctrine of God as Creator, and Peter insists that we can entrust our souls to a faithful Creator (I Pet. 4:19).

The Old Testament shows us that whilst created Man fell, yet God did not abandon him, but even at the time of pronouncing the curse on Man He warned the serpent that He—God—would crush the serpent's head by means of the seed of woman, i.e. of the very femininity which he—the serpent—had beguiled.

The love of God in the universal covenant with Noah is followed by the love of God in the universal covenant of grace with Abraham, a covenant which determines salvation history, through the coming and work of Messiah, designated both Son of God and Son of Man. His offering to the Father of both active and passive obedience was the means whereby the Father could—and did—achieve salvation for all mankind in general, and for His elect in particular¹.

(I) GOD'S LOVE WAS REVEALED IN THE INCARNATION AND ATONEMENT OF THE SON

We saw, then, that God's love was shown in the incarnation. Firstly God the Father was the one who brought His Son into becoming man, and remaining man for ever. Secondly his love was shown in the act of the Cross—the atonement—where he defeated the

¹ This is a vexed question—the universal nature of the gospel. Some claim Christ only died for the elect. What would be the purpose of the Cross if it were not for the elect? Why, then, should Jesus die for all, when all would not respond? One answer must be that Jesus broke the domination of all evil powers and of all sin's power when he died for the world. 'God so loved the world' must be kept in mind, as also 'he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world' (John 3:16; I John 2:2). Of course the question of predestination arises, but its operations are within the wisdom of God and not solvable to our minds. We can be sure that predestination is neither uncaring mechanical act or fatalism. Only in awe and doxological worship can we find ease in the sovereignty of God.

forces of evil, and saved Man by the bearing of the sins of the world. When through the revelation of God by the word and the Spirit a believing person comes into salvation then that one receives eternal life, the cleansing and forgiveness of all sins, the justification from the guilt and penalty of sin by grace, and enters into regeneration and the adoption of sons.

Thus the love of God was shown by the acts of God in Christ, and known in the fruit of those acts, namely the experience of justification, sanctification and adoption.

(II) MAN RECEIVED THE GIFT OF LOVE ITSELF—GOD HIMSELF

The love of God was poured into the heart of believing Man by the Holy Spirit, and so the believer began to dwell in love, as love came to dwell in him as the Three Persons, i.e. (a) the Father who is love, (b) the Son of the Father's love, and (c) the Spirit of love who is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. This was described as the person 'dwelling in love and God dwelling in him' and 'abiding in love and love abiding in him'.

(III) MAN HAVING RECEIVED DIVINE LOVE WAS NOW CONSTRAINED AND ENABLED TO LOVE

That is, those of the believing community—the people of God were now expected to love, commanded to do so, and enabled to do so, because God in them and God amongst them was the Presence of love. The Personal Presence meant persons should and could love, the Godhead being active and dynamic

in them. Thus all the personal action of God operated—and continues to operate—through them.

The Relational Incentives to True Loving

What we may miss is that love is not simply a duty to carry out—although it is no less than that. Loving happens *in the context of relationships*, and it could be no other way. Believers live as 'sons of the prophets and of the covenant' (Acts 3:25) which means they have continuity with Israel. They are not 'alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world'. To the contrary: they are 'fellow heirs [with Israel], members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel'². They are thus,

- (a) they are members of the new covenant, with all its covenantal relationships, Christ being the mediator of this covenant, and the 'minister in the sanctuary' of its worship³;
- (b) they are members of the new community—the body of Christ—and so are members one of another. They are the living temple and so bonded together in it as living stones. They are a the true prophetic community are share in the prophetic ministry of their Head. They are the priestly community and so are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation', and as such work together

² Ephesians 2:12; 6:3

³ I Corinthians 3:16; Hebrews 9:15; 8:2; cf. 12:22–29.

in the one ministry of worship and proclamation⁴;

- (c) they are members of the Kingdom of God under the Lordship of 'God and Christ'⁵. Thus their ministry is royal one, a ruling one;
- (d) they are members of the household of God, being sons of the Father, and thus are brethren together in the family of the Father, and in brotherhood with Jesus the Son who is their Elder brother⁶;
- (e) they are sharers with Christ in the proclamation of the gospel to all the nations, thus seeking to bring all the nations to the feet of Christ who is their Lord. This means they are fellow-workers in the Gospel⁷.

We have seen how in the Triune Godhead the Three Persons work together as one, and work out 'the plan of the mystery' and in doing so honour, serve and give to one another: so in the true community of the Father, Son and Spirit—the redeemed people of God—the same principles are at work. What we must not miss is that personally we each have a relationship as a son to the Father, a brother to the Elder Brother, Christ, a brotherly-sisterly relationship to all the family in the Presence of Him 'who is above all, and through all and in all'. The community being the body of Christ, makes us intimately members one of another

⁴ Ephesians 1:22–23; 4:25; 2:21; Acts 2:17ff.; I Peter 2:4–10; Acts 1:8.

⁵ Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 5:5; I Peter 2:9–10, Revelation 1:6; 5:10.

⁶ Romans 8:14–17; Ephesians 1:5f.; 2:18–19; Galatians 3:26–4:7; I Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:1–6; 2:11ff.

⁷ Genesis 49:10; Psalm 2:7–9; Matthew 28:19–20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; cf. Romans 16:9, 21; Philippians 1:5; 4:2; I Corinthians 3:9.

and such a relationship is not only on the horizontal, but on the divine level. As the Trinity is outgoing in its love and ministry, so is the new community. As subjects relate to the Lordship of Christ, and the Kingship of him and the Father, so being subjects together is a powerful relational situation. No less in working out 'the plan of the mystery' under the Godhead and being fellow-workers in this, can relationships be on less than the most active terms.

It is doubtful whether many have explored all these relationships in plotting the course and action of love in history. The mind is deeply moved when it sees what constitutes the essence of love in relationships and relationships in love.

The General New Testament Principles of Doing Love

We saw in Chapter Eighteen some six principles by which we do love, namely,

- (a) the constant looking at the fact of God's unchanging love which gives us confidence to love continuously,
- (b) the knowledge that love operates in, and as, obedience,
- (c) the fact that love is always practical, i.e. does acts of love,
- (d) the fact that *agape* always gives without looking for something in return, and such giving can be even unto death,

- (e) the fact that love always honours all others, and
- (f) the fact that love always serves others, no matter who they may be.

We saw, also that the way in which love works is portrayed for us in I Corinthians 13 in that one does not use the gifts of God except for love, and in love. Similar to this way of love are the following passages, namely⁸,

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law.

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to edify him. For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me'.

through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.

I . . . beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also

must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves.

may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you.

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart.

Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins.

He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling.

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another . . . We know we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren . . . By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Beloved let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God . . . Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us . . . So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

These are only a few of the passages which deal with love, and especially with loving one another. Passages on God's love to us, and ours to Him are not included.

⁸ John 15:12, 13; Romans 13:8; Romans 15: 1-3; Galatians 5:13-14; 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:1-3; 4:32; Colossians 3:12-14; Philippians 2:1-3; I Thessalonians 3:12; Hebrews 10:24; I Peter 1:22; 4:8; I John 2:10; 3:11, 14, 16; 4:7, 11, 12, 13, 16.

Mortification of Hatred and Evil so that Love May be Full

There are also other principles the main one being the refusal to have anything to do with bitterness, hatred, malice, envy, division, party spirit—and so on. The passages of Colossians 3:5–14; Galatians 5:19–21; Eph. 4:17–32 speak of putting off things which belonged to our old way of life under Satan, the world, sin and the flesh and putting on the things of love. In Titus 3:1–7 Paul gives a contrast of life out of Christ and life under grace:

Remind them [the Cretan converts] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all men. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another; but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and the renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Previously (Titus 2:11–12) Paul had said something similar, i.e. that grace changes one's way of life and the evil is despatched. In its place comes gentle godliness,

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world.

In all of this it is not simply being morally good as against being immoral and evil, but it is the battle

waged which is the battle of love. As we saw in Romans 12:18–21,

If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap coals upon his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The whole paragraph is summed up in this one statement, 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good'. Love is the only power, the great power, the overcoming power. Evil will accomplish nothing. We saw in Chapter Twenty-One of the gospel and the battle with the world, especially in the Book of the Revelation where the saints accept the domination of the beast and Babylon yet never accede to their evil demands, nor wear their badge of corruption. Love triumphs: love assures that those who die in the Lord are blessed, and that their deeds do follow them.

So the theme of love in the New Testament faces the issue squarely—submit to evil and you will die, and nothing of merit will remain. Overcome evil with good and you will see the triumph of love in the habitations of glory and in the new heavens and the new earth, where all will be love, and where love will be vigorous and functional, since all will have become full partakers of the Divine nature.

Chapter Twenty-Four

THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE—VII

The Human Operations of Love Within the Community of Christ

THE CREATIONAL LAW OF LOVE HAS ALWAYS BEEN EXTANT

Man has been commanded to love the Lord his God, and his neighbour. We have noted that creational law is not the same as 'natural law', but is law which stems from the nature of the Triune God who created Man and the universe. Indeed, as the law of love it issues from the nature of the Triune God, for it is in this sense that Man must image the God in whose image and likeness he is made. We saw John's 'from the beginning' must relate to creation, as well as to the second 'beginning' which was Jesus' ministry. It certainly must relate to Israel and Covenant. Love at creation may well have been expressed in the mandate to be fruitful, to replenish the earth, to have dominion over it, and to exercise a faithful stewardship of it. Love is a matter of command, then, in both the initial creational situation, and then in the world of Man's fallenness.

In the former it is by nature of the case; in the latter an explicit command—one which becomes intelligible through the revelation of God in covenant and salvation.

THE COVENANTAL LAW OF LOVE IN ISRAEL

Israel was commanded to love God and each was to love his neighbour.¹ The neighbour included the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow. The Ten Commandments had two tablets, the first of which was the command to love God and the second to love one's neighbour. Jesus made it clear that love to God and one's neighbour was the essence of the law and the prophets.² Paul made it clear that the Ten Commandments were the true expression of love, and were summed up in, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'.³ James spoke in similar terms.⁴

If we think that Israel was given laws which were unrelated to all laws that cultures had known and practised, and if we think that they were novel, inasmuch as they were new revelations of how the people of God should live together, then we miss the nature of the law that is linked with the conscience⁵, and the truth which men and women seek to repress because of its high demands. That they know what is the truth

¹ See Deut. 6:4f; 10:12-13; 30:6 for love to God; and Lev. 19:9-18; and Deut. 24:19-22 for love to the neighbour.

² Matt. 22:34-40.

³ See Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14.

⁴ See James 1:22-25; 2:8-13.

⁵ This is a point that Paul takes up in Rom. 2:12-16 where he links the conscience with law, and obviously the conscience is the arbitrator of what is right (lawful) and what is wrong (unlawful).

is evident from their knowledge of the just punishment of it.⁶ Thus we conclude that in some sense there is a universal understanding of the creational law, although not a universal acknowledgment of it.

All the time we are keeping in mind that the necessity⁷ to love is there in all human beings because all are in the image of God. The rationalization of love comes in various modes and perverse expressions, but it is there. Man could not live without law, and without law he increases his misery. The law in Israel was known as *torah*—the way of instruction. In Greek and Roman cultures and in legalistic Judaism, the Greek term *nomos*⁸ speaks more of legislation and punishment than—for example—in Deuteronomy where it was the way of life of the nation.

THE LAW OF LOVE IS THE LAW OF CHRIST, THE ESCHATOLOGICAL-TELEOLOGICAL LAW

Jesus twice commanded his disciples to love one another, even as he loved them.⁹ Paul speaks of ‘the law of Christ’ in I Corinthians 9:21—‘under the law of Christ’—and in Galatians 6:2—‘Bear one another’s

⁶ Rom. 1:18 shows that human beings under wrath suppress the truth, therefore they must have some idea of it. Rom. 1:32 shows wicked men know the just punishment of the breaking of the law, but flaunt it.

⁷ By this we mean the ontological necessity, the sense of ‘oughtness’ which Man in his depravity continually resists, or sometimes—in a remarkable episode, or episodes—unaccountably obeys. We have noted before that *eros* is really Man’s endeavour to love, and that he thinks this is the fulfilment of *agape*.

⁸ The terms *nomism* and *antinomianism* are used when the matter of law (*torah* seen as *nomos*) is discussed in regard to justification by works of the law. Justification by works of the law was not a doctrine of Israel, but in Paul’s day it was certainly mooted, as Paul’s Epistles clearly attest.

⁹ John 13:34; 15:12–13.

burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ’. This can be said to be the law to love which Christ commanded, and under which he had lived¹⁰, since they are to love as he loved them. It can also be called ‘the law of love’ in the sense that John speaks about—‘the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining’—meaning that the day of lawlessness is ending and the day—of love—is now coming into its own, in all fullness. Of course, all action that is not from *agape* has been an intrusion into the true nature of God and creation, and so an intrusion into the true nature of law-as-love, and is a disturbing excrescence upon it. ‘Now,’ says John in effect, ‘because of the Cross that is changing’. The *crisis* of change came at the Cross, and the *process* of agapitic renewal is presently happening, and its *telos* or climax will be when ‘the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea’. By *crisis* we mean the judgement of God upon evil at the Cross when He ‘judged sin in the flesh’¹¹; by *process* we mean the enlarging grip of *agape* over the whole universe and its system, including the

¹⁰ Theologians speaks of Christ’s active and passive obedience. ‘Active obedience’ was his carrying out of the law into which he was born (cf. Gal. 4:4) and under which he rendered perfect obedience. His ‘passive obedience’ was his being ‘obedient unto death, even death on a Cross’ (Phil. 2:8). His obedience is spoken of in Rom. 5:12–21. Doubtless this includes both active and passive obedience, and it was enormously effective.

¹¹ Not only was sin judged at the Cross but also its inherent guilt, and in this sense law was judged, even as it judged the sinner. This is seen in Rom. 7:7–12. In Gal. 2:16–21 Paul speaks of himself being killed by the law, but then in one sense the law received its death-blow as a power of punishment for the sinner (cf. Col. 2:14–15). The justified sinner escapes the law. Rom. 8:1–4 shows that once the sinner is freed from the law he is now free to ‘fulfil the just requirements of the law’. Law is then a living way of living—the truth brought out beautifully in Ps. 1, 19 and 119.

actions of various judgements¹² on all that is non-agapitic and anti-agapitic; by *teleological* or *climactic*, we mean the ultimate climaxing of love when all things will be reconciled, unified and filled up in Christ the Reconciler, Unifier and Filler.¹³

LAW AS A LOVE ACTION NOT LEGAL AND STATIC

In the above section we have indicated the dynamic nature of the law of love. Whereas law is often regarded as a rule, or a standard, or prohibitive and inhibitive, love differs greatly, i.e. love-as-law or law-as-love as shown in John's statement—'this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.' In Deuteronomy 4:6 Moses said of the commandments, 'Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."' So love-as-law becomes teleological—something moving towards its *telos* but taking those who love with it, by and through, their love-actions. At the same time the law of love—the law of Christ—has commands, and these are as much practical guide lines for present living as they are movements towards the *telos*.

¹² We mean 'the judgement of this world' at the Cross (John 12:31; 16:11; cf. Col. 2:14–15; Heb. 2:14–15), and the judgements at the hand of the Lion of Judah—the Lamb as it had been slain—as seen in the actions of the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath. In other words love is outworked in judgements as much as in the ways we might call 'affectional' and 'ethical'.

¹³ See Eph. 1:9–10; 4:10–14; Col. 1:19–22; cf. II Cor. 5:19.

OBEDIENCE IS FROM LOVE: LOVE IS LAW-OBEDIENCE

We saw in Chapter 18 that true love operates in, and as, obedience. Christ loves the Father and obeys Him. The disciples love Christ and obey his commandments. Paul said, 'The love of Christ controls us,' and John in his First Letter said, 'And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected,' and, 'By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, *that* we keep his commandments'.¹⁴

Commands and Guide-Lines for True Relational Living

We have seen that the law of God—called by some 'the creational law', but not to be confused with 'natural law'—is the law of love, and it sets out certain structures for living. This is easily seen in the covenantal law which Israel knew. There were prescriptions for love and worship of God, husband–wife and family relationships, as also relationships which were societal, i.e. across the covenant-community, and out into the nations of the world. These are far too detailed for our study, but they were all practical.¹⁵ Love was a

¹⁴ See II Cor. 5:14; I John 2:3–5 (cf. *NRSV*); 5:2–3.

¹⁵ The entire ethical system of Israel needs to be closely studied. There were precepts both apodictic and causistic—covering general principles of living but meeting eventualities with understanding and amelioration.

matter of action, not just of ‘word and thought’, but of deed. For example, one loved one’s neighbour if one did not move his landmark.

The New Testament also has fairly detailed prescriptions for relationships. One simple example is I Timothy 5:1–4, ‘Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity. Honour widows who are real widows. If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God’. This simple prescription does not really differ from what is given in the Old Testament.¹⁶

The Man–Woman Relationships¹⁷

What we see is that all human relationships—i.e. man–woman, familial, societal, international—are not arbitrary, but are fixed according to creational principles.¹⁸ This is where all relationships start. By this we mean that Man being made in God’s image must reflect the relational nature of the Triune God. That is, God is love, and the unity of love that constitutes

Father, Son and Holy Spirit will be the origin and basis of true human relationships. In Chapters 9 to 13 we traced the union and communion of these ‘other-Persons centred’ members of the Triune Godhead. Something of the Son being generated from the Father is echoed—so to speak—in the woman being drawn from the man. This account of the creation of Man—of woman being drawn from the man—indicates the fact that Man is man–woman, i.e. the woman can never be thought of as woman apart from the man, nor the man as man apart from the woman. Together they constitute Man. When Adam sees his woman, Eve, she is already ‘bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’. They are already one, although marriage declares the oneness of the affianced couple.

This is not the place to enter into the ordinances and precepts that are set out for the man and the woman in the creation account, the covenantal principles in Israel, and then in the New Testament. It is interesting that Jesus makes marriage a creational ordinance, and draws the principles of its permanency from Genesis 2:24. The fall of man and the consequent ruling of the man over the woman need to be recognised, as also her changed relationship to her husband.¹⁹

COURTING, MARRYING, MARITAL AND FAMILIAL LOVE ARE ALL OF AGAPE

We need to recognise that all relationships are only complete in *agape*. It is not that a strong set of rules is

¹⁶ For a wide coverage based on theological biblical principles see my *God’s Glory: Man’s Sexuality* (NCPI, 1988); *Angry Heart Or Tranquil Mind?* (NCPI 1981); *The Wisdom of God and the Healing of Man* (NCPI, 1990); *Oh, Father! Our Father!* (NCPI, 1983).

¹⁷ See my *Stronger than Death, A Commentary on the ‘Song of Songs’*, NCPI, 1991), especially the introductory essay, ‘Human Love and “The Song of Songs” ’ which speaks of the matter of human man–woman relationships.

¹⁸ See for example the principles set out in Acts 17:26–28; Deut. 32:8–9.

¹⁹ For an expanded treatment of all this see my *God’s Glory, Man’s Sexuality* (NCPI, 1988).

laid down regarding personal relationships²⁰ either in Deuteronomy or the New Testament. Only in *communion* do relationships have their true exercise and their fullness, and communion is never outside of *agape*. We have many love relationships in persons such as Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel. One of the most moving of all is that of the two lovers in *The Song of Songs*. Whilst varying views are held regarding this Book it is nothing if not a love between two young people which can be no less than *agape*. It is so pure, so full of admiration for the beauty and character of one another, and so rich in the reality of love, as to seem unbelievable to many readers. Yet it all rings true. It is not really a song of infatuation or a sentimental romance, but is full of the vigour of two lovers. It is certainly a Book which ought to be read by all, married or unmarried. It is not simply an evidence that human love can be true and pure and beautiful, it is the very source of understanding true man–woman love.

Normally marital love issues in the creation of the family, and the experience of the parents in *agape* is the basis for bringing up the children, as also the basis for their children–parent, and child-to-child relationships. In the New Testament the principles of husband–wife, parent–children and children-to-children relationships are well set out. Along with these are employee–employer relationships also.²¹ Yet there is an entire lack of the legal element, since the relationships are in *agape*.

²⁰ See some of my books, *The Heavenly Vision* (NCPI, 1987), *God's Glory: Man's Sexuality* (NCPI, 1988) and *Where I Love I Live* (NCPI, 1986).

²¹ See Eph. 5:21–6:19; Col. 3:12–25.

These community relationships, as we saw above in I Timothy 5:1–5. We have also seen that the church was a body with functional gifts, ministry and order. It was led by those described sometimes as ‘elders’²², and at other times by the terms, ‘bishops’ ‘overseers’ and ‘leaders’. The ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher all combined to assist in the unity and fellowship of the community. Of course—as we take up the issue elsewhere—relational life is rich because we are members of the one Kingdom, the one body of Christ, the one temple, the one family and are related to the one Father, the one Lord, and the one Spirit. The people of the Triune God dwell in Him, and He in them. All of this makes for rich relational life, especially as relationships are in communion.

Living in Agape or Eros

Time and again we come back to this comparison. Do we live in *agape* or *eros*, or both, or do we vacillate from one to the other? We have defined *agape* as love that goes out to give, to honour, and to serve another or others. It gives continually but not in order to get. *Eros* will give and serve and honour—if needs be—but always with a view to receiving something back. We have seen that *eros* can be easily offended, angry and even wounded if it does not get its returns or its own way. Every relationship has the opportunity to develop and grow strong where there is *agape*. Where there is

²² See my little book *Shepherds of the Flock* (NCPI 1985). This is quite a demanding subject on its own. It links up with the themes of authority, order, and the well-being of the local assembly.

only *eros* then ultimately the relationship will not last. It may be eked out for a lifetime but the rich quality of love will be absent.

One of the reasons for this is that if a person is humanly in *eros*, then that one will see God—so to speak—as an *eros*-God and not as an *agape*-God. Just as one distrusts *eros* in another, so God will be mistrusted. He will be seen only as One who gives in order to get. There is no joy in any of this. Indeed there is misery. Rather than trying to give formulae for relational living, it is better to think and speak in terms of *agape*—God as love dwelling in His people. From the moment the Spirit came at Pentecost love sprang up spontaneously in the new community of Christ, and has spread its rivers of love down through the centuries.

The sad fact is that we can switch from one to the other, from *agape* to *eros*. In this case we are being inconsistent with our being in God and He in us. We revert to fallen ways of loving. We find a number of cases of this throughout the New Testament, and particularly in the second and third chapters of the Book of the Revelation. *Eros* is cunning, able to disguise itself, and cheats in all relationships. It will be noted that acts and things which relate to breakdown in marital relationships, familial and societal relationships have to do with *eros*. Discussion concerning problem spouses, separation, divorce, the care of the children, and remarriage are all fearful when they are in the context and expectancy—or disappointment—of *eros*. Innumerable problems arise and no worthwhile solution can be found. Anger, hurt, wounding and bitterness result, and even homicide and suicide. In the ultimate *eros* achieves nothing.

When a community becomes renewed in love—true love—then the power of the gospel is seen and experienced in new, wonderful and powerful ways. The simplicity of divine love in human beings is the key to all true relationships. He—God—saves us from our times and bouts of *eros* and establishes afresh, even more firmly in His own personal love. How apt we are to revert from *agape* to *eros*, and not realise it at the time. How we need to be under the grace of God continually, that we might live in *agape* continually.

Chapter Twenty-Five

**LOVE—BLAZING HOT
AND WAXING COLD—I**

Hot or Cold?

Jesus told the church at Laodicea, ‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.’

Cold, hot, lukewarm: these are the variations. As with a church so with a man or a woman. As with faith, so with hope and so with love—hot, cold, lukewarm. Paul, with a pen dipped in blazing ink, writing to the Galatians because they are so quickly moving away to another gospel which is no gospel. The author of Hebrews writing to Jewish Christians who are wavering in their allegiance to the old and new, warning that to go back is death and death worse than death, and to go forward is life and life beyond human dreams. The writer of the Epistle of Jude talking of people who are in the new community of love who are ‘blemishes on your love feasts, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, carried along by winds, fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea,

casting out the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever’. The author of Hebrews urging his dullard readers to ‘lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.’

Blazing Love

Men and women of *eros* certainly blaze out in their loves¹. The actions, songs and ballads of the Romeos, the Lochinvars, the Don Juans, and the amorous knights of old and new times testify to that. Hence the saying, ‘All the world loves a lover’. The Shulammite woman cries,

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
jealousy is cruel as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire.
a most vehement flame.

¹ Here—for the moment—we are proceeding on my thesis that *eros*, rightly understood and practiced is reasonable love. In its pure form it is *agape*, and so true *eros* has its life in *agape*. In principle true *eros* is not found outside the biblical experience of *agape*. Nevertheless it seems human beings are pressed to rise to their best because of the *imago dei*, and so *eros* under such circumstances is not necessarily lustful or selfish; in other words it seems—in practice—to transcend its fallen self. It can be contained within the words of the Shulammite woman of the *Song of Songs* (8:6–7).

Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.
If a man offered for love
all the wealth of his house,
it would be utterly scorned.²

What we are here concerned with is the blazing love of God which evokes faith in that love and so in Him who is Father. It is the same love which is expressed in His Son, which is revealed by His Spirit and which brings the response of love from the person who repents of his sin and receives the gifts of forgiveness, justification, purification and ultimate glorification. The 'response of love' is really *agape* which comes in the person of the Spirit to the heart of the believer, who then knows the Father's 'great love' and 'the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge'³, and so the new believer's heart is set ablaze. There is a great conflagration of love, perhaps never better expressed than in Charles Wesley's fine hymn,

O Thou who camest from above
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart!

There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze;
And trembling to its source return,
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for Thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up Thy gift in me.

² Here I am not saying the Shulammite woman is not speaking from *agape* but *eros*, but that she is speaking from *eros* that is *agape*.

³ See Romans 5:5; Ephesians 2:4; 3:19.

Ready for all Thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death Thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.

Others may think his beautiful song, 'Love Divine All Loves Excelling' is even more wonderful, but 'O Thou who Camest From Above' speaks of 'an inextinguishable fire' which is love. One is also reminded of Blaise Pascal's testimony. On the evening of Monday 23rd November 1654, Pascal had an 'extraordinary assistance of God's grace'. His account of it was written on parchment, sewn into the lining of his coat where it remained until the day of his death. The substantial part of it is reproduced here:⁴

FIRE

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scientists.

Certainty, Certainty. Feeling. Joy. Peace.
God of Jesus Christ.

Deum memum et Deum vestrum.

Thy God shall be my God.

Forgetfulness of the world and all, except God.

He is to be found only by the ways taught in the Gospel.

Greatness of the human soul.

O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I
have known Thee.

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

I separated myself from Him.

Dereliquerunt me fontem aquæ vivæ.

My God, wilt Thou forsake me?

May I never be separated from Him eternally.

⁴ Pascal and Kierkegaard, Vol 1, D. Patrick, Lutterworth Press, London, 1947

'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.'

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ

I separated myself from Him; I fled Him, renounced Him, crucified Him.

May I never be separated from Him!

He is to be kept only by the ways taught in the Gospel:

Renunciation, entire and sweet.

Pascal's account of his encounter with God is only one of innumerable experiences of the fire of God. Not only are they found in the Old Testament and the New Testament but they are prolific in number over the two thousand years of Christian history. They are not only present in quantity, but the quality of each conversion, of catching alight with the fire of love is such as to be indescribable. No one doubts that throughout history there have been fires of *eros*, but the question is as to the lasting power and value of such fires. As we have said before, great art, literature, music, theatre—especially grand opera—have portrayed what has seemed to be the grandeur of great human love, but the question still remains whether great human love is, in the ultimate, truly great, or whether it is only that by comparison with some of the deadly-dull and mediocre relationships which are the lot of mankind.

SOME WHO BLAZED INTO LOVE

Not all conversions are dramatic, and not all revelations are blinding. Perhaps the quiet and steady ones have even more to be said for them than the startling and sensational ones. Paul's conversion was dramatic, but then it was a confrontation of the man by the risen

LORD himself. To penetrate into the depths of the astonished Pharisee and see that his brilliant understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures when brought into line with the apostolic gospel he had heard so many times, is an exercise many have executed, and all come away shaking their heads with amazement. Certainly Paul was ignited through his revelation of Christ, and his knowledge of the love of God stands no less paramount in history than does that of the apostle John.

We could, then, mention men like Peter who says of Christ, 'Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with joy unutterable and exalted.' Peter's rehabilitation in the faith by Christ as described in John 21:15–19 set his feet again in the path of apostleship, but it was the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost which acted as an incendiary within his spirit. Stephen was a man whom Luke describes as 'full of the Spirit and of wisdom', 'full of faith', 'full of grace and power', and reported that none could 'withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke'. Surely another ignited man! Along with him were men and women such as the apostles, Apollos, Timothy, Titus, Lydia, Phoebe, Aquila and Priscilla and those who were martyred for the faith such as 'Antipas, my witness, my faithful one'—those whose blood will be found in the unholy city of Babylon at the time of its destruction. With them will be the Old Testament saints who

through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were

tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Heb. 11:33-38)

If these were not those fired by love—by *agape*—then who ever were such? We know they must have loved God because He first loved them: nothing but *agape* could have so driven them on. If we apply the test of self-seeking, self-flaunting and self-saving *eros*, then certainly the above fighters for the faith were not men and women of that kind of love, i.e. of *eros*.⁵ If we proceed into the Book of the Revelation and see those who refused the mark of the beast, and who were ‘not ashamed to confess Christ crucified and to fight faithfully under his banner against the world, the flesh and the devil’.⁶ What was it that kept those who were loyal to God—those on whose forehead was the mark of the Father and the Lamb, the beloved, the elect, the children and family of God—the Father’s strong strong love?

And so we might proceed to unearth innumerable stories of ‘faithfulness in love’⁷ of twenty centuries of

⁵ We might think mankind awaited the revelation of Christ as the love of God before it could itself, love. The love of the covenant-people for their God is seen richly in the Psalms, cf. Psalm 116:1 which commences with ‘I love the Lord!’

⁶ From the services of Baptism in An Anglican Prayer Book, AIO Press, Sydney, 1978

⁷ We remind ourselves that ‘love with faith’, ‘faith working through love’, that ‘hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts’, and that ‘faith, hope, love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love’, show us that ‘faithfulness in love’ is accompanied by hope, and with the drive of these three factors the history of believing men and women is truly remarkable—distinct from the histories of those who do not work by this triad. See Galatians 5:6; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 13:13.

remarkable saints as well as those unremarkable in their histories—those who were simple, obedient and unnoticed or applauded. Compare these—if you will—with those who had high aspirations, great ideals, and ask whether the best of humanity in *eros* can compare with the least in *agape*.⁸ However, we are not here concerned with adding up the aggregate of the loving saints but with seeking to penetrate the miracle of a person’s transformation from a sinner to a saint, from being a person of *eros* and ego, to one who is free in the liberty of *agape*, and charged with great love so that he—or she—‘loves not life unto death’⁹.

The Love that Makes Men and Women Blaze into Life

In previous chapters we have discussed what it is about the love of God that evokes the response of faith and love within the hearers of the gospel.¹⁰ We need to enlarge on the work of the Cross but this is not possible unless we first understand the nature of God

⁸ I am aware that comparisons are always deficient. We may judge some to have been in *eros* who were really in *agape*, and some in *agape* who were really in *eros*. That shows the futility of exercises in comparison. It also shows that we should not be quick to judge any since ‘God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him’ (Acts 10:34–5).

⁹ See Revelation 12:10ff.

¹⁰ See chapters 4–7 where we have seen, virtually, that God’s love is known through the work of the Cross. In particular, it is known through the propitiation of our sins. What we have not opened up is the nature and essence of the propitiatory work of the Cross. For some explanation of this work see my *The Things We Firmly Believe* (NCPI, 1986), and *Christ’s Cross Over Man’s Abyss* (NCPI, 1987).

as holy. It is His holiness as Creator—in whose image Man has been made—that we can understand the fall of Man, the fact of his guilt, the nature of his misery, and the shattering of all relationships between God and Man and Man and his fellow-creatures. If we do not go into depth in these things then we will not understand the scope and immensity of the work of the Cross, as also its absolute necessity for the salvation of human beings. I have discovered over many years of evangelistic, pastoral and teaching ministry that most human beings are ignorant of their offence against God in their acts of sinning. When we speak of ‘original sin’ we mean the sin in which the whole human race was involved when our first parents disobeyed God. Romans 5:12 says that in that act ‘all did sin’, meaning we all sinned. The effects were for the human race to have died relationally to God, and to be faced with physical death. It also meant that death would happen to each of the race not simply because they had inevitably to die, but because they *deserved* to die.

GOD’S HOLINESS: MAN’S UNHOLINESS

In Jeremiah 33:8 God promised rehabilitation to the nation Israel, saying, ‘I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.’ In the Old Testament the term ‘guilt of their sin’ is sometimes used but generally the term ‘guilt’ is used on its own. Sin is the act done, but ‘guilt of sin’ is first of all a *legal* term meaning one is guilty because of the sin one has done. At the same time guilt is a dynamic matter within

the conscience, and affects the whole person. Guilt then, is first legal, and then it is a matter of the mind and the emotions.¹¹ Guilt is a legal position and also a state of human experience which can deeply trouble the guilty. There can be subjective guilt which is morbid, and guilt which actually hardens the heart of a person, so that guilt is no longer felt normally¹². Today psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists are seeking to deal with human guilt and up to a certain point can be effective. However the guilt of which we speak is not psychological but theological¹³.

In Romans 1:18–32 we see the sinful rebellion of Man against God and the terrible effects of that act. Paul says that the wrath of God is being continually revealed from heaven ‘against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth’. By this statement we need to understand two things, (i) Man is consciously seeking to suppress the truth, which in some sense he must know, and (ii) Man is therefore under the wrath of God. The way in which this wrath is being revealed is seen in verses 24, 26, 28, i.e. that God is giving Man up to his sin

¹¹ The idea of guilt deeply occupied the people of the covenant. One only has to look at the number of times the term is used, and the vast provision made for cleansing guilt by the sacrificial system to know that it was important.

¹² What, indeed, is a ‘normal’ feeling of guilt? We cannot say. When guilt hardens the heart it can drive itself down into the depths of a person, resulting in a compounding of hardening against guilt-emotion, but which will eventually result in a collapse of the person. Guilt is something we dare not fiddle with.

¹³ Those of the psychological professions treat Man as a psycho-somatic entity, and do not include the spiritual origin and elements of the human person. Hence analysis, diagnosis and treatment is always along psychological lines as though they alone existed. There have been many attempts to effect an integration of the psychological and theological elements of Man.

and 'guilt of sin'. The term "God gave them up" should not be read, 'God left them to their own devices', and 'God let them stew in their own juice', but 'God deliberately gave them over to their own evil so that the guilt of their sin would be their punishment and at the same time His wrath'. Kasemann says 'Phenomenologically wrath is the power of the curse.' He quotes an apocryphal book, to make his point, 'If however, sin, unrighteousness, blasphemy and violence increase in all conduct, and backsliding, iniquity, and uncleanness grow, then there comes on all a great judgement from heaven, and the Lord comes forth with wrath to hold judgement on the earth.'¹⁴

What we see in Romans 1:18–32 is that the guilt of sin is in fact God's way of judgement. God's wrath is not guilt, but the guilt of sin is God's wrath working in various ways,

- (a) when Man goes against the true (ontological) order of things he experiences an awryness, a disorder, and the hit-back of the true order,
- (b) his guilt has built into it the component elements of disorder, fear, confusion, anger, heaviness, dread of reprisal, pain, a sense of pollution, shame at defilement—and so on—
- (c) the one who is suppressing truth cannot see truth truthfully as truth, and so wrong decisions, irrational reasoning, and ego-based ideas take him even further from the truth which otherwise would make him free, and keep him in freedom,

¹⁴ *I Enoch* 91:7, Quoted by Ernst Kasemann in his *Commentary on Romans* (Eerdmans, 1980) p.37.

- (d) all of this drives the person more deeply into sin and error, so that as the guilt of sin compounds so sin increases and guilt further compounds itself. As we have said, this is not just a person being given over—by God—to stewing in his own juice but is a deliberate, persistent, and insistent action of God who all the time is bringing the wrath—the curse—upon the mind and conscience of the sinner, and so deeply affecting him.

We need to understand this personal action of God and the psalmists, wisdom-writers and prophets are very helpful in this area. Some of their statements are simple enough to be understood by all,

God is a righteous judge,
and a God who has indignation [wrath] every day. (Psa. 7:11).

Why does the wicked renounce God,
and say in his heart,
'Thou wilt not call to account'? (Psa. 10:13).

Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life . . . it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God. (Eccles. 8:11–13).

When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night they hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. (Psa. 32:3–4).

There is no soundness in my flesh because of thy indignation;
there is no health in my bones because of my sin.

For my iniquities have gone over my head;
they weigh like a burden too heavy for me. (Ps. 38:3–4)

Modern depth-psychology claims that events early in life determine the ways people think and act throughout their life. Some claim that certain forms of intervention may halt a problem, and that persons can be brought back to what is called normal living. Others suggest that beyond a certain point intervention can be of no help. Some clinicians believe they can help to deal with human guilt, whilst others feel they can only help in the case of morbid or irrational guilt. Doubtless clients are helped up to a certain point, but beyond this point neither therapist nor client can proceed. When a human being is guilty before God then God only can help.

Humanity Under Guilt

The doctrine of accountability is strong in the Scriptures. Each person must suffer in, from and because of his—or her—own sin. Attempts to justify oneself from the guilt within oneself are doomed to failure. God is accountable for no person's guilt. Christ was without sin, and so not accountable for sinners. Propitiation for sins is the act of God pouring out the entirety of His wrath upon Christ—upon Christ who is unaccountable for any one's sins. God's wrath is the guilt of sin which the sinner knows in his mind, body and spirit, and which he bears every day—since 'God has indignation [wrath] with the sinner every day'.

The human race, when it is wise enough, knows that

the aberrations of the human spirit, the anger men and women exercise towards one another, and the dreadful things they do to one another spring from human guilt, guilt which twists the human mind. The deepest of pain and shame—the internalized shock, trauma, wounding, and the like—are what cause spasms and seasons of anguish, depression, anger and bitterness¹⁵. They also trigger off horrific actions such as child abuse, human deviations and perversions, acts of unbelievable selfishness and greed: homes are divided, divorces become common, and manslaughter, murder and suicide become rampant. How then is such guilt erased, and how is a person set free in his—or her—spirit?

The Eradication of Guilt and the Liberation of the Conscience

We are now looking at propitiation. We are seeing the statements made earlier,

Therefore he [the Son] had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Heb. 2:17)

but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1–2).

¹⁵ I am not unaware that there may sometimes be biochemical factors in depression and anger, but it may be also that some of these elements themselves arise from deeper causes such as sin and guilt—self-alienation from God, their true source of life.

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (I John 4:10).

For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (Rom. 3:22-25).

The *fact* of that propitiation we understand from the Old Testament¹⁶, and we even know something of the *mode* of it—'the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all', 'God made him to be sin', 'he, himself, bore our sins in his own body on the tree'. What we do not know was the pain of his suffering. As guilty men and women we know the ravages guilt brings to the inner person, but we do not know what it is to bear the sins of others. We think we know what it is to bear our own guilt, but dread comes to us when we think of taking our guilts—God's wrath—into the world beyond this one in which we now live.

It is from that dread that Christ delivers us by averting the wrath from us. The wrath must be upon sin—whatever. That is the demand of God's holiness—that which we have most dreadfully violated. We have violated our own selves by thrusting holiness from us. The Son willingly bears what the Father lays upon him, but the cost is a terrible one. To become sin, to have the sins of the world laid upon him, to bear the sufferings of the centuries and the millenniums— this is to

encapsulate all evil for all time and destroy it within his holy self. This is to immolate all that is evil within his holy conscience. It is to enter into the deepest of suffering of the human race, and be one with it, whilst also redeeming it from the curse and pain of guilt. How simply the hymn-writer put it,

We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains he had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

It is this event—the event of propitiation—which was initiated by the Father, and executed by the Son, who in turn was aided by both Father and Spirit—insofar as these holy Ones can go—in an exercise which defies our understanding as to its deepest mode, and which goes beyond our comprehension of its fathomless love in its pain and rich compassion. This is the act of practical love that causes us to know God is love, and to surrender to that love. All that is *eros* is foreign to this great event but all that is *agape* is this event. Hence, when we come to understand it, we love because he first loved us. We say, 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.'

¹⁶ Especially do we understand that propitiation was a provision made by God for the clearing of the guilt of sin from the worshipper (see the first 6 chapters of Leviticus). See also Leviticus 17:11 where it is God who gives propitiation ritual on the altar. Man does not invent this. The *principle* of atonement (propitiation) was made known to him. God gave the blood upon the altar. The victim suffered the sins of the offerer. Always sacrificed was 'all of grace'.

Chapter Twenty-Six

LOVE—BLAZING HOT AND WAXING COLD—II

The Heart Strangely Warmed

It was John Wesley who went through years of seeking peace in the love of God and who—as he listened to Martin Luther’s *Introduction to the Book of Romans* in that Aldersgate meeting place in London—said, ‘Then was my heart strangely warmed within me.’ At last the grace of the gospel had reached him, and he was a transformed man. He had seen this sort of change in his brother Charles and his friend George Whitefield.

It is saving grace that warms the heart, and, indeed, sets it ablaze. This had happened to Howell Harris the Welshman who was first to venture into the open air of fields and villages to preach the message of redemption. Wesley and Whitefield took to church grave-yards when they were hounded from the pulpits, and their vast meetings with tens of thousands of coal-miners on the Kingswood Common of Bristol are still remembered.

The truth is that not only have these men and women recognized that Christ died for their sins. With that wonderful truth they have come to know that they

died with Christ—they were crucified with him. They were taken up into the Cross and in those hours the Son of God dealt with everything in them. No sin, no deceit, no rebellion and no wound or grief remained uncrucified. Until this intimate truth is known we cannot really say, ‘The love of Christ constrains me,’ nor claim, ‘I have been crucified with Christ.’ Such a claim is no light one. It says that there is nothing of our past—nor for that matter of our present and future—with which Christ has not been one. To bear our sins was his work, and also to bear our griefs and our sorrows was to finish their pain and liberate us for ever.

We must appreciate all that the medical profession and other care groups seek to do for us. We must acknowledge that humanity works for the good of humanity. This is the finest side of *eros* that happens for us and to us. How therapists would wish to penetrate into our depths and release us from past experiences that seem to have had such binding effects upon us. Yet no one has penetrated as deeply as this ‘Wonderful Counsellor’. This one, whose wisdom was greater than that of Solomon has ransacked our past of all its debris and detritus, and has spring-cleaned wholly our secret attics and hidden alcoves, and has set us free from everything that would rise up to accuse us.

Of course few who have been through the crisis of conversion would necessarily understand it in these terms. It is just that the word of the Cross reaches them and everything is changed. The old is made new; the impure is made pure; the burden lifts and is gone; the new life of love flows in. With some it does not come quickly, is not necessarily dramatic, and seems to happen almost unnoticed. Sooner or later, however,

it is noticed. The presence of love—true love—is sensed with joy and relief. Love—in the form of the Triune God—has come to take up residence. Even that is not always consciously realized but if the Presence were not there then the sense of the Absence would quickly be noticed. What is more, the beloved of the Father is never a single person on his—or her—own. All belong to the one world-wide and time-wide community, the community of Christ.

The Warming Community

As much a love community as Israel had been—at least in ideal—the new community of Christ was unique in human history. The love shown amongst the new Christian Jews—as we have seen—expressed itself in care for the poor, the orphans and the widows. All were of one heart, one soul and one mind. Great grace was upon them all¹. The word of the gospel was preached with great power. Soon Samaritans were brought into the heart of the community, and then, also, Gentiles. Spontaneous movements began wherever the apostolic bands went, and it was said, ‘How these Christians love one another!’ Those who heard loved those who preached, and those who heard and were changed loved their fellow-community members.

THE CONTINUING COST OF LOVE

We saw in Hebrews 11 that the saints of God suffered incredible opposition and persecution, yet

¹ Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–37; 6:5–7; 8:7–8; 11:27–30; Rom. 13:8–10; I Cor. 13; Gal. 5:13–26; Ephes. 1:15; 4:1–15; Phil. 2:1ff.; Col. 1:8; 3:12–17; etc.

endured to the end. Likewise in New Testament times until the present day ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church’—to quote Tertullian. Such passages as II Corinthians 4:7–15; 6:3–10 and 11:23–29 tell us of the constant suffering of an apostle such as Paul—let alone the suffering of so many others. Whilst we can rightly call such love ‘costly’ yet it was not how it appeared in the eyes of the loving believers, for Paul could claim

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ. (Phil. 3:8).

THE OUTWARD-LOOKING AGAPE OF THE NEW COMMUNITY

Love was not confined to the new community. It was not just an ‘in-house’ property. The true evidence of love was the going out to cultures and nations who did not know Christ. Distinctions such as male and female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile did nothing to separate people by gender, social position or racial background². It is difficult for us, today, to realize how powerful was the love-response to the gospel. The first chapter of the First Letter to the Thessalonians is a classic example of newly converted Christians who immediately looked out to the province in which they lived, and then beyond that. Just as the first ‘non-Jewish’ church at Antioch Syria sent out Saul and Barnabas, so the church at Thessalonica caused Paul to write,

² I Corinthians 12:12–13; Galatians 3:26–29; Colossians 3:9–10.

For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit; so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, and how you turned from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (I Thes. 2:4–10).

History tells us of the great missionary movements which have broken out in century after century and claimed many cultures and lands for Christ³. That it is the Son who is to inherit the nations has been the driving force of this venture. There are still such movements in third-world countries, and in old Christian lands when revival comes to churches who ignite afresh with the love of the gospel. It can be shown, historically, that where there has been suppression of the churches and proclamation of the gospel by the governing authorities, that new churches have been born, that Christianity flourishes in the catacombs, in spite of the Inquisition, persecution, iron and bamboo curtains. This is a testimony to the power of ‘strong, strong love’.

The early churches were not without their problems, but they were problems of life and not those of death.

The Apostolic Letters keep speaking about grace and peace and love as these are so essential to the life of the localised communities of Christ. They teach the need for love and always link this with the message of the Cross, and the risen Christ. Exhortation is constantly needed, especially if a church begins to rest back on its heels. The churches live their life in the midst of many perils.

Love Waxing Cold

How could *agape*—*agape* that glows with the warmth and heat of God—become cold? *Agape* is *agape*—whatever. It cannot grow cold: it cannot diminish. Yet this is what Christ said would happen,

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love [*agape*] will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:9–11).

This statement is part of Jesus' great apocalyptic address to his disciples. The statement, ‘And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love [*agape*] will grow cold’ can be taken in two ways, (i) that in fact those who fall away never did have genuine *agape*—hence the apostolic exhortations to have genuine love (Rom. 12:9; II Cor. 6:6; I Pet. 1:22), or (ii) that they had genuine love but did not live according to it, since they fell away under pressure. In the new era of the

³ See Psalm 2 especially verses 6–8; Matthew 3:17; 17:5; 28:19–20; Acts 1:8; I Corinthians 15:24–28; Ephesians 1:19–23; Hebrews 10:12–13; Revelation 7:9–15; 11:15; 12:10; 21:22–24.

gospel many would be stimulated to be ‘false prophets’—something from which the church has always suffered— and these would ‘lead many astray’. We have clear example of this in I John 2:18–19,

Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us.

John makes it clear that these never belonged to the community of love. Even so, they must have *seemed* to have belonged. Paul in Acts 20:29–30 warned the elders of the Ephesian church,

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and *from among your own selves* will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

If within the elders there could be those who were not living in *agape*, then how much more possible amongst those who were not elders!

THE POWER OF PERSECUTION AND WICKEDNESS

If we go back to Matthew 24:9–14 we see some of the causes for love growing cold, i.e. hatred of the Christians by the nations, the going over to the enemy in apostasy, the deluding false prophets, and the multiplication of wickedness. These elements will come together to influence members of the church in every age. We have seen these very things happen in countries with totalitarian rule, and some of us have lived to see

those who gained personal advantage by deserting the Christian faith come into a terrible retribution as these systems were comparatively short lived.

All of this means we can never be sure who are the true lovers within the believing community⁴. Paul’s prediction doubtlessly came true, for Revelation 2:4 finds Christ announcing to the Ephesian church, ‘I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love [*agape*] you had at first.’ That virtually an entire church could do this seems difficult to understand. How, in fact, could it come about? So far as the Ephesian church was concerned it had become a well-organized church, doing good works, discerning false doctrine and practice and rejecting both. Christ showed the church that it was doing all this commendable work—*without love!* That virtually damned the church. Nothing was done in love! There was now no point to the church being in existence. Christ warned that unless there was repentance he would come and take the church’s golden candlestick out of its place.

LOVE AND SEDUCTION

Linked with the fall of man in Eden was the seduction of Man by the serpent. In II Corinthians 11:1–4

⁴ Judas was with the group of the disciples. Ananias and Sapphira could have brought disharmony through their hypocrisy. Paul spoke of those who lived as ‘enemies of the cross of Christ’ and whose ‘end is destruction, their God is their belly . . . with minds set on earthly things’. John spoke of Diotrophes ‘who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority’. Jude said ‘For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.’

Paul fears a similar seduction of his converts may take place,

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough.

The Corinthians were somewhat like the Galatians who were in danger of ‘quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel’. This change of gospel is in the spirit of antichrist against whom John warned his readers in his First Letter. There seems to be something fascinating about an illicit gospel—as though it would promise more than the true gospel itself. It is being back again in the illicit spirit of idolatry. Idols do not make the moral demands that God does, and so one can have adventures with an idol. One’s love for them becomes a fascinating occupation. At least that is the deceit of the idols⁵. There is also ‘the deceitfulness of riches’. ‘Delight in riches’⁶ is trust in them—trust that they will keep one secure, whereas the only trust can be in the Father who alone keeps us. This is the deceitfulness that seduces us from the love of the Father. Paul speaks of ‘love of money’ [*philagria*] as

⁵ The idols are not alone in their deceit. The lusts are ‘the deceitful lusts of the flesh’. Sin carries its own deceit. Satan goes out to deceive the world. There is also ‘the deceitfulness of riches’.

⁶ See Matthew 13:22; 19:23; Luke 8:14; I Timothy 6:17.

being the root of every kind of evil. Here, indeed, is deceit and seduction. He also speaks of ‘lovers of self’ [*philautoi*] ‘lovers of money’ [*philarguroi*]. So many things to wean us from the love of God and our true love for God!

Likewise John warns against seduction, ‘Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the Father’s love⁷ is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.’ (I John 2:15,16). What is interesting here is that John uses the verb *agapao*. How can one love the world with *agape*? Paul also uses it in II Timothy 4:10, where he says, ‘For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.’ Peter uses it in regard to Balaam ‘who loved gain from wrongdoing’⁸.

The question is, ‘Is *agapao* a fit verb to use for love of the world, or for love of anything that is not of God?’ In one sense it is not a fit verb because the love is not good and pure, but then was it not the love man received through creation *agape* indeed? To use *agape* unsuitably must mean that one is perverting true love. The love one has for idols, or the world or things illicit, is the same love God had placed in the human heart at creation but which now turns aside to wrong objects. This explains God’s anger and His jealousy when Man

⁷ We have noted before that the RSV and the NRSV differ here in their translations. The verse is talking about the Father’s love—which is the only true love that dwells in a person.

⁸ For other wrong uses of *agape* or *agapao* see Matthew 5:46 (loving only those who love you is a self-seeking love, the equivalent to *eros*, as we have discussed it). Also, see Luke 11:43; 16:13, I John 4:20.

uses *agape* for any but God and appropriate objects. This kind of illicit 'loving' is the most dreadful of all sins. Indeed it is the *esse* of sin.

The point we make is a significant one: the wrong use of *agapao* indicates a wrong relationship, a spurning of God's true love, a perverting of love for an end which is not genuine love. Thus we can see how a person's love can 'grow cold'. There is something frightening in this thought. Take, for example, the story in Luke chapter seven regarding the Pharisee—Simon—and the woman who was a sinner. The woman had an intense love for Jesus, but Simon did not. In the story that Jesus told about two debtors, the woman who was a sinner owed her creditor much, but the one who seemed to owe so little was surely Simon. At least he would have seen himself as owing little when in fact he—like us all—owed much. He was witnessing an extraordinary demonstration of love as the woman wept tears and washed Jesus' feet because of his forgiveness—'Your sins which are many are forgiven'. The Pharisee could see nothing noble in it all. Any love he had had for God was not merely cold: the man had a terrible dryness of soul, a frightening frigidity of spirit.

WHAT LIES BEHIND SEDUCTION AND IDOLATRY?

How could the church at Ephesus *abandon* its first love—Christ? Peter speaks of a person who lacked the good things such as faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection [*philadelphia*] and love [*agape*]⁹. The point is that he

⁹ See II Peter 1:9 et al.

ought not to have lacked these since he was in Christ. Then why were they lacking in him? Why had he become 'blind and short-sighted'? Because he had 'forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins'. The 'forgetting' was 'contracted forgetfulness' and 'wilful and culpable obliviousness'¹⁰; in other words the person has abandoned his love because he has deliberately forgotten God's forgiveness of his sins.

God's love is shown through the forgiveness of sins, and one must refuse to remember that he was forgiven if he does not wish to be confronted continually with the love of the Father. To gladly remember that one has been thoroughly purified from one's sins is to be continually renewed in the love of God. In order to love idols and the world one has to refuse to remember the love of God which obligates him to responsive love and obedience.

From Cold to Hot and Remaining Hot

Jesus told the church at Ephesus¹¹ to 'Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first.' They had fallen from love and from doing the works inspired by that first love. To the church at Thyatira Jesus said, 'I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.' The 'latter works' were surely the works of a more mature love than even those inspired by 'the first love' (cf. Phil. 1:6–9).

¹⁰ Comment—ad loc—in Jamison, Fausset and Brown's *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oliphants, London, ed. 1961)

¹¹ Revelation 2:5, cf. 2:19.

The man in II Peter 1:9 must *remember* he was purified from his old sins. To do that he would need to repent of his ‘contracted forgetfulness’ and ‘wilful and culpable obliviousness’.

He who has begun to love the world and all that is in the world, would have to repent and turn and ‘keep himself from idols’ as clearly as the Thessalonians had ‘turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God’¹². He would have to hear Jude’s injunction ‘keep yourselves in the love of God’¹³.

Zephaniah 3:17 is capable of a number of translations, such as ‘he will quiet you in his love’ (*NIV*), ‘he will renew you by his love’ (*JB*), ‘he will renew you in his love’ (*RSV, NRSV*), ‘renews his love’ (Moffatt), ‘he will rest in his love’ (*AV*). This kind of promise is consistent with *chesed*—God’s continual ‘loving kindness’—and his *ahab*—His love as in Hosea which loves Ephraim freely—the Ephraim of whom he had once said, ‘Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone’. Then there had seemed to be no hope for Ephraim, but *ahab* came and Ephraim heard God saying,

How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
How can I hand you over, O Israel!

.....
I will not execute my fierce anger,
I will not again destroy Ephraim.

So then, let there be repentance where there was coldness. Let the few coals be fanned into live embers and then into a fire in the depths of the human spirit. Let the anamnesis of the Holy Communion— the dynamic memory of that cross—come blazingly alive to

The almost dead heart, so that it comes again into life like the bones and corpses in the valley of the vision.

Let the Presence of the Holy One become renewed holy one, the fullness of great and glorious grace flushing out the debris and detritus of sin, rebellion, idolatry and near apostasy, and in its place let there be the heartwarming love of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Let this ‘further grace’ inspire to ‘greater grace’ in the proclamation of the gospel of love- the good news of Him Who is love. Let love move in new power for the liberation of the nations from hatred and bitterness into the freedom which comes with true agape: God taking up residence in the human heart; finding his home in God.

¹² I John 5:21; I Thessalonians 1:9.

¹³ See Jude 21 where ‘Keep yourselves in the love of God’, can possibly be translated in the middle voice, ‘Be being kept in the love of God’.

POSTSCRIPT TO 'AH! STRONG, STRONG LOVE!'

The Substance of the Book

The beginning and end of this book is 'God is love' and 'Love is of God'. This is the pure essence of our subject. Love is personal, since God is love. Love is not known outside of God since love is of Him, from Him, and from none else and nowhere else. God dwelling in us, and we dwelling in God means love is present, and love is active in our lives.

Created in God's image we were made to be creatures of love, but the Fall denied our origins and our way of life. We turned to another object of love—our self. Self in turn had to look for an object it could deify in order to allow us some kind of creaturehood. The objects of our love are always the idols. Notice that we do not live without love, but the love we have is perverted since it can only have its true origin in God. He alone can be its object.

Man then has an imitation love, or—we might say—a fallen form of love. Words for such love have been coined in various languages and cultures. The covenant-people of God—the people of Israel—had their word, *ahab*, and a support word was *chesed*. The Greeks

had four words to describe various elements of love, but the Christians seized on *agape* and gave it the content of revealed truth. They could say, 'God is *agape*. *Agape* comes from God.'

Whatever words Man-outside-of-God uses for love do not really matter: Man cannot love in the *agape* mode. That content is not in him. So he must get along with his own devised love, and this in many cultures has much the content that *eros* has in Greek. Modern usage in English of the word *eros* is generally connected with man-woman love and the term we use 'sex'. However, that is not how it has always been used. It has been used of the highest forms of love a human can execute. Man can exercise a rich form of love. Of course, he can also exercise very low forms of love and still give them the term *eros*. Even pornography can come under that term.

Eros and Agape

The two forms of love are utterly different, although sometimes they may appear to be one and the same. *Eros*, although often magnificent in its accomplishments is essentially self-seeking and out to get. It will give—even magnificently—in order to get. The self-deceit of it is that it does not think it is selfish, yet its selfishness is of the worst order because of this. Springing from the human ego it can never transcend its humanity which is, in fact, fallen humanity.

It is only natural that *eros* should be popular because on the one hand it seems to meet the demand of conscience to give, and on the other hand the sheerest

pleasure that humanity can achieve lies within its realm. When it comes to man-woman love it seems to have a natural ally in what is called 'sex'—in the polarity of the male-female encounter. The text of the book will show that genuine man-woman love cannot be achieved since it must derive from *agape*. All relationships in order to be authentic must derive from God—by nature of the case. Sooner or later *eros* will not fully satisfy human beings, whether male or females, children or adults. Noble ideals built on *eros* will bring enormous pain and wounding through inevitable failure. Even if *eros* is substantially maintained it will fail to give the utmost which the human spirit desires, even if that desire is kept secret. On the lowest level *eros* will defile and brutalise humanity.

Man Blocked off from God's Love—*Agape*

We saw that Man having defected from God cannot return. He has neither the will nor the capacity. Out of his *eros*-idolatry he will seek to find satisfaction, goal, vocation and security, but the gods cannot give these things. Not only has Man rejected the truth of God for a lie and worships and serves the creation rather than the Creator, but he is under judgement. His self-willed autonomy prevents him even from seeking God, but God's judgements on him add to his rejection of God whose wrath he sees as unjustifiable. At best man must persist in *eros* and the *eros* way of living. So all his relationships become defective and even crumble, and he is without authentic love. In love's place he begins to hate.

God Reveals Himself to Sinful Man

God has always revealed Himself to sinful Man—a fact which Man deplores and resists. God reveals Himself by many media, and He always acts in history. His action of creation and covenant lead by His careful planning to the incarnation of his Son as Jesus Christ, and then to the Cross on which the Son makes atonement for the sins of the world, thus making the way open for reconciliation with God. The Son brings life to Man who is dead because of the fall, and because of his original and active sin.

The sight of God the Father initiating all things for man, and especially salvation by grace gives Man a revelation of the Father as love. The receiving of forgiveness, cleansing, justification and eternal life are experiences which a person has, and by which he knows God's love because something extraordinary has happened to him. He now knows God as love.

God as Love Comes to Dwell in Man

In particular, the New testament teaches us (i) God the Father is love, (ii) God the Son is not love, but 'the Son of his [God's] love', and (iii) the Spirit is the Spirit of love. Biblical theology shows us the Triune Godhead is a love-unity, indeed *the* love-unity, i.e. God is love. The Three Persons of the Godhead honour one another, give to one another and serve one another. This dynamic love-unity they bring to those who have come to salvation, and they dwell in them, as those human persons are also made to dwell in God. Dwelling in God is

dwelling in love and is love dwelling in them.

Because of this the redeemed persons can now love with *agape* since God Himself is the *agape*, and has residence as love within the persons—the new community of Christ. A number of passages show the nature of *agape*—e.g. I Corinthians chapter 13—and such descriptions show the impossibility of a human being, unaided, being able to love this way. Because of God in him, and he being in God, God can motivate and enable *agape* actions—true love.

Agape Relationships in a Fallen Human Society

No one needs to have it proved that Man has not brought about hideous wars, terror, divisions, hatred, suffering and emotional repression, wounding and the like. In regard to creation he has despoiled what God has made, exploited it, and made the world even to be a dangerous place in which to live. His *eros* cannot heal this. Everywhere this is the case, from the smallest family up to the largest international warring. Relationships cannot succeed within the realm of *eros*, but within the dynamic of *agape* life can be different.

In the text of the book we see this can change relationships because they are not ego-centred, but ‘other-person centred’ even to being ‘other-person concentrated’, and so others are placed before one’s own self. The modes of the Triune Godhead are replicated dynamically in the believer and the believing community. For example, love replaces hatred, forgiveness is instant where and when one is sinned against.

God’s forgiveness and cleansing has purified the heart from all past rancours, spite, guilt, anger—and the like—and so the believer sees the sins of himself and his brother as being ‘covered’. He does not seek to be suspicious or critical, but loving and ‘covering’ where the failure of another is concerned. Only the atonement can actually cover that sin, but *agape* sees it as covered.

Note that whilst *agape* perfects in the ultimate, human beings—even redeemed human beings—will always be tempted to fall, to revert to *eros*-ways, and *agape* must act as God has acted (i) leave Man—even redeemed Man—in his sin and attached to his idols until he wearies of them, realizes his error and cries out for help, (ii) proffer continuous grace for failure, continually covering the sin that has happened. The believer, as God does, does not accuse, condemn and alienate, but keeps in reconciliation and helping grace.

MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS

In *eros* relationships men and women seek to gain something from each other. They may even give in order to get, but then that is not genuine giving and is always felt by the ‘conscripted’ receiver. *Agape* gives without expecting or demanding a response and a repayment. In pre-marital relationships there is a wrong demand. In marital relationships *eros* will inevitably fail because the other person cannot supply what the *eros*-ego demands. This often leads one or other—or both—partners to seek outside of marriage. So the damage is done. With *agape* no images are devised,

and no demands are made. Each loves the other with the love of the Father.

True marital relationships lead on to true familial relationships and training in and by *agape* is the true order. True familial order tends to true societal order, and true societal order is then in the mode of the Trinitarian love.

The Outgoing of Love, and its Glorious Climax

Love we have learned in our text is God Himself, and in the Triune relationship each Person honours the other, gives to the other and serves the other, so the believing community does just this. Each honours, gives to, and serves all others. This works out in many ways, but chiefly in proclaiming the saving word of God—the gospel. In the process of proclamation the material needs are also seen and taken into consideration, but the pain of man in guilt, and emotional crippling of sin and judgements are relieved by the effective preaching of the grace and love of God in Christ.

This is not just done to recruit others to the believing community, but is the love of the Triune God working through His servants to redeem the lost. The outcome is not just salvation from damning judgements—though of course it includes that—but it is to bring men and women to freedom of *agape* in this life and full fellowship with God in the next. That full fellowship means the redeemed as sons of God are conformed to the image of His Son and attain unto

'the liberty of the glory of the sons of God' which is total fellowship with the Triune God, being admitted into the mystery of the Godhead, and becoming wholly partakers of the divine nature, i.e. sharing in God who is *agape*. In no sense is Man divinised—i.e. takes on deity—but he is one with God who is love.

In this love he receives eternal life, is glorified with a substantial body of glory, receives the inheritance of glory, is inducted into the body called 'a kingdom of priests' and with others will reign forever.

Conclusion

When all of this is seen then it is also realized that God is love from beginning to end, from before time to after time. His plan before time was to bring Man to this glorious end. That is why we say God is love from beginning to end, and that He acts in this love from beginning to end, ultimately making His children to attain to eternal *agape*. This, this is love. This, this is *agape*.

Note: Those who have read the book from beginning to end should find this Postscript to be a helpful refresher and review. Those who have read it as an introduction to the book should be inspired to read the book and its substantiating materials.