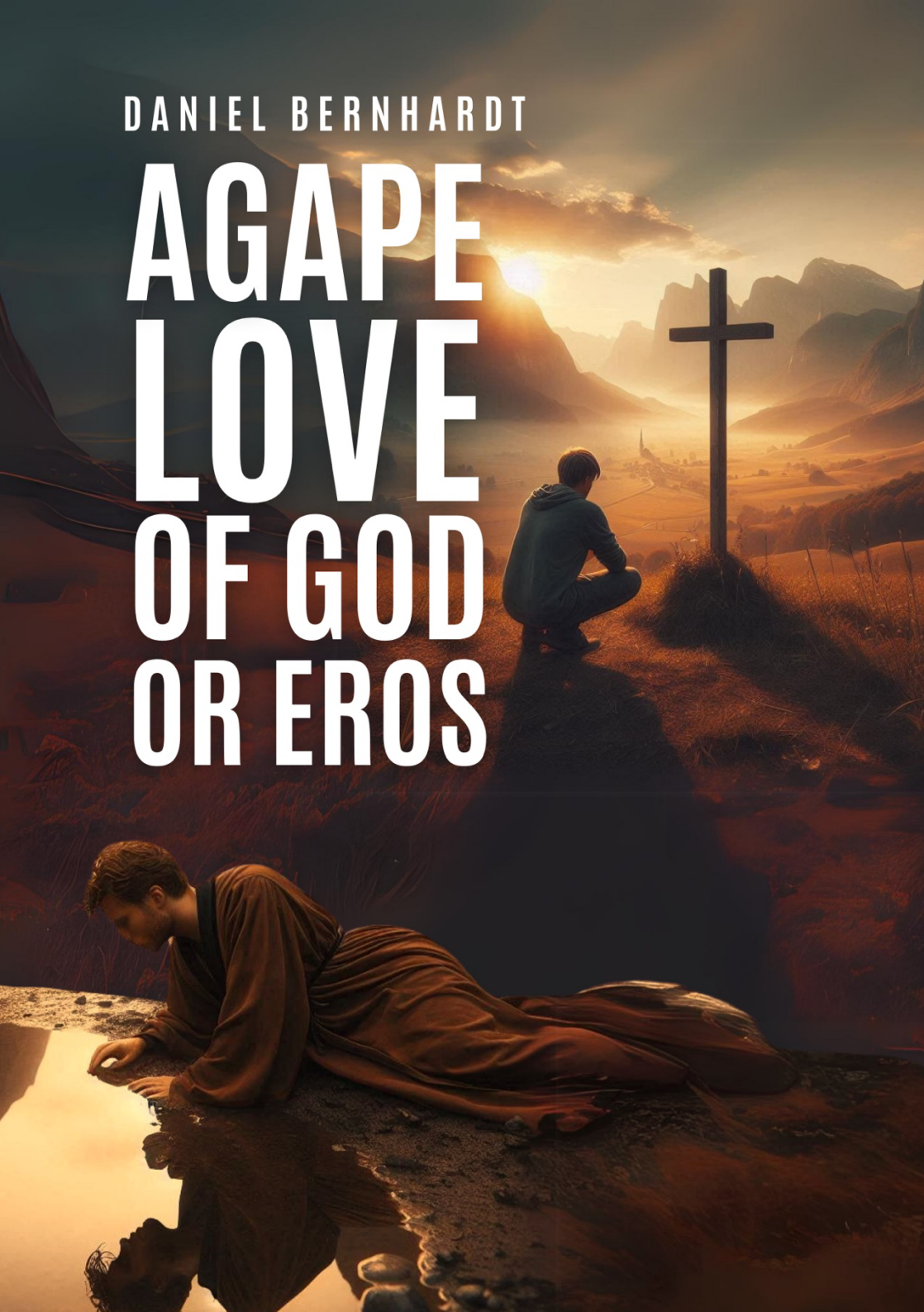


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# AGAPE LOVE OF GOD OR EROS



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Companion book to the lesson **The Agape Love of God**



First edition, September 2024.  
Second edition, January 2025.

## Introduction

In the Scriptures we read that God is love<sup>1</sup>. The word used in the original Greek is agape<sup>2</sup>. The Greek language has a few words besides agape for the English word “love”. What does it mean that God is agape love? How do the Scriptures describe and reveal God's agape? How did Christ's life here on earth manifest it? Why did so many of God's people, and especially the leadership at the time of Christ, find themselves struggling with this revelation of God? What were the concepts that hindered their acceptance of Christ? Could the same thing happen to us? What are the influences of Hellenic origin that blocked the expansion of early Christianity, and still do to this day? How is this heavenly agape love contrasted with human love, and with the love of philosophy?

In considering all these questions, we need to mention that there are some instances in which the word agape is used with a different meaning than the one applied to God. For instance, consider the following verse:

1 John 2:<sup>15</sup> Love [agape] not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love [agape] the world, the love [agape] of the Father is not in him.

We notice that man can love the world with agape. In fact, we see it in the experience of Demas:

2 Timothy 4:<sup>10</sup> For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; ...

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 4:8

<sup>2</sup> In this booklet we will refer to agape love in general, using the word agape, without going into the detail of whether in the original is the root of the word, the verb agapao, or the noun agape, or some other variation of the same word such as agapate, or agapao, etc.

But we see is that if someone agapes the world, what does he not have? He does not have the agape of God. Thus, agape for the world has a different meaning than God's agape. Why?

1 John 2:<sup>16</sup> 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.

For all that is in the world, which is the desire and longing to satisfy oneself, is not of God. Therefore, we find that the love for the things of this world is not of God because it is foreign to Him. Something similar happens with peace:

John 14:<sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Jesus says that the world gives peace, but it is not His peace. The world may call it peace, but the only true peace that exists is the peace that Christ can give. For that reason He would later on say:

John 16:<sup>33</sup> These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

It is in Christ that there is peace; outside of Him, that is, in the world, there is no peace, but only tribulation. In the same way, God is agape, and although love for the world is called agape a few times<sup>3</sup>, it is not the agape of God, nor is it really love, because the love of the Father is not in him who loves the world, and consequently there is hatred against the beloved Son of God:

John 15:<sup>18</sup> If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. <sup>19</sup> If ye were of the world, the world would love [phileo] his own: but because ye are not of the world, but

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 11:43; John 3:19; 12:43; 2 Peter 2:15.

I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

That love of the world, that hate, has death in it:

John 8:<sup>39</sup> ... Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. <sup>40</sup> But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. <sup>41</sup> Ye do the deeds of your father. ... <sup>42</sup> Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love [agape] me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. ... <sup>44</sup> Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, ...

And if that love of the world intrinsically has the murder of the Son of God, how can it be called love? Evidently it is not love, and just as Christ condescended to use the word peace for that which men call peace but it is not true peace, so the Word of God calls agape love that which is not God's agape nor love, but which men do call it so.

Isaiah 55:<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. <sup>9</sup> For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are my ways higher than your ways, And my thoughts than your thoughts.

Therefore, this study will try to show and give meaning to the Agape of God, the agape that is in God, by looking at the life and teachings of Jesus and the testimony of His apostles. And there we will see that the way in which Jesus, John and Paul define God's agape makes it impossible to have anything in common with the love of the world, as there is nothing in common between Christ and Belial.

The author of this booklet has made a summary of *Agape and Eros*<sup>4</sup>, a book written by Anders Nygren. This book was first published during the 1930s, in two parts, and was originally written in Swedish. This booklet is my summary of Part I of that book, **together** with my own notes and comments. With this in mind, if the reader wishes to know Anders Nygren's opinion, although he will find the structure and central line of Nygren's thought here, we recommend reading his published work instead, given that my subtractions, additional comments and expansions might not reflect the thought of the author of *Agape and Eros*.

## God's Agape

When searching the Scriptures for a starting point to establish the basis of God's love, one may be tempted to look first into the twofold commandment of love.

Mark 12:<sup>30</sup> And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment. <sup>31</sup> And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Here we have the two great commandments. However, if we start building the concept of God's agape love from the commandment, we will block our understanding of agape, given the fact that a commandment is something that is demanded. This might surprise us: how can something like love be demanded? Precisely because of this preconception, it is better not to begin an analysis of agape love from the commandment.

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<sup>4</sup> Nygren Anders, (1930, 1936), *Agape and Eros*, Harper & Row Publishers Inc.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agape\\_and\\_Eros](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agape_and_Eros)

The commandments cited by Jesus are at the beginning of the Old Testament<sup>5</sup>, but it is only in His coming and life lived here on earth that we are given the complete and total revelation of God's agape love. In this sense, it is Jesus who completely redefines the concept. And although the revelation of that love had already been made, humanity needed to know the true meaning of love.

So, where can we begin to build the concept of agape love? We are going to do it through what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. And we will do so precisely in contrast to the Pharisaic teachings, and even in contrast to what was written in parts of the Torah. Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, completely reframes what the commandment really means:

Matthew 5:<sup>38</sup> Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: <sup>39</sup> But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup> And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloke also. <sup>41</sup> And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. <sup>42</sup> Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. <sup>43</sup> Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. <sup>44</sup> But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; <sup>45</sup> That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

You have heard about the relationship you are to have with your neighbor, Jesus tells them; however, “I say to you, love your enemy”. This was clearly different from the law of an eye for an eye and a

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<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; Leviticus 19:18, 34

tooth for a tooth<sup>6</sup>, the strict principle of justice that was read in the Torah. The reason Jesus gives for such an invitation is noteworthy. This love for the enemy must not be based on our hatred towards others, but on God's love for the wicked. The reason for this love is that He makes the sun rise on the good and the bad, and gives the blessing of rain on the just and the unjust. In other words, love for one's enemy has its foundation on the fact that God loves both the righteous and the wicked, and it is in this way, by loving our enemies, that we become children of our heavenly Father.

And here, I would like to suggest, is the key upon which we can begin to build the concept of agape love. It is communion with God that gives meaning and sense to God's agape. And it is precisely at this point that we see the religion of the Pharisees coming into direct collision with the teachings of Jesus. For Jesus does not come to establish a new religion. He Himself says:

Matthew 5:<sup>17</sup> Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

Not only does He not come to establish a new religion, but He comes to fulfill and live the religion of the Torah! Nor does He come to proclaim a new God. The God of the Old Testament, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is His own God<sup>7</sup>. What Jesus is trying to bring is, not a new idea about God or His laws and messages, but about man's communion with God. What is distinctive about this is precisely what generates the conflict with the religious leadership of His time. What does this distinctive message consist of? Jesus says:

Mark 2:<sup>17</sup> ... I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

And with this phrase, He demolishes the whole intrinsic and legalistic Pharisaic scale of piety values. This, for them, was a direct attack on

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<sup>6</sup> Exodus 21:23-24; Leviticus 24:19-20

<sup>7</sup> John 20:17



the prevailing religious values. Why? Because there was, in that religious experience, a difference between the just and the unjust. There was a difference in value between the good and the bad. And this feeling of value was driven by religious sentiments. In such a view, the righteous man loved the law of God, and not purely in the legalistic sense in which it is usually held. There was a link between the religious man and the law. The religious man, in contemplating the law, felt an attraction to it, he delighted in the law of the Lord. It was his observance of the law that gave him value and made him acceptable before the Lord, and in that he found delight. And it was in light of this understanding of value that he read, for example:

Psalms 1:<sup>1</sup> Blessed *is* the man That walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. <sup>2</sup> But his delight *is* in the law of the Lord; And in his law doth he meditate day and night. <sup>3</sup> And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, That bringeth forth his fruit in his season; His leaf also shall not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. <sup>4</sup> The ungodly *are* not so: But *are* like the chaff which the wind driveth away. <sup>5</sup> Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Thus, in such a perspective, a clear distinction is made, both in the sight of God and in the sight of men, between the just man and the sinner. And from this view, the religious spirit of the time drew and derived value. We see this clearly manifested in the prayer of the Pharisee, who thanked God that he was not like the publican<sup>8</sup>.

But now, Jesus comes and throws all this out the window.

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 18:11

Mark 2:<sup>17</sup> ... I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

And of Jesus it is said:

Matthew 9:<sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?

Thus we can see that those who had been brought up with a religious devotion to the law saw this phrase of Jesus and His relationship with publicans and sinners as a direct assault on the very foundation of their morality and religion. And what made it worse, was that Jesus did not keep it to His own private judgment, but that when He ate with sinners and publicans, and called not the righteous but sinners, He did it not for Himself, but in fulfillment of His mission; He did it in the Father's name, it was God Himself acting in Him, calling sinners and publicans. Christ, it became clearly evident to them, came commissioned by God Himself, thus reflecting God's will. And what is God's will? To have fellowship with sinful man. He wants to draw to Himself the publican and the sinner. Thus, the relationship of communion with God is not governed by man's selfish perception of the law but by God's law of love. God's attitude toward man is not governed by man's attitude toward God's law but is based on God's love and desire to draw him to Himself.

And so, two different models of communion with God are presented, leading inevitably to a conflict between the two. Thus, we see Jesus engaged in endless discussions with the Pharisees on these points, because for the Pharisees the presentation of communion with God based on God's law of love and not on their understanding of His law seemed to them to be a violation of the divine order and of God's majesty. We see how the conflict is to them a conflict of communion with God based on obtaining value through keeping the law versus communion with God based on receiving value through His love for us. And although in Scripture we find that God's love is revealed to

those who keep His commandments and His covenant, this is only confirmation that God remains faithful to His promises in spite of man's weakness. It does not imply that God does not want to have fellowship with the sinner. And that is the point which had been lost and which Christ came to reestablish in the first place. This is where those who based their value, relationship, and communion with God in the terms of keeping God's law and His righteousness, found the life and teaching of Christ, and His appeal to publicans and sinners, to be blasphemous.

However, this transvaluation of values that Christ presents – what was it based on? Why are sinners the ones called? Let us remember that in the previous concept, it is only by virtue of a righteous life that we can gain God's approval and consequently be incorporated into His communion. But of course, when Jesus comes and turns this order of things upside down, we cannot help but wonder, why? We ask ourselves, is it the discovery of something that was not evident? Is it a reversal of values, or could there be something of greater value in the sinner? And if we look in the Old Testament, already there, in the law that was so much held as the means of communion with God, there were clear signs that such communion is not because there was something of greater value in the recipient. For it says:

Deuteronomy 7:<sup>7</sup> The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: <sup>8</sup> But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Thus, we see that according to Christ, God's love is sovereign and arises from Himself. And the fact that God's love is sovereign is evident precisely in the fact that it is addressed to sinners; we see that communion with God is distinguished from any other communion in any other religious system by the fact that it depends

exclusively on God's agape love. To the question of why God loves, the answer lies exclusively in the fact that it is proper to His nature to love and is independent of the object of love.

Now, having seen this, we are in a position to briefly summarize God's agape love in four main characteristics.

1.) Agape love is spontaneous and unselfish: If we look for any explanation of God's love external to Himself, we will not find it. It is in this sense that it is unselfish or not motivated. It does not act out of self-interest. It is not the object of His love that determines the existence of agape, although it is true that the object of that love may or may not allow the expression of that agape love in him. God's love does not seek something in man to motivate Him to love him. God's love does not seek the just man in order to love him. When it is affirmed that God loves man, this is not a judgment about *man*, but a description of what *God* is like. And it is precisely this spontaneous and disinterested love, having no motive outside of itself, that characterizes the action of Jesus in His search for publicans and sinners. And it was precisely in doing this that He knew He was following the Father's will, and thus revealing His mind and heart. God's will is the search for the lost outside of a legal relationship. When the relationship and communion with God are built on a legal platform, that is, in relation to how the object interacts with the law, divine love is ultimately dependent on the value of the object. But in Jesus a love is revealed that breaks through every barrier, refusing to be controlled by the value of the object of its love. Thus, all love that is motivated is human, yet divine love is not motivated by the value of its object. Christ was not interested in highlighting the love that is deserved, but quite the contrary, He was interested in revealing the undeserved love of God as the basis of communion with Him, totally outside the legal scheme.

2.) Agape love is indifferent to value: We have already mentioned that God's agape love is indifferent to the value of its object, but we need to clarify something here. When Christ comes and seems to reverse the values of the righteous and the sinner, it is not a reversal of values, as if the sinner has more value in the eyes of God. Something deeper is going on, and that is the application of the principle that any thought, any slightest element of valuation in relationship and communion with God, is totally misplaced. When the love of God is directed to the sinner, then this point is made clear: that all thought of value is excluded beforehand, for if the Holy One loves the sinner, it is not because of his sin but in spite of it. But when the love of God is shown to the one who is religious and holy, there is always the risk of thinking that God loves such a one by virtue of his righteousness. But this would be a denial of the agape love of God as Jesus describes it. It is only when we remove all value and merit from the object of love that we can begin to appreciate God's agape. Neither the just nor the unjust place limits on God's love. God loves both the sinner and the righteous.

3.) Agape love is creative: Looking at these characteristics of God's agape, we discover how unique it is. But what really accentuates this characteristic is that, being divine love, it consequently carries within itself the creativity of God. God does not love what has value in itself, but what lacks merit and value, yet it is in that act of love that He gives it value. Agape love does not depend at all on the value of the object; it does not *recognize* value in what surrounds it - it *creates* it. Agape is a love that loves, and it is by loving that it creates value. The man who is loved by God has no value in himself; what gives him value is the fact that God loves him. Some may come to think and speculate about what is known as the "infinite value of the human being". However, the suggestion that man inherently has that value may give the idea that God's love is fixed in that value. To go down that road is to totally distort God's forgiveness, and would end up sealing His forgiveness and love in that "spark" – in that supposed

inherent human potentiality. But we see that this is not so. When Christ says “your sins are forgiven”, that forgiveness is not given as the recognition of any value, but as the giving of a gift. Thus, the forgiveness of sins becomes the creative work of divine power, and it is placed on the level of gifts of a healing character such as the healing of the paralytic.

4.) Agape is the originator of communion with God: Agape not only *determines* and *establishes* the characteristics of communion with God, but it *initiates* it. In the relationship between God and man, the initiative is only on the side of divine agape. Understanding God's agape, we see that every other initiative of communion with God is useless, both for the man of righteous ways and for the sinner. Not even repentance, conversion or a righteous man will move God to love. In this way, the path of righteousness is rejected as a way to lead man to God. And not only this, but the way of humiliation and change is rejected, too – so we reach the conclusion that there is no way from man to God. Communion with God only exists because of *God's* actions; God Himself is the one who comes, reveals Himself and meets man and offers him His communion. Thus, there is no way from man to God – there is only a way from God to man, the way of divine forgiveness, the way of divine love, Christ Jesus. Christ is the revelation of God's agape. Therefore, agape is the way from God to man, and thus, Christ is the Agape of God.

We see these concepts illustrated in the parables. And perhaps the first thing we would like to emphasize is the two diametrically opposed types of religions that exist in the world. The first is demonstrative in character and the second is revelatory. The first is that which takes life in its natural course and elevates it to a religious sphere and discovers universal religious rules that apply to all circumstances. The other type of religion is one that is revelatory in character, meaning by this that it is made clear only because God Himself comes down to reveal Himself and make it possible for us to

have communion with Him. And Jesus' whole ministry, and specifically the parables, has that authoritative character of being God's revelation of communion with God. It is not a revelation of truths that are inherent in themselves to the human being, but rather, these truths are specifically God's revelation.

In that sense, the parables do NOT affirm that God must act rationally. Being the Holy of holies, it is rational and self-evident that He should shun contact with sinners, yet Jesus comes to proclaim just the opposite. While God's majesty and glory remain, Jesus comes to proclaim that God is seeking sinners, and thus understands His mission:

Mark 2:<sup>17</sup>... They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

There is no reason for this outside of the pure, spontaneous and unselfish love of God.

And we have as an example the parable of the laborers<sup>9</sup>. In this parable, God is the father of the family who enters into communion with those who are neither worthy nor deserving of such communion. Precisely, the central message of the parable is to overthrow the attempt to regulate communion with God through worthiness, merit and principles of justice. The householder's attitude of equal pay for unequal work clearly expresses the principle that He causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. The principle of justice requires a fair proportion between wage and the work done. However, the central purpose of this parable is to completely exclude the principle of humanly perceived justice from the relationship with God. Self-interested justice must yield to spontaneous and disinterested love. And this love is God's true definition of justice.

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 20:1-16

God's justice is to do what is right, and to God, the thing which is right is to show mercy and kindness to those doing nothing worthy of it.

Psalms 89:<sup>14</sup> Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

It is impossible to behold God's face without seeing first His mercy and truth. And these are the visible manifestation of the justice and judgement of God. Agape does not exact a price as payment for transgression. It freely forgives. Justice that requires punishment is at war with Agape. As Jesus says:

Matthew 12:<sup>7</sup> But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

Man's justice which is separated from Agape requires condemnation. If we know the agape of God we would see that God requires mercy, not sacrifice, not payment for sin. Because of man's confusion about the Agape of God, he thinks that Christ was sent to satisfy justice and make payment.

Isaiah 53:<sup>4</sup> Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

But Agape keeps no record of wrong<sup>10</sup>. It seeks no price to be paid; it openly and freely forgives.

Thus, only beholding Agape in its purity will eliminate the human principle of justice. It overthrows the principle of inflicting punishment completely. This will eliminate the offensiveness of God's love for the lost and cause us to realize that God's spontaneous and selfless love is *also* for the righteous.

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:5



With spontaneous and unselfish love, the householder gives the workers of the last hour a far greater reward than they could ask for. Those who have worked more, subject to the concepts of just proportions, consider that they should now receive more. It is true that they cannot demand more from the Father of the family, but compared to those who came later, surely “justice” would demand that more work should be compensated with more pay! When this expectation is broken, the workers complain. Even though it is by grace that others have received more than they have earned, and thus the concept of merit and reward has been totally disrupted, they still complain out of a sense of entitlement to receive more. Then they use the principle of grace to make a higher legal claim. But the householder says to them, “If you come with the principles of justice, then let us stick to justice”:

Matthew 20:<sup>13</sup> But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

When spontaneous and selfless love and generosity are manifested, the order of justice is obsolete and invalidated. But for those who want the system of justice to be maintained, grace, generosity and love itself become a cause of offense:

Matthew 20:<sup>15</sup> ... Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

Those who can make no claim, (the sinners) accept love and selfless generosity, but those who can make a claim (the “righteous” in this case) claim for merit-based justice, and refuse to accept unconditional, spontaneous and selfless love. Thus, the last will be first and the first will be the last.

We find this exact same testimony in the parable of the prodigal son. And in case anyone still has doubts about the Father's spontaneous and selfless love, the elder brother is there to represent the lawful order. From his point of view, from the point of view of justice, the

conduct of his younger brother in no way justifies such a waste and feast of love made by the Father. And it is precisely this that demonstrates that the Father's love is spontaneous and unmotivated.

There we see that the love that Christ came to reveal from the Father is a love that is directly opposed to any kind of rational calculation or computation. Agape love gives and sacrifices where rational calculations say that sacrifice is useless. Agape sows its seed, even where there would seem to be no hope because of the soil. When the Sower goes out to sow, He knows that much of the seed will be lost and will not bear fruit. However, He does not worry about that, but sows left and right in a carefree display of love. We see the same thing in the parable of the lost sheep. It is not cold calculation that leads Him to leave the 99 in the wilderness to go in search of the one that is lost.

Finally, let us note the parable of the wicked servant<sup>11</sup>. Here we see, in the unpayable astronomical debt owed by the servant, that the divine Agape manifests itself as unlimited and unconditional. But if God's love is unlimited and unconditional, He demands of those who receive His forgiveness and love, that this same unlimited and unconditional forgiveness and love be shared, not seven times, but seventy times seven.

Matthew 18:<sup>33</sup> Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

Thus, we see how Christian ethics is completely based on relationship and communion with God, and can be summarized in the words of Jesus:

Matthew 10:<sup>8</sup> ... freely ye have received, freely give.

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<sup>11</sup> Mathew 18:23-35

Put in clearer terms, our relationship with our neighbor is regulated by our relationship with God.

I would like to end this section by looking again at the commandment of love, now within the parameters of God's Agape as revealed in Jesus.

Mark 12:<sup>30</sup> And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment. <sup>31</sup> And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

The love required here has its prototype in the Agape manifested by God, and therefore must be spontaneous, disinterested, non-calculating, unlimited and unconditional.

This is true first with respect to the first commandment, love toward God. When man has experienced the love of God, when in spite of his utter worthlessness and helplessness he has been brought into communion with God, it is now established that he belongs completely to Christ. The unconditional nature of the love he experienced now demands, or more realistically, produces a desire that his surrender also be complete and unconditional. This is the natural reaction to becoming aware of God's love. Therefore, the commandment says with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, all the days of your life<sup>12</sup>. These words declare absolute devotion and submission.

The love of God is neither an acquisitive love nor a love of friendship, because both of these arise or take their impulse from man himself. If the love of God were acquisitive, even if God is seen as the highest and noblest good, He would become only a means of satisfying man's desires, and we would be dealing with an egocentric and not a

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<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 11:1

theocentric religion. Nor is there room for a love of friendship, since such love presupposes an equality between divine and human love, which does not exist.

And here we may ask, to what extent can love for God be spontaneous and unmotivated? Is not our love for God motivated to the highest degree? For Jesus, the fulfillment of the first commandment, as revealed in His life, means to be completely and totally possessed by God. It is no longer His will, no longer His words, no longer His works, but it is the Father who dwells in Him<sup>13</sup>. God's love has chosen Him and touched Him so deeply that He has abandoned Himself to this love to the point that it can be said that there is nothing that He has of himself. Belonging to God without reservation, to the point of voluntarily abandoning the totality of my will because of His love, ends up displacing motivation as the source of that love. The love of God in the human being does not seek to gain anything except God. But the mere thought of gain is essentially foreign to the concept of Agape. When God gives His love freely and in exchange for nothing, there is nothing left for man to gain in the act of loving God. In other words, it is God's unlimited and unconditional Agape love that removes any gain that man might have as a result of loving God; for God already loves in an unlimited and unconditional way. Thus, love for God loses its character of being a deserved gain and becomes pure and unfeigned. This comes from the fact that having given oneself completely to God without reserve and being conscious of that, one is completely and totally devoted to doing God's will. It is obedience to God without considering a reward.

Having thus covered the first commandment, let us focus on the second commandment, which says: "You shall love your neighbor as

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<sup>13</sup> John 14:10

yourself.” From this commandment, we would like to highlight four important aspects:

a. Christian love, once defined, is not simply a love for humanity, a sense of affinity and sympathy for the human race, an altruism because of the bonds of brotherhood - quite the contrary. To put the commandment in these terms is to empty it of its spirit. Christian love is of a purely religious character. Agape exists and manifests itself within the context of the person being the recipient of God's Agape love. There the love of neighbor can manifest and have its being. Thus, love for one's neighbor has the same characteristics as God's love for the sinner, in the sense of being unlimited, spontaneous and unselfish. Agape love to the neighbor, when it exists, shares the attribute of being creative, of creating and restoring relationships where before they were broken or non-existent. It is a love of divine, not human, origin. In these terms, human love is self-interested love, and ends up manifesting itself as a natural state of self-love that extends its influence to all who are benefactors of the self. And this natural self-love, which sinners also possess, is contrasted with the divine Agape love in the words of Christ, when He says:

Luke 6:<sup>32</sup> For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. <sup>33</sup> And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. <sup>34</sup> And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup> But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to the evil*. <sup>36</sup> Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

The attitude of the natural man towards his neighbor is a mirror of his neighbor's attitude towards him: love is reciprocated with love, hatred is reciprocated with hatred. Christian love, on the other hand,

is a reflection of God's love - that is its model. Consequently, Christian love has no basis and does not exist as such without the love of God, depending entirely on communion with God and the experience of that divine love.

b. As we have seen in the previous point, we cannot exclude one commandment without ending up excluding the other one. Particularly, we cannot exclude and separate the second commandment from the first. But having said this, we must be careful not to confuse them and assimilate them into one, because Jesus really gave us two commandments, therefore we must avoid any tendency to make them one. One has heard attempts to unite them, thus finding a rationale for love, that is, constructing a self-interested love. Arguments are expressed by saying that love for one's neighbor is in the potential future ideal state of the person, in the potentiality of the person, or of God in the person. However, we find none of that in the Scriptures. Jesus tells us:

Matthew 22:<sup>38</sup> This is the first and great commandment.  
<sup>39</sup> And the second *is* like unto it, ...

For Jesus they are two different and separate commandments, each with its own reason for existence. Love for one's neighbor is not a special or different love than love for God. In this second commandment, and as a consequence of the first, the Christian is given an object on which to deposit the love received. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" does not refer to God, but it really refers to the neighbor, in his own situation, in his specific and definite immediate reality. To see it otherwise would destroy the meaning of Agape love by destroying its spontaneity and selflessness. There is no occasion to look at the condition of my neighbor to try to find some kind of hidden or potential value. God's love and His request to love is His only explanation and condition. As Jesus says:

Matthew 5:<sup>44</sup> But I say unto you, Love ... <sup>45</sup> That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: ...

c. And just as we saw how necessary it is that the two commandments remain two commandments and not one, we also see that they are two commandments and not three, that there is no need to add a third one. There is a tendency, a desire, to add a third commandment to these two, that of self-love, since it says “you shall love your neighbor as yourself”. Some may insinuate that love for one’s neighbor here is dependent on love for oneself, and that love for oneself is necessary for the existence of love to one’s neighbor. At first, it appears that Jesus is saying this. However, how does Jesus explain this commandment? Jesus describes how the neighbor is to be loved, and, how is this?

John 13:<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; **as I have loved you**, that ye also love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

John 15:<sup>12</sup> This is my commandment, That ye love one another, **as I have loved you**.

The love that Jesus poured upon His disciples is the pattern to follow in regards to love for one’s neighbor, and it is exactly this type of love that is the evidence that we are His disciples. The love with which Jesus loves, that very love received, is extended to one’s neighbor.

John 12:<sup>25</sup> He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

Is Jesus saying that you have to love yourself first? Evidently not. Additionally, we have already seen that love for one’s neighbor comes from the love of God, which is the love that God bestows upon us. Jesus is then saying that “‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself’ have been loved by me”. Therefore, we affirm again, there are two commandments, and not three. We have no evidence of the concept of self-love; it is not found in the Biblical record; it has another origin. There are other foundations that seek to incorporate this element within the commandment of love, outside of revelation. Self-love is

the natural condition of the human being, it is also manifested in the ungodly, and it is the reason for the perversion of their will. We all know that man, by nature, has self-love, and he is devoted to the protection, care and exaltation of himself. It is in this sense, the commandment tells us, that you have to love your neighbor. Only when love is redirected we do stop focusing on ourselves, and start directing the love received to our neighbor instead. Only then the perversion of the will can be conquered. Love for one's neighbor is so distant from self love that it actually excludes it and triumphs over it.

d. Love for one's neighbor includes enemies. And this is not to add a third commandment, but to emphasize what is evident in the text: love is for one's neighbor, regardless of his condition or his relationship to us. Christ comes precisely to contrast the self-interested love of the human being with the unselfish, spontaneous and unlimited love of the Creator that is manifested to all equally, and this contrast is made by including the love for one's enemies. It is there that the contrast becomes evident. There and then, the love for one's neighbor becomes a manifestation of the Agape received from God. This is where it becomes more evident than ever that it is not a human love, but a divine love. Love for one's enemy is only a correlation of God's love for sinners. And this is how Christ connects them:

Matthew 5:<sup>44</sup> But I say unto you, Love your enemies, ... <sup>45</sup> That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

Agape love reveals itself to be spontaneous, selfless and creative when it is directed at enemies.

Thus we conclude the presentation that Christ made in His teachings and His life about the love of God: Christ as the Agape of God. And it is interesting that He began by announcing that "the kingdom of God



is at hand”<sup>14</sup>. The kingdom of God, in this sense, is not any utopian human construction, but it is allowing that, from one human being to another, one by one, in those who allow it, the Agape of God might dwell in the heart. That is why He says: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock”<sup>15</sup>. And it is precisely such an altruistic, disinterested and spontaneous character that constitutes its main safeguard against any sick sentimentalism or weak altruism. The revelation of God's Agape is precisely the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and it confronts man with an inescapable decision. Since Agape is a love so boundless and generously given to the point of seeming senseless, that very quality of self-giving attracts the soul to complete devotion. This is how Agape love manifests and reveals itself, and despite being a creative love, it ends up being the very element that brings judgment as the consuming fire of every selfish life that has not allowed itself to be recreated into a new life of love, and that rejects such communion with God. It is precisely in the presence of such Agape love, in the revelation made visible to every eye, that every being will be confronted with that divine Agape, and where the destiny chosen by every man will be manifested. The great question is whether each one of us will allow God to win us to Him and to recreate us by His love; or whether we will resist Him and finally, upon encountering this love, condemn ourselves for having led such a selfish life in the face of so much love poured out upon us. In the end, the love of God is the vehicle of the final judgment, and it will be seen that he who did not allow himself to be won by such a bold and boundless love, cannot be won at all.

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<sup>14</sup> Mark 1:14-15

<sup>15</sup> Revelation 3:20

## The Agape of the cross

I would now like to consider Paul, his experience and teachings. One can try to draw different lessons from his experience on the road to Damascus, and enter into psychological conjectures of what he went through. However, we don't need speculation to understand the simplest facts of the change that took place in Paul. Everything can be summed up as follows: the persecutor became a disciple and an apostle. How is it possible that he, of all men, who had done everything in his power to destroy the Christian church, should be called to apostleship? If it were a question of merit or worthiness, he, more than anyone else, would have been the last to deserve it. He himself says:

1 Corinthians 15:<sup>9</sup> ... that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

And yet, he received the call. Christ revealed Himself to him:

1 Corinthians 15:<sup>8</sup> And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

And so he was given grace and apostleship, and this experience is evidence that the way of God was revealed to him, that is, the Agape of God: Christ Jesus. The totally selfless character of God's love was revealed to him. For, what else could show the totally disinterested, unselfish, beneficent, and kindly love, than the call to the apostolate of one who was His most bitter enemy?

Realizing this, a revolution takes place in Paul's mind regarding communion with God. Previously, he knew only one way, man's way to God through strict observance of the law and through a righteous life. He was following this way when he left for Damascus. But where was that road leading him? To the greatest sin of his life – to the persecution of God's church. Instead of leading him to God, it was leading him as far away from God as possible. Evidently, then, there is no way from man to God. The way of obtaining value through the

law leads us away from God. And this constitutes a complete inversion of values on the Pharisaic scale; justice by the law is sin taken to the limit. The only thing that the law can do in the framework of man is:

Romans 5:<sup>20</sup> ... [that] the offence might abound.

Romans 4:<sup>15</sup> ... worketh wrath

Romans 3:<sup>19</sup> ... [that] every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Galatians 3:<sup>24</sup> ... [to be] our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ,

Then, once Paul sees that following the way of righteousness which is by the law only distances him from God, he can no longer preserve his value system. And this is what he speaks about here:

Philippians 3:<sup>4</sup> Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: <sup>5</sup> Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

We notice two things in these verses. Firstly, righteousness that is of the law manifests itself in persecution of God's church. It was the pursuit of the righteousness that is by the law that led him to persecute the church; and when he thought he was doing God's will, he was actually committing his most terrible sins. Therefore, his conversion is unusual. Supposedly, he was already converted and walking in the way of righteousness, yet we see that he is converted or set apart *from* his righteousness by the law. It tells us of the blindness that overcomes all that take this path, manifested in the stoning of Stephen. The path of securing righteousness by the works of the law invariably leads to the rejection and crucifixion of Christ,

while believing that service to God is being rendered. Secondly, for this very reason, the righteousness that is by the law, all that constituted the summit of Israel's pride, is now considered by Paul as belonging to the flesh.

Galatians 4:<sup>29</sup> But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now.

All this was a consequence of the revelation of Jesus Christ in his life. And Paul goes on to say:

Philippians 3:<sup>7</sup> But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup> Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ,

We see that Paul had all the spiritual advantages and blessings of Israel and Pharisaism. However, these had separated him from God. And he gives them up, he counts them for loss and rubbish, in order to gain Christ. As Paul eloquently states it in his famous love chapter

1 Corinthians 13:<sup>1</sup> Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, [agape] I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, [agape] I am nothing.

With all this in mind, we would like to point out something else. It is precisely when Paul found himself farthest away from God, in the most opposite condition possible for him to be, there, in his greatest sin, the election and call of God came to him. That is Agape, God's way towards man. This is how Paul became aware that there is no way from man to God. Not even man's repentance, his humiliation,

or his observance of the law can be, in practice, the path to having communion with God. He becomes aware that there is only one way, the way from God to man, and takes a totally theocentric position, and affirms to us:

Romans 3:<sup>22</sup> ... for there is no difference: <sup>23</sup> For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

There is no one who does good; all have sinned. And in this rebellion, there is no way from man to God.

Romans 3:<sup>11</sup> ... there is none that seeketh after God.

However, God's way to man is manifested.

2 Corinthians 5:<sup>18</sup> And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, ... <sup>19</sup> To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, ...

Paul's story is that of a fervent and sincere Pharisee who in the pursuit of righteousness becomes the chief of sinners, and right in the very act of his greatest sin hears the voice and the call of the One who says "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners". And because the way of God that reaches him now is just the opposite of the way of righteousness by law and merit, it can be described as "grace".

1 Corinthians 15:<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am: ...

And the grace of God turned a persecutor into an apostle. And what kind of apostle? One whose central message was the cross of Christ. And this revolution that exists in Paul's life, this dazzling, this awareness of God's way toward man, translates into a conscious effort to reveal the cross of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:<sup>2</sup> For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

He knows that he is sent to preach the gospel, and for him it is nothing but Christ and the cross. Anything else that gets in the way is avoided, lest:

1 Corinthians 1:<sup>17</sup> ... the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

And Paul explains why:

1 Corinthians 1:<sup>18</sup> For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

And in this, Paul goes in the opposite direction to the claims of the religious and non-religious, for he says:

1 Corinthians 1:<sup>22</sup> For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: <sup>23</sup> But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; <sup>24</sup> But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Why does he give so much importance to the cross? Because Paul understands that the cross is the way of God's communion with man. It is God establishing Christ as the means of reconciliation. There is no accessible way to God through righteousness that is by the law (i.e., all his previous experience). Consequently, Paul's gospel consists of a struggle against and for freedom from the righteousness that is by law.

Now, Paul's central theme is love. In fact, God is described as the God of Agape or God of love<sup>16</sup>, and he teaches that Christians are to manifest Agape as they have been taught by God<sup>17</sup>. Now, the cross of Christ and the Agape of God are not two central themes in Paul's life; they constitute one theme, and are seen as one. It is impossible to think of one without reference to the other. Without the cross of Christ, we could never have known of God's love and its profound meaning, and without God's Agape, Christ's way would not have led

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<sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:11

<sup>17</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:9

Him to the cross. Let us look at the following verse in order to clearly see the Agape of the cross:

Romans 5:<sup>6</sup> For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. <sup>10</sup> For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

We would like to highlight four points from these verses:

a. If we are asked what Agape is, we are pointed to the cross. Here is something that was not explicitly described in the gospels; Paul makes the direct connection. The cross is the sublimest and greatest manifestation of God's Agape love. There is and will never be a greater manifestation. This is also declared by John when he affirms:

1 John 3:<sup>16</sup> Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because he laid down his life for us: ...

If it were not for the cross of Christ, we would have not known and grasped the Agape love of God. We would have known love, but not its most sublime and glorious manifestation. And what does the cross tell us? That it is a love that is self-sacrificing, that gives itself to the utmost, without any consideration or prejudice as to the condition of the object of that love.

b. The Agape revealed in the cross of Christ is in no way independent of God. In fact, God is the subject of this Agape. It is God who demonstrates His love for us in the act of Christ dying on the cross. The work of Christ is the very work of God, the Agape of Christ is the Agape of God for Christ is the Son of the eternal Father and the

express image of His person. From now on then, we cannot speak of God's love without speaking of the cross of Christ, just as we cannot speak of Christ's love shown in His death without seeing in it God's own love. The two are one, therefore, Agape is:

Romans 8:<sup>39</sup> ... the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We also see this in that:

2 Corinthians 5:<sup>19</sup> To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself ...

And he confirms it by saying:

2 Corinthians 5:<sup>18</sup> All this is from God ... NIV

It is not we who develop a way to God, but it is God who opens a way to us. In that sense, the atonement does not mean that we are now reconciled to Him by the cross of Christ, but that God in Christ reconciles us to Himself, and it is in that unique sense that Paul goes on to say:

2 Corinthians 5:<sup>20</sup> ... be ye reconciled to God.

c. Nowhere else is the absolutely spontaneous and unselfish Agape of God so clearly manifested as in the cross of Christ.

Romans 5:<sup>7</sup> For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

Giving one's life for someone good is something that hardly anyone does. It is not natural. But for whom did Christ lay down His life? Not for the righteous, but for sinners. Paul emphasizes this three times in this verse we have been analyzing, affirming that Christ has died for the weak (without strength), the ungodly, sinners and enemies. And finally,

d. Paul wants to manifest even more greatly the spontaneous and unselfish nature of Agape by declaring that Christ died even for the



ungodly. And it is precisely at this point that Paul most greatly emphasizes the nature of Agape love. Christ literally exceeded or surpassed that love by dying for those who have no God, those who are of other religions, those who dedicate their lives to other gods.

Thus, in describing the Agape of the cross, we see the most sublime conception of God's love ever given. God's Agape is manifested in that He gave His Son for us, so that His love might find us, not as a vaguely expressed idea or concept, but as the most powerful of all realities, a self-sacrificing love, an Agape that empties itself for even the most lost and unworthy. Now, the interesting thing about this is that this is not the end of Paul's presentation of the cross.

Ephesians 5:<sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

The first thing we notice is how love is connected to Christ giving Himself. But above all, we see the establishment of His self-giving on the cross as a sacrifice, as an offering to God. This is revolutionary. This, the immense love of God revealed in the sacrifice of Christ, lays the true foundation of communion with God. Let me say it again because of how important it is: it is the love of God manifested in the sacrifice of Christ that gives meaning to and demarcates communion with God. Let me expand and explain this concept a little more.

When we speak of sacrifice, in general we can distinguish different stages.

a. We can see the concept of sacrifice in the most direct and concrete sense in the sacrifice, in the offering of a gift, in the giving of something of value, in the offering of covenants. Man offers something of his property on the altar of sacrifice to his God. Sometimes men feel constrained to offer what is most precious and dear to them in order to win God's favor. Sacrifice is then no longer

so much the offering of something as the sacrifice of oneself by parting with something beloved. Gradually, however, man becomes aware that what God wants is no ordinary sacrifice.

1 Samuel 15:<sup>22</sup> And Samuel said, Hath the Lord *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *And* to hearken than the fat of rams.

Proverbs 21:<sup>3</sup> To do justice and judgment *is* more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

And here we enter the second stage or idea of sacrifice:

b. The sacrifices now offered by man are obedience, righteousness, good behavior, mercy, love. These are the means by which God's favor is sought to be won. Sacrifice has been spiritualized and becomes more personal. This was the way of Paul before his encounter with God's Agape. This is the way of the Pharisee, sincere and fervent, the pursuit of righteousness that is by the law. It is to approach God with the merits of an ordered, righteous, obedient life, it is to find value in veganism and country life, for example. However, the question still remains, are man's obedience and righteousness, and his love, pure enough to be acceptable sacrifices before God? And it is precisely the realization of this that brings us to the next concept of sacrifice:

c. The sacrifices now offered no longer consist of the ethical achievements that man can attain, but, as the verse says:

Psalms 51:<sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

This is the religious meaning of sacrifice. In the presence of God, nothing is more appropriate than humility in man, and it is humility and humiliation alone that give man worth before God. Here, it would seem, man has reached the zenith, the limit of sacrifice. He has offered himself. His dearest good, his life's work, has been given to

the work of righteousness, to the work of the Lord. He can even go so far as to declare that he has done all this in contrition and humility. What more can he offer?

1 Corinthians 13:<sup>3</sup> And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [agape], it profiteth me nothing.

He can do all of these, but there is still something else, almost as if hidden, that is not included in this sacrifice. And this that is not included, hidden, that remains in the heart of man, is just the opposite of sacrifice. Those who think of humiliation and humility as the way to God, and that it is their humility that makes them acceptable before God, are ultimately anything but humble. This is evidence of not beholding the Agape of God, and that it does not dwell in him. This thought, which is quickly discarded by those who experience this, comes to light when in the hour of trial they present before God that offering as a credit for themselves. In recognizing that all he possesses is a gift to him, humility is the only reasonable response. It is the natural fruit of receiving the Agape of God. Hence Paul says:

Romans 4:<sup>4</sup> Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

And so we see how sacrifice is spiritualized and takes on an increasingly personal aspect, yet, in the end, it all ends up being a modification of the same thing. At each step, at each stage, it is still man's way to God. The sacrifice seen so far in its various stages is still man's way to God, and that is denial of the truth that all that he has comes from God.

This is where Paul makes it clear that the cross of Christ is judgment against the way of righteousness that is by law and against seeking God through humility. The cross shows us that there is no possible way from man to God. At the same time, the cross has made void every sacrifice that man can offer as a means of approaching and

entering into communion with God. In the light of the cross, for man to offer something of himself is treason of the highest degree, because he has nothing from himself to offer. All has been given to him. To seek to offer something to God is a form of theft. It claims God's gifts as belonging to self. But above all things, it declares the the cross of Christ and the love and sacrifice of God as not enough. In the cross of Christ, it is not man who makes the sacrifice, nor is it God who receives that sacrifice. The cross of Christ is *God's own* sacrifice. And the recipient of that sacrifice is man.

2 Corinthians 5:<sup>18</sup> And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, ... <sup>19</sup> To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself ...

Sacrifice is no longer man's way to God, but God's way to man. Thus, we see how the love of God shown in the cross establishes the way of communion with God.

Now, having established all of the above with respect to the law, Paul concludes by stating that when man becomes a recipient of God's Agape; he is only then keeping the law.

Romans 13:<sup>10</sup> ... love *is* the fulfilling of the law.

In fact, Paul's whole emphasis is not on man's Agape toward God, on the fulfillment of the first commandment, but on the second commandment, taking the first commandment for granted. That is, the keeping of the second commandment is the visible manifestation of the first<sup>18</sup> being fulfilled. That is why he says in Romans, now in a broader context:

Romans 13:<sup>8</sup> Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt

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<sup>18</sup> 1 John 4:20

not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. <sup>10</sup> Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law.

In the fulfillment of the second commandment, we also see evidence of the fulfillment of the first, in perfect agreement with the divine pattern, because there is no second without the first; there is no fulfillment of the second commandment without communion with God.

Galatians 5:<sup>14</sup> For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

We see how Agape ends up being the source, the root of the only true and authentic religious experience.

Galatians 5:<sup>6</sup> For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

2 Corinthians 5:<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ constraineth us ...

In the life ruled by the Agape of God, the subject that acts in the Christian is no longer himself, but God through Christ, the Spirit of Christ that dwells in him<sup>19</sup>. In this way then he can affirm:

Galatians 2:<sup>20</sup> I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Therefore, Christ is the true subject of the Christian's life, and His Spirit gives us His Agape love.

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<sup>19</sup> Romans 8:9-10; Galatians 4:6

Romans 5:<sup>5</sup> ... the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Therefore, we see that Christians have nothing of themselves to give, but only that which they receive. The love they show to their neighbor is only a reflection of that communion with God through Christ. Thus, the Christian's whole life is only theocentric. He lives neither of himself nor for himself.

2 Corinthians 5:<sup>17</sup> Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Having seen this point with respect to the second commandment, that of love for one's neighbor, it is also necessary to revisit the concept of self-love that some have tried to introduce. As we saw in the previous chapter, in Paul's writings we also find a frontal opposition to self-love. Many times, a distinction has been proposed between a bad self-love, of low characteristics, and a good self-love, of high and spiritual characteristics; and an attempt has been made to introduce this supposedly high self-love as a third commandment. But we have already seen that this is a mistake. Self-love is totally excluded:

Romans 8:<sup>39</sup> ... the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It says "the love of God", not one's own love. And that love is the standard, it is of One who gives Himself and is self-sacrificing, being therefore the opposite of acquisitive love. Thus, Paul affirms that Agape love:

1 Corinthians 13:<sup>5</sup> ... seeketh not her own, ...

Thus, unwittingly but by its very nature, Agape already passes judgment on the self-centered life and its interests. For when God's Agape is poured into the heart of the believer, the believer now has

a new center. The center has been transferred from self to Christ. Self is crucified and dead<sup>20</sup>, and now the eyes are fixed on Christ<sup>21</sup>. Thus, when we are placed under the sovereignty of Christ's Agape,

2 Corinthians 5:15 ... they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

And this slavery to self and self-love is consequently also eradicated in our relationship with our neighbor, because it says:

Romans 15:1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Let every one of us please *his* neighbour for *his* good to edification. <sup>3</sup> For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

Philippians 2:4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Thus, Paul condemns all forms of self-love, even those that take on spiritual overtones.

2 Timothy 3:<sup>2</sup> For men shall be **lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud**, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

It is precisely a sign of the final apostasy that men will be lovers of themselves and that their thoughts will only be on self-exaltation and self-satisfaction. Nothing is more alien than to base love of neighbor on a spiritual self-love, as if a being must first look after his own spiritual interests in order to be able to love his neighbor. Christian love has to be ready to sacrifice even spiritual advantages and privileges, if necessary, in the service of one's neighbor. This can be

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<sup>20</sup> Romans 6:3-4; 7:4

<sup>21</sup> Hebrews 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18

seen in the subject of married life in Paul's writings<sup>22</sup>. The ascetic life can be a blessing, however, the Christian has to yield this in consideration of his spouse. It is also seen in the fact that Paul himself was willing to be cut off from Christ so that his kinsmen according to the flesh could be saved<sup>23</sup>.

In short, all things are God's, and God expects neither the achievements nor the sacrifices of man. It is God himself, in His infinite Agape, who sends His own Son. It is God who sacrifices Himself and gives Himself in the person of His Son, for the weak, the enemy, and the servant of other gods. This is where the righteousness that is by the law harms man, since righteousness comes from God, and to seek justification by the works of the law is to reject and fall from grace<sup>24</sup>. But, when through faith, man opens himself to God's way toward him, the Agape of God is poured into his heart through the Holy Spirit, and thus, the foundation is laid for a new Agape life guided by the Spirit, in which the subject is no longer man, but God through the Spirit of Christ, the Agape of God. Thus constrained by the Agape of Christ, the Christian now does the work of God, that is, he has the fruits of the Spirit. In other words, he now has the righteousness of God, which is God's character, God's way of being, God's life. And in that state, the first fruit of all is love for one's neighbor. The Agape of God, the love of Christ, has the first and last word. Divine love rules everything from beginning to end.

Finally, let's consider the hymn of love, in 1 Corinthians 13, as the sublime expression of God's Agape. And although faith and hope are placed side by side with love, in the end, nevertheless, we are told that love is the greatest of these. Love is the most excellent way that

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<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 7

<sup>23</sup> Romans 9:1-4

<sup>24</sup> Galatians 5:4



Paul wants to show, and after exalting it, he calls us to follow it. Paul contrasts Agape with (value through) knowledge, *gnosis*, presenting them as two different forms of communion with God. Already in chapter 8, Paul says:

1 Corinthians 8:<sup>1</sup>... Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

And this knowledge, or *gnosis*, is taken up again in chapter 13 where we are told that it is in part, and that it will pass away, while Agape (translated as charity), together with hope and faith, remain forever. Thus, value through *gnosis* is egocentric, while Agape is theocentric. Agape does not seek its own, while value through *gnosis* is self-seeking. We find in Paul's writings an exaltation of Agape, which remains forever, as God's way to man, a more excellent way, against man's ways to God, in the form of the righteousness that comes from the law on one hand; and in knowledge as a quest to reach God, which together with all other human attainments, will cease to be. And Paul, enraptured in the love of God, cannot but exclaim:

Romans 8:<sup>28</sup> And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. <sup>29</sup> For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. <sup>30</sup> Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. <sup>31</sup> What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? <sup>32</sup> He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. <sup>34</sup> Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or

sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. <sup>37</sup> Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thus, speaking of the Agape that endures forever, the concept of Agape and God are so closely associated that they are almost identified with each other. However, this identification is finally made by the apostle John, who twice confirms that God is Agape.

1 John 4:<sup>8</sup> He that loveth not knoweth not God; for **God is love**. ... <sup>16</sup> And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. **God is love**; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Agape love is of God Himself:

1 John 4:<sup>10</sup> Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

And that love, received, is by its very nature extended:

1 John 4:<sup>19</sup> We love him, because he first loved us.

The love of God moves us so much, that we can not do less than to love Him, and love our neighbor. In this way, the commandment to love our neighbor becomes the evidence of love to God. The second commandment is a channel and magnification of the first or source.

1 John 4:<sup>20</sup> If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

The second cannot exist without the first. Love for one's neighbor is not a special or different love than love for God, but simply a visible expression of it. And it is only through the cross that we really know the meaning of God's love.

1 John 3:<sup>16</sup> And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

The revelation of God's love is that God sent His only begotten Son, and gave Him to be our atonement for the sins of the world, to reconcile us back to Him.

1 John 4:<sup>9</sup> In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

John 3:<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

And it is this love that gives us God's Son; when received and adopted into our lives makes us children of God.

1 John 3:<sup>1</sup> Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Love for God is, essentially, to be possessed by God, to be under His absolute authority, and is manifested in obedience to His will, by keeping His Word and commandments. Thus, the twofold commandment of love occupies a central place. It is an old commandment that has been from the beginning, but it is Christ who gave it its true, complete and final meaning, which is why John now speaks of a new commandment. It appears to be completely new because we couldn't see it clearly before Jesus came to earth.

In John we also find this total rejection of self-love. It is more clearly detailed in the following verses:

1 John 2:<sup>15</sup> Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> 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.

John pleads that we should not love the world, nor the things of the world. And then he explains what the world is. The world is self-love. The world is exactly that: the lust of the flesh, one's own flesh. The world is the lust of the eyes, one's own eyes. The world is the vainglory of the world, it is glory for oneself. Thus, self-love is radically opposed to the love of God, because where the love of the world is, the love of the Father is not.

Now, in John we find an even closer look at the origin of this Agape love of God poured out on humanity. John, after affirming that the very essence of God is Agape, that God is Agape, repeats to us the very words of Jesus:

John 17:<sup>24</sup> ... for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

John 3:<sup>35</sup> The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

John 5:<sup>20</sup> For the Father loveth the Son ...

John 15:<sup>9</sup> As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

This Agape love, then, is the love with which the Father loved and loves His Son. Here is the clearest evidence that the Son of God received everything He had from the Father. The created value in His Son by His own unselfish Agape love. And the most marvelous thing

about all this, considering that here its spontaneous, unlimited and unselfish character is revealed again (perhaps in one of its clearest forms), is that this love proper to the sacred relationship between the Father and the Son is poured out on a rebellious, hostile, wicked and impious creation. Therefore, the love of the Father for the Son, the Beloved, becomes the prototype or pattern that manifests the love with which God loves each one of us individually.

John 17: <sup>23</sup> ... and hast loved them, **as thou hast loved me.** ...  
<sup>26</sup> And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare **it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them,** and I in them.

He loves us in exactly the same way in which He loves His precious Son.

## Eros

We have first seen the Greek word *agape*, typical and characteristic of early Christianity, and how Jesus in words and deeds gave it meaning. Then we saw how Paul and John describe that God's *Agape* love was manifested in the cross of Christ, explaining that it is there that we can see God's love revealed. And finally, John confirms that God is *Agape*, God is love. To be love is His own, natural character - it is who He is. He cannot be otherwise. Being this way, it is impossible for Him to be otherwise, because that is His nature.

Next, we will look at another Greek word, *eros*, prevalent in the Hellenistic world prior to and even contemporary with Christ. *Eros* is not a word that appears in the Greek New Testament Scriptures. However, we want to see what these two ideas (*agape* and *eros*) are like, what these two opposing worlds are like with respect to love,

and how they contrast with each other. We will devote considerable space to the development of the concept and the idea of eros, and for this we will basically refer to the Greek philosophers. It is necessary to do this in order to be able to see and understand where certain concepts and ideas arise from and to be able to contrast them with the glorious truths of the kingdom of God. This will allow us to recognize them and know their origin when they arise within religious contexts.

The eros referred to here is a specific concept, of which perhaps the classic example is Plato's celestial eros. This heavenly eros is human love for the divine, man's love for God. However, not everything that is called love towards God is categorized as eros. Eros is the appetite, the longing, the desire that is aroused by the attractive qualities of its object. In love towards God, man seeks God in order to satisfy his spiritual need to possess and enjoy the perfection of divine gifts. Let us not fall into the temptation to equate eros with earthly, sensual love, for Platonic love is deeply rooted in the tendency and the quest for a liberation from the merely sensual. And we understand that Plato makes an effort to avoid such confusion. Whereas sensual love binds the soul to material things, it is the task of philosophical eros to liberate the soul from the chains of the senses and raise it to a more sensible, heavenly world. In Plato's Symposium, Pausanias differentiates vulgar eros from celestial eros. We are not interested here in the vulgar eros, but in the so-called celestial eros, since it is the most spiritualized of all and is the one that is in direct opposition to Agape.

However, Plato is not the source of these concepts, although it was he who perhaps described them and gave them a characteristic form. We find the philosophy or principle of eros in the mystery-based religions of antiquity. Perhaps we could mention Orphism, which in its central myth contains all the basic presuppositions that we find in eros. This myth tells us that Zeus decided to give his son Zagreo

(Dionysus) dominion over the world, but while Zagreo is still a child, the Titans (who were a race of deities) manage to kill and dismember him. But Zeus fulminates the Titans, destroys them, and from their ashes creates the race of men<sup>25</sup>. This myth, in Orphism, was probably derived from the Egyptians' Osiris worship, designed to explain the orgies, a central part of the ritual of the mysteries of antiquity. This is where the key element is seen: according to the myth, man has two natures: one divine-like, the other earthly. Since he was created from the ashes of the Titans, man is evil and at enmity with God, yet in the essence of the Titans there is something of the God who created them, so there is also something divine in the human being. According to this myth, man belongs to two worlds: he is an earthly being with a divine spark. And it is this divine element that must be liberated from his earthly bondage and his sensual element. The divine reason or the divine soul has to arise above all things by breaking that which binds it; it has to purify itself of any environment which is not proper to its condition of divine life to which it belongs by nature. The way of salvation for the soul then, according to Orphism, is the way of purification and ecstasy through initiation into the mysteries, and its goal is the final reunion of the soul with and incorporation into the divine. This would ultimately be achieved after death. Those who did not carry out this initiation process would live through a cycle of reincarnations. This dual conception of the human being, of his divine origin and the quality of his soul, his liberation from the world of the senses and his ascension to his original divine home, is the common background on which the eros theory rests. Thus, a set of ideas follows from this concept, which manifest themselves in various religious expressions, such as, for example, a fall before the fall, the body as the prison of the soul, a belief in the immortality of the soul, asceticism and mysticism as the way of salvation. And if we look closely, all this is central to the mystery religions of antiquity. The soul is the pearl that has fallen into the

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<sup>25</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orphism\\_\(religion\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orphism_(religion))

darkness in the bottom of the sea. The mysteries seek to redeem this immortal, divine, essential element of the human being. These are the very words spoken of old:

Genesis 3:<sup>4</sup> And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

In this philosophy, man has life in himself, and these divine sparks have to be carried and gathered again in the divine primary fire. What man would need under this philosophy, is to become aware of his present situation, to leave aside the earthly things that prevent him from reaching the light; he needs to enter into himself, to learn to know himself, that is, to know his own transcendent value, and from there to go out of himself, breaking the barriers of time and senses and enter into divinity. And although all these mystical religions of the mysteries of antiquity were conscious of the condition of man, they were all based on the human being's own original divine dignity. This presupposition alone was what allowed the ascension of man to the divine. And these traces, these brushstrokes, become the common baggage of them all, and the religion of the mysteries thus becomes a real living religion, and the philosophy of eros becomes the fundamental soul of all of them: Babylon. That is the prevailing spirit since antiquity.

Now it is necessary to outline what we read from Plato, not forgetting that the use of myths is a tool in Plato's discourse. It is also correct to state that Plato's philosophy was a doctrine of salvation. For both religion and Plato, the object is for man to attain his true and blessed life, and this, in the context of antiquity, is obtained through the liberation of the soul from bodily imprisonment and the senses, and restoration to its heavenly home. Plato differs with the mystery religions of antiquity in how to achieve that. Whereas in the latter salvation is achieved through initiations, purifications and rites, for Plato it was attained through philosophy. But still as a philosopher,



he declares himself in need of conversion and purification. And it is here that the myths give an important worldview of the religious aspects of Platonism.

According to Plato, the two worlds, the world of *Ideas* and the world of the *Senses*, the world of necessary rational knowledge and the world of contingent sense perceptions, are side by side. The duty to make a transition from one to the other falls upon man. It is his work to escape from the lower world, the world of the Senses, and to ascend to the higher, the world of Ideas. Thus the world of Ideas triumphs over the world of the Senses. However, this work is only possible thanks to the eros that dwells in the human being. Ideas in themselves are incapable of generating this movement, they are not forces in themselves, they have no influence on the world of the Senses. The relation thus between the two worlds is completely inclined, there is only one direction, from below upwards, from the material to the spiritual, from the senses to the Ideas. There is no help, no force coming from the world of Ideas to assist in this movement. It is when man perceives the Idea in things that he is possessed by eros, the longing for the pure world of Ideas. Thus, Eros is the conversion of man from the sensible to the super-sensible, it is the tendency of the human soul to the superior, it is a real force that pushes man to the world of the Ideal. If it were not for eros, the exchange between the two worlds would be impossible. It is eros that sets in motion this upward movement. Eros is the great opportunity of the Ideal world over the world of the Senses. For while the Idea cannot assist man, man equipped with his eros can assert the authority of the Idea. Thus, we can see how Plato's philosophy was at the same time a doctrine of salvation.

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, we begin with the assumption common to all eastern doctrines of salvation: that the human soul has a supernatural and divine value and origin. In a pre-existent state, the soul has had a vision of the Ideas, and of that which is true, good and beautiful, and has made so strong an impression upon it, that

although it has fallen and been imprisoned in a body, it still retains a memory of the higher world's glory, and feels an attraction which sometimes it cannot even explain. This attraction to the higher in the soul is eros. It is what prevents the soul from being subject to temporal things. Thus, the love that Plato teaches is love for the brilliant world of Ideas, a longing to participate in the divine life. The memory, those impressions of the soul in its pre-temporal state, varies from soul to soul. In most souls it is only latent, and has only to be actualized, brought into reality. When the soul perceives the brilliance of the beautiful, then it gains wings and can reach the world of the super-sensible. The reason why beauty has this effect on the soul is because it is the brightest of the Ideas. The idea of beauty is thus the last to be forgotten and the first to come to mind when we encounter it in the world of the senses. And the sight of beauty is intended to awaken Eros in man, not, however, that he may fix his love on that object, but that he may, passing by it, continue in constant ascension towards beauty, that being the very essence of eros. When the soul contemplates the beautiful, it is so that it forgets itself and fixes itself on absolute beauty, from which it participates and derives its own beauty. Thus, eros becomes celestial eros, which seeks to ascend to celestial beauty. Sensual beauty is only the starting point, reaching its destination in the world of Ideas.

According to Plato, eros has a kind of duality in its nature. It is neither purely human nor divine; it is something in between - in his own words, a demigod or "great demon". We read what he wrote came from Socrates who heard it from a priestess:

*"So if Eros is in need of beautiful things, and the good things are fair, he would be in need of the good things as well."*

*"I, Socrates," he said, "would not be able to contradict you; so let it be as you say."*

*"Not at all, my dear Agathon. It is rather that you are unable to contradict the truth," he said, "since it is not at all hard to contradict Socrates.*

*"And I shall let you go for now, and turn to the speech about Eros that I once heard from a woman, Diotima of Mantinea. She was wise in these and many other things; when the Athenians once made a sacrifice before the plague, she caused the onset of the disease to be delayed ten years; and she is the very one who taught me erotics. The speech that she was wont to make, I shall now try to tell you all on the basis of what has been agreed on between Agathon and myself; and I shall try to do it on my own, as best I can. For just as you explained, Agathon, one must first tell who Eros himself is and what sort he is, and then tell his deeds. In my opinion, it is easiest to do this in just the same way that the stranger once did in quizzing me. For I came pretty near, in speaking to her, to saying the same sort of things that Agathon said to me now that Eros was a great god, and was the love of beautiful things. She then went on to refute me with those same arguments with which I refuted him – that he is neither beautiful, according to my argument, nor good.*

*"And I said, 'How do you mean it, Diotima? Is Eros after all ugly and bad?'*

*"And she said, 'Hush! Or do you believe that whatever is not beautiful must necessarily be ugly?'*

*"'Absolutely.'*

*"'And whatever is not wise, without understanding? Or were you unaware that there is something in between wisdom and lack of understanding?'*

*"'What is this?'*

*"Don't you know,' she said, 'that to opine correctly without being able to give an account [logos] is neither to know expertly (for how could expert knowledge be an unaccounted for [alolon] matter?) nor lack of understanding (for how could lack of understanding be that which has hit upon what is)? But surely correct opinion is like that, somewhere between intelligence and lack of understanding.'*

*"What you say is true,' I said.*

*"Then do not compel what is not beautiful to be ugly, or what is not good, to be bad. So too since you yourself agree that Eros is not good or beautiful, do not at all believe that he must be ugly and bad,' she said, 'but something between the two of them.'*

...

*"Do you see then,' she said, 'that you too hold that Eros is not a god?'*

*"What would Eros then be?' I said. 'A mortal?'*

*"Hardly that.'*

*"Well, what then?'*

*"Just as before,' she said, 'between mortal and immortal.'*

*"What is that, Diotima?'*

*"A great daemon, Socrates, for everything daemoniac is between god and mortal.'*

*"With what kind of power?' I said.*

*"Interpreting and ferrying to gods things from human beings and to human beings things from gods: the requests and sacrifices of human beings, the orders and exchanges-for-sacrifices of gods; for it is in the middle of both and fills up the interval so that the whole itself has been bound together by it.*

*Through this proceeds all divination and the art of the priests who deal with sacrifices, initiatory rituals, incantations, and every kind of sooth- saying and magic. A god does not mingle with a human being; but through this occurs the whole intercourse and conversation of gods with human beings while they are awake and asleep. And he who is wise in things like this is a daemonic man; but he who is wise in anything else concerning either arts or handicrafts is vulgar and low. These daemons are many and of all kinds; and one of them is Eros.'*

*"Who is his father?' I said, 'And who is his mother?'*

*"It is rather long,' she said, 'to explain; but I shall tell you all the same. When Aphrodite was born, all the other gods as well as Poros [Resource] the son of Metis [Intelligence] were at a feast; 16 and when they had dined, Penia [Poverty] arrived to beg for something – as might be expected at a festivity – and she hung about near the door. Then Poros got drunk on nectar – for them was not yet wine – and, heavy of head, went into the garden of Zeus and slept. Then Penia, who because of her own lack of resources was plotting to have a child made out of Poros, reclined beside him and conceived Eros. It is for this reason that Eros has been the attendant and servant of Aphrodite, as he was conceived on her birthday; for he is by nature a lover in regard to the beautiful, and Aphrodite is beautiful. So because Eros is the son of Poros and Penia, his situation is in some such case as this. First of all, he is always poor; and he is far from being tender and beautiful, as the many believe, but is tough, squalid, shoeless, and homeless, always lying on the ground without a blanket or a bed, sleeping in doorways and along waysides in the open air; he has the nature of his mother, always dwelling with neediness. But in accordance with his father he plots to trap the beautiful and the good, and is courageous, stout, and keen, a skilled hunter, always weaving devices, desirous of practical wisdom*

*and inventive, philosophizing through all his life, a skilled magician, druggist, sophist. And his nature is neither immortal nor mortal; but sometimes on the same day he flourishes and lives, whenever he has resources; and sometimes he dies, but gets to live again through the nature of his father. And as that which is supplied to him is always gradually flowing out, Eros is never either without resources nor wealthy, but is in between wisdom and lack of understanding. ...*<sup>26</sup>

Eros is an intermediate between mortal and immortal, between having and not having, between wisdom and folly. He always has a well-defined tendency: Eros is the love for the beautiful and the good.

Having summarized Plato's presentation of Eros, basically from Phaedrus and the Symposium, we will mention the main contents of the concept of Eros love.

1. Eros is acquisitive love: When Plato gives a definition of Eros, he says that it is an intermediate state between having and not having. The most obvious aspect is that it is a desire, a drive, a longing. But man only has desire for what he does not have, and for what he feels he needs, and he can only push for what he believes to be valuable. Thus we see that Eros has two main characteristics: awareness of the actual need, and the effort to find the satisfaction of that need in a higher and happier state. The feeling of need is key in Eros, since without it the need for acquisitive love is not awakened. An Eros that was rich and in need of nothing would be a contradiction in terms, in the same sense as the thought of an Eros that gives freely. Eros is the will to possess, even when it has a nobler sense of possessing for reasons of instruction or moral improvement. And it is evident that even in those cases in which Eros would seem to be a desire to give, it is ultimately a further will to possess. Like all acquisitive love, Eros is limited to that which it perceives as valuable. Love and value are

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<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Plato's Symposium*, translated by Seth Bernardete.  
<https://archive.org/details/PlatosSymposium>

here together, hinting at each other. Only that which is valuable can become an object of love and desire. From this we may note that for Plato it is impossible to conceive of a love that is free, spontaneous and unselfish, because acquisitive love is motivated by the value of its object. However, it is an acquisitive love, not in a sense in which it pushes the soul to its lowest and retains it in temporal things - that would be a sensual love. Rather, Eros is a love that is directed to what is superior, it is the longing of the soul for the superior, for that which is better; it is an aspiration to the celestial world, the world of Ideas. In this sense, it is noteworthy that this aspiration to higher things is still an acquisitive love.

2. Eros is man's path to the divine: Plato's description of Eros as something in between also has religious significance. Eros is the mediator between human life and the divine. It is Eros that elevates the imperfect to the perfect, the mortal to immortality. Plato can speak of love as divine, but only in the sense that it is something that unites him with the gods, not in the sense that the gods feel love. The gods live their blessed lives without feeling the need for anything. They don't need love. Plato says, *man only loves and desires that which he wants and does not have, for who in the world desires what he already has? Since the gods have everything and need nothing, they do not feel love.* But they are the object of love. Given their inherent beauty, divinity sets all things in motion toward it, but the divine remains unmoved, in absolute repose. Plato says that a god has no relation to man except through his intermediary, Eros, and that is how all relations between gods and men occur. Thus, Eros love, as activity and movement, is a purely human act. Because love is always the desire of the low for the high, of the imperfect for the perfect, Eros is the way by which man ascends to the divine, and not the means by which divinity bends towards man.

All this is simply the recognition of value in the beloved object, and in the awareness of the necessity of that value. In this sense, for Plato, the direction of love towards the super-sensible becomes key. Eros,

in this sense, is the escape of the soul from one world in the direction of the other, from the world of the Senses to the world of memories awakened from the higher world by the beauty of things. Thus, the ladder for Plato is from a beautiful body, to all beautiful bodies, from there, to the beauty of a soul, from there to beauty in human laws and institutions, and from there to the beauty of the sciences, and finally to that which is absolutely beautiful in itself, the idea of beauty in itself. Thus, one arrives at the contemplation of eternal beauty, which has neither beginning nor end, which neither grows nor decays, which is at the same time the absolute being.

3. Eros is egocentric love: Absolutely everything is centered on self and its destiny. All that matters is the soul and that it is on fire with Eros, its present challenges as a slave of the body, its gradual ascension to the higher world and its blessed vision of the Ideas in their glory. The mere fact that Eros is acquisitive love should be evidence enough that it is egocentric. However, the egocentric nature of Eros manifests itself in that the object of love is to obtain possession of something considered valuable and for which man feels a need. Thus, every man longs for that which is good for him, therefore to love the good is the desire to possess the good and to possess it permanently. Love then is always a desire for immortality. But in this desire his egocentrism is manifested. Plato confirms by citing the case of Alcestis dying for Admetus, or Achilles following Patroclus to death, affirming that they would never have done it if it were not for the fact that they knew that they were going to earn a reputation of universal fame. He adds that all men would do anything to gain immortal fame and such glorious renown, and it is better the more they crave it, because they love the immortal. Evidently, this love that leads them to lay down their lives for each other is not a love that “does not seek its own”<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:5



Seeing this, we cannot help but consider what happened in the Garden of Eden:

Genesis 3:<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more subtil ... <sup>4</sup> And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: <sup>5</sup> For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

The serpent first establishes that no matter what Eve did, even if she disobeyed God, she would not die, despite God's express word that this would be the result. Her life did not depend on her communion with God. Secondly, it emphasizes that God is voluntarily and consciously depriving them of a special knowledge, and of the ascension to a higher condition of life, a condition in which they could become like God. And this higher state of existence is attainable only by taking and eating from the forbidden tree. The serpent awakens, through lies, the sense of need for a higher and happier condition. And being like God is presented as something valuable, something superior and worthy of being aspired to and snatched, even though it is not their own. Of course, part of the problem is that God is not like this, as Agape love demonstrates. In fact, following the serpent's advice leads Eve away from God. Thus, this acquisitive Eros is implanted in Eve, and in this search to be like God, she traces a path that is from man to God, it is the human effort to become and be in a supposed ideal condition. All this is based on an egocentric conception, where the satisfaction and fulfillment of one's own being is sought above all things. Thus, we see how Eros is the spirit of the ancient serpent, the "great demon", interposing itself between man and God, of him who is said:

Isaiah 14:<sup>13</sup> For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: <sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

Having seen these characteristics of Eros defined by Plato, we must highlight Aristotle's contribution by giving it a cosmic sense. We see it highlighted in the doctrine of movement, where the whole process of nature is a movement, successive ascensions from matter to form, from imperfection to perfection of being, from the potential to the actual. The cause of this movement can be seen in the influence that form has on matter. This is due to an inherent tendency of matter toward form, and partly to the influence which form has upon matter, though in the latter instance, so far as pure form is concerned, it is absolutely transcendent over all motion. It is pure form that ultimately triggers all motion, but it does so without any motion or change on its part. And it sets things in motion by the desire it awakens. What is, then, the influence of the pure form? The pure form, because of its perfection, awakens the Eros. Thus, we find that Aristotle elevates Plato's Eros to a cosmic plane. Additionally, we see in Aristotle again the concept of the ladder in his Scale of Existence. For Plato, the rungs through which the individual has to climb from one world to another are not represented by objective realities connecting the world of the Senses with the Ideal world, and thus making it a continuum, but the ladder would seem more like a psychological aid to guide the soul in the ascension. However, with Aristotle in his ladder of existence, all existence is a continuous ascension, in which everything lower aspires to the higher, and the whole process of the movement converges towards the divine, the divine remaining immovable, while it exerts its attraction on the lower. Everything in existence reflects this movement, the evolution of all species. Everything has a yearning for the supreme being. The whole universe bears the marks of Eros, the lower ascending to the higher and striving to be like it. And this striving goes on from sphere to sphere throughout the universe. This concept of Aristotle's motion is based on the idea of a Greek God. This God is immovable, exerting his influence not because of anything he does, but because of the world's desire for the divine.

Now we will look into Neoplatonism, specifically the teachings of Plotinus, who lived well into the Christian era. What Plotinus tries to do is a synthesis of Platonism and the piety of the mysteries of antiquity. In both Plato and Aristotle there is a great variety of thoughts related to Eros, however in Plotinus we see the return of the soul to God as his main theme. And what Plotinus introduces is the concept, already manifested but treated secondarily, of how the divine soul came to be trapped in a body. This point becomes central to Plotinus. He understands that the ascension is preceded by, and is conditioned by, a descension. Thus, the descension has to be reproduced, but in reverse, so that the soul can return to God. Thus, for Plotinus, the process of the world can be summarized in the double conception of an emanation of all things from the One, the divine, and the return of all of them to the One. The descension occurs in the emanation from the One, and the abnormal occurs when the soul of the individual becomes disconnected with the world of the soul, when it forgets its divine origin, and seeks satisfaction in the world of the senses. When the downward movement has reached its limit, it returns in upward movement. When the soul allows itself to be caught up in the work of the senses, it is because of an undervaluation of the value of the soul itself. Thus, in order that descension may become ascension, the soul must learn two things: first it must bring to mind its own divine origin and value. And when the soul has thus been moved out of the world of the senses, it can then turn to beauty, and in so doing, it is directed toward ascension, and it is its work now to ascend and rise to greater scales of beauty, thus reversing the process of descension. Thus, the steps in the ascension begin by noting that bodily things receive their beauty from the soul, the soul from reason, and reason from the One, from the divine. Plotinus says that we must ascend to what every soul aspires to, to the good. However, the highest height, the perfect union with God, cannot be reached by dialectics or by any discursive

reasoning, but only through ecstasy, in which the one who contemplates becomes merged into what he contemplates, thus becoming God. Thus is the ascension described, and the whole ascension rests on the presupposition, which we had already seen in Orphism, that the soul has something divine, and that it has been caught up in matter. And in this, Plotinus endeavors to show that the soul by nature is good, and that what is external is bad and is the consequence of the soul's entanglement with matter. Thus, the doctrine of Plotinus can be summarized in the descension and ascension, where Eros dominates the two paths.

We may wonder how genuine is the descension being presented here. Perhaps the first thing we could say is that Plotinus is interested in the cosmological process by which we are here, how it is that this situation came about. As far as salvation is concerned, Plotinus is only concerned with the ascension, with the movement toward the divine. Communion with the divine is not by God coming to man, quite the contrary, but it is man climbing through Eros toward the One. And in the description of the descension, there is in fact no descension of the divine. The divine remains in its transcendence, immovable. When the higher provides for the lower, it does so without being under any circumstances subject to the conditions in which the lower is subject, but remains completely inert, its influence is always passive. For Plotinus the divine is self-sufficient and never manifests from its sublime repose. There is no spontaneous descension. Descension is in reality not an act of divine condescension, but is the fall of the soul into sin and guilt. Plotinus states that anyone who descends to a lower level does so involuntarily, and that it is evidence of weakness and incapacity, something impossible in the divine. The concept that the divine actually descends is therefore impossible. Thus, Plotinus' descension has nothing in common with the Agape we find in the gospel. On the contrary, Plotinus calls for an elevation of man to the status of a divine superman. Thus, the conclusion is reached in Plotinus that God is Eros. It is said about God, that he is

worthy of being loved, and he himself is love, love of himself, since he is beautiful only by himself and in himself. Thus, God is defined as Eros, and the way is opened right here to make a comparison between this God who is Eros with the God we find in the Bible who is Agape. But while in the Bible the fact that God is Agape is a natural consequence of the successive revelation ending in its pinnacle expression: "God is Agape", the same cannot be said of Eros, since in no way in Plato can Eros be identified with the divine. God is not Eros and Eros is not God; for Plato Eros is a demon or demi-god who guides us in our ascension to the divine.

Thus, at first glance, it would seem that this affirmation of Plotinus that God is Eros is an abdication of the Platonic idea of Eros. It would seem to be so, however by means of what would appear to be a dialectical device, Plotinus detaches himself from that problem. What he basically affirms is that the divine is the highest good, the final destination of all longing and desire, and as such, God himself cannot have any longing or desire or aspire to anything, since in him is the sum of all that is desirable. Thus, Eros cannot be applied as a concept to God, but, Plotinus affirms, God is Eros only for himself. And in this way, he succeeds in applying the concept of Eros to God. Thus, in this conception, Eros becomes the ultimate source and ultimate destiny of all things. And here we have the clear demonstration of the difference between Agape and Eros. When Eros is applied to God, its acquisitive and egocentric character is applied so much to itself that it ends up being a love that is completely self-absorbed in the contemplation of its own beauty, reducing it to immobility. If we were to summarize this, we would see that the idea that God is Eros has no meaning unless it is applied as a love of self. Interestingly enough, the old pagan religion also speaks in its myths about the end of their god. There are several accounts, but in principle, Narcissus<sup>28</sup> was fathered by the river god Cephissus to a nymph named Liriope. Liriope was told by a prophet that Narcissus

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<sup>28</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_(mythology))

would reach old age if he failed to recognize himself. Narcissus turned into a very beautiful young man, whom everyone loved. However, there was no one to whom Narcissus would return love. One day while Narcissus was hunting he went to get a drink on a pool of water. As he bent down to drink he fell in love with the reflection of himself. He was so awed by this person that he could not move. He found the image beautiful as a marble statue. Unable to see his love reciprocated, incapable of departing from his own image, he ended up killing himself by drowning into his own image reflected in the waters. And thus, it is prophesied of the dragon, the old serpent, which sits on many waters:

Ezekiel 28: <sup>8</sup>They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of *them that are* slain in the midst of the seas.

Thus we end with the presentation of the concept of Eros, coming from the mystery religions of antiquity itself, going back to the Eastern religions, to Egypt and ancient Greece until its expression in the early days of Christianity.

## Conclusions

It is noteworthy that Nietzsche, the magnifier of the philosophy of the superman, describes Christianity (the primitive Christianity that came out of Jesus and His disciples in the ancient world) as being a transvaluation of all ancient values<sup>29</sup>. This inversion of values, as he puts it, really meant a radical change, and that change is rightly centered on the introduction of the spirit of Agape. In that sense,

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<sup>29</sup> [https://apologetics.fandom.com/wiki/Transvaluation\\_of\\_values](https://apologetics.fandom.com/wiki/Transvaluation_of_values)

Agape comes as a crushing blow both to the legal religious system of Pharisaic Judaism and to the Eros-based spirituality of the Hellenic world primarily, but of the ancient world as a whole.

From the point of view of the legal religious system of Pharisaic Judaism, the predominant religious system of the people of God in those days, it is self-evident that God loves those who are righteous and devoted to God, while God does not love the sinful and unrighteous. This is the natural consequence of a relationship with God that is framed in performing the law, that is man's way to God. However, Jesus says,

Mark 2:<sup>17</sup> ... I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

And the reason for this call is the Agape love of God, which by its very nature means the forgiveness of sins. *This conception completely closes the door to a legal relationship with God*, and is the reason for the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, and is also the reason for Paul's emphasis against the works of the law. But just as Agape is opposed to the legal religious system of Judaism, to the same extent it is also opposed to the Hellenic scale of values of antiquity, whose spirit was Eros. As we have mentioned, the Hellenic values drew from the most ancient mystery religions. For the Greeks, it was evident that the gods do not love. Why would they, if they already possessed everything they wanted? Having no need for anything, no unsatisfied desire, they do not need love, that is, they have no need to acquire anything. Thus, the Greek god is self-centered only. And against all this, Christianity comes to say that God is love. This love, however, has nothing acquisitive (as love is understood and lived in this context), but is detached, self-sacrificing and self-giving for His rebellious creation. God does not love in order to gain any advantage, but loves because it is His way of being, it is His nature. For the Greeks, there is no place for communion with God. As Plato says, a god has no relationship with man. However, in Christianity, Agape means exactly that - that God wants to have communion with man.

We find that the Greek philosophers speak, at times, of the love that the gods have for man, yet when we look for the reason for this, we still see a great contrast compared to the Agape of God. Aristotle himself answers, when he says *“he who lives according to reason will be the special object of the deity's love. For if the gods have any interest whatsoever in human affairs, as men are prone to think, we must assume that they have delight only in what is best and most like themselves, which is reason, and that they reward those who love and honor this. ... But it is evident that this is found in the wise man. Thus, this is the one most loved by the deity”*. Obviously, this love thus described by Aristotle is totally opposed to the Agape of Christianity. Paul tells us the following:

1 Corinthians 1: <sup>27</sup> But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; <sup>28</sup> And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

Thus, we see that Nietzsche is right when he says that Christianity is a transvaluation, an alteration of all the values of antiquity. Those values, be they like the Jewish religion based on righteousness which is by the works of the law, or like Hellenism or the religions of antiquity, all of them start from man's way to God, from what man does to enter into communion with God. And it is the Agape love revealed and preached by Christ that demolishes all these concepts. Nietzsche's words in this sense are so important that it is worth quoting them verbatim:

*“Modern men, hardened as they are to all Christian terminology, no longer appreciate the horrible extravagance which, for ancient taste, lay in the paradox of the formula ‘God on the Cross’. Never before had there been anywhere such an audacious inversion, never anything so terrifying, so*



*challenging and challengeable, as this formula; it promised a transvaluation of all ancient values”*

We thus see how Nietzsche's interest in antiquity enables him to see the immense and fundamental difference that existed, on the one hand, between all the values of antiquity (both pagan and within the very people of God) in the quest to establish their own righteousness, and Christianity just coming out from the hands of Christ, on the other.

This abysmal difference in philosophy was noted and emphasized in the early days of Christianity, both by friend and foe. Hence Paul says:

1 Corinthians 1:<sup>23</sup> But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;  
<sup>24</sup> But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

For the Jews it was a scandal<sup>30</sup> and an offense, not only because of the difficulty they had in conceiving the crucified Messiah, but because the Agape of the cross destroyed the value system on which their religious relations were based. And here it is important to be aware of what this religion appealed to: it was a religion based on man, on man's effort. On the other hand, for the Hellenic mind, the preaching of Christ and Him crucified was, as Paul says, outright madness, totally contrary to the scheme of values and thought of the time, in which man ascends to the divine, a whole theory of evolution in his time. At the same time, the Agape of the cross seemed a total

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<sup>30</sup> Scandal and stumbling block in the New Testament are the same word.

Gálatas 5:11 But \*I\*, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why am I yet persecuted? Then the **scandal** of the cross has been done away. DARBY.

4625. σκάνδαλον **skandalōn**, *skan'-dal-on* (“scandal”); prob. from a der. of 2578; a *trap-stick* (*bent sapling*), i.e. *snare* (fig. *cause* of displeasure or sin):—occasion to fall (of stumbling), offence, thing that offends, stumblingblock.

4624. σκανδαλίζω **skandalizō**, *skan-dal-id'-zo* (“scandalize”); from 4625; to *entrap*, i.e. *trip* up (fig. *stumble* [trans.] or *entice* to sin, apostasy or displeasure):—(make to) offend.

lack of justice and integrity, apparently lacking the necessary firmness to deal mercilessly with those who, in their view, did not deserve it. Thus, for the ancients, the Agape of the cross was already blasphemous, because it revealed God to be worse than human judges, given such generous treatment and mercy to sinners. Moreover, it was in direct conflict with the immutability, immobility, incorruptibility and eternity of the divine. In the ancient mind, the predominant thought of ancient and modern Babylon was:

Daniel 2:<sup>11</sup> ... the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.

How could God's beauty, harmony, happiness, perfection and blessed condition be defiled and tainted in human affairs? How could He not only defile Himself but humiliate Himself, and abandon His self-sufficiency to the point of carrying the cross? To the Hellenic mind, it was madness, and on these points the criticism was centered. This was even manifested in the Sadducees, who apparently were so Hellenized that they rejected the resurrection of the dead. Once they had gotten rid of matter, why return to it?

And it is here where we would like to stop and assess these two philosophies, two loves, or two principles. We need to see them side by side, compare and contrast them.

Now, Eros and Agape are much more than just two different and opposite ideas of love. In reality , they are totally, completely, and universally opposed to each other. This is manifested in every facet. Eros and Agape are the characteristic expressions of two different types of attitudes in life; they are fundamentally two opposite types of religion and ethics. Both represent two currents that have run in parallel throughout history, in some instances confronting each other, in others blending together. Each of them represents a different religion: Eros, the egocentric vs. Agape, the theocentric religion.

In the egocentric religion, the religious relationship is basically dominated by man. The distance between man and the divine is not insurmountable. Man is divinity-like, or perhaps he is a divine being, even though at the moment he is confused, distracted and trapped by the things of the senses around him. To become aware of himself, then, is to go to the divine, and that is where the end goal, satisfaction and bliss of man lies.. Thus, between man and the divine there is a continuum that is never broken, and no matter how great the differences, they remain relative. According to this thought, it is possible for man to ascend successively to a likeness more and more like that of God, and to approach, step by step, the divine.

On the other hand, in the theocentric religion, the center is God. Between God and man there is an absolute distinction, a line that can never be crossed from man's side to God. Any thought of man elevating himself to the divine is nothing but massive pride, which, far from bringing him closer to God, is the highest level of an ungodly life. The separation between God and man is absolute, so that man has no possibility of ascending to divinity. Only God can close that separation, and He does so by sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh<sup>31</sup>, to call and rescue the sinful and lost. Communion is only possible if God in His Agape love condescends to man, and He does so by sending the Spirit of His Son. This is the only way in which man has any chance of communion with God.

Religion is communion with God, but we see here two very different conceptions of communion with God: one centered on man, egocentric, the other centered on God, theocentric. If we look at the history of religious experiences, this world has been overwhelmingly dominated by religions of the egocentric type. From the earliest beginnings, starting with the sacrifice of Cain, and then with Nimrod and the tower of Babel, through the mystery religions of antiquity and mysticism, all of them have sought to approach divinity on their

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<sup>31</sup> Romans 8:3

own terms. In all cases, communion with God is the effort of man. All these religions seek to awaken in man a desire and a longing for the transcendent, to remove him from the temporal and corruptible so that he rises on the wings of the soul to a higher world from where the soul originates. On the other hand, theocentric religion has never been absent; constant strokes of it are seen throughout the Old Testament<sup>32</sup>, but it is not until the coming of Christ and the interruption on the scene of the disciples' primitive Christianity that it takes center stage, and in one generation it overturns the world<sup>33</sup>, by the grace and power of God. It is precisely the theocentric character that constitutes the transvaluation of the values of antiquity.

Having seen this, we are now in a position to compare these two very different attitudes to life, these two types of religions so abysmally opposed. Both Eros and Agape express the relationship or communion of man with the divine, and in so doing, they determine what man's religious life and his relationship with others will be like.

**Eros** is a desire, a longing to possess.

**Agape** is a self-sacrificing giving.

Eros is an upward movement.

Agape descends.

Eros is man's way to God.

Agape is God's way to man.

Eros is man's effort; it presupposes that man's salvation is in his hands.

Agape is the grace of God; salvation is the work of divine love.

Eros is self-centered love, a form of self-assertion of the

Agape is selfless love, it does not seek its own, it gives itself freely.

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, in Exodus 32:31-32

<sup>33</sup> Acts 17:6

noblest, highest, and most sublime kind.

Eros seeks to obtain life, an immortal, divine life.

Eros is the will to take and possess that which depends on one's own desires and needs.

Eros is primarily the love of man; God is the object of that love. Even when attributed to God, Eros is modeled after human love.

Eros is determined by the quality, beauty and value of its object. It is not spontaneous, but provoked or motivated.

Eros recognizes value in its object, and loves it.

Agape lives the life of God, therefore it dares to lose it.

Agape is giving and offering oneself without limitations.

Agape is primarily the love of God, God is Agape. Even when attributed to man, Agape is modeled after divine love, and proceeds from God.

Agape is sovereign with respect to its object, and is directed to the bad as well as to the good; it is spontaneous, superabundant, and unselfish.

Agape loves, and consequently creates value in its object.

Now, having clearly understood the different meanings of Agape and Eros, we are in a position to look again at the two main commandments.

When we speak of love, we speak of the relationship between a loving subject and an object of that love. Thus, we can see three personal dimensions, which are related to the main commandments, but we will include a fourth dimension given the widespread acceptance it has within certain Christian circles. This last and fourth

dimension is not actually a relationship, because there is only one subject rather than two. These four dimensions are:

- a. God's love for man
- b. man's love for God
- c. man's love for his neighbor
- d. self-love.

Let's look at each one more closely:

a. God's love for man: Speaking of Eros, it does not make much sense to speak of God's love. In fact, it is impossible to, if we think about what this means. Eros is an ascension; however, for God (according to Eros) there is no upward movement. In God there is no need or desire, therefore there is no desire or longing to ascend, and neither can He. And it is even less possible for Him to be able to love man, since this would mean descending from His divine perfection, and when such love is sometimes manifested, it is only because of the very divinity that is in humanity.

On the other hand, when we look at Agape, the whole tendency is just the opposite. Here, the love of God is central. All love that can be called Agape is only a stream of divine love flowing from the heart of God. Agape has its origin in God, because God is Agape. Agape is a love that descends without restraint, freely and generously, giving out of its superabundance.

b. Man's love for God: In Eros, now we find love for God; man rises in search of God in order to secure his share of the divine riches and abundance. Here, the ascending tendency of Eros manifests itself in his own life; human desires and needs are satisfied in the divine fullness. Eros love is thus shown as an acquisitive desire, an appetite that seeks to secure these advantages. Since God is the supreme good, the sum of all imaginable and conceivable good, it is natural that He should draw to Himself all love and desire. It is of course possible for man to love something other than the divine, but anyone

who does this, and nothing else, has no real understanding of his desires and no perception of the true insatiable nature of them. In his blindness, man chooses the lower things and deprives himself of the higher satisfaction.

On the other hand, in Agape, the love of God is central.

Matthew 22:<sup>37</sup> Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

Love for God is never spontaneous in the sense that it arises from man, but it is God's love poured out and manifested in our lives by the Holy Spirit; it is the love that God has given us, and so we love with the love that He gave us. We love because He first loved us<sup>34</sup>. Thus, man surrenders himself completely to the love of God, giving his whole heart to God in the person of Christ. And so, the concepts are re-defined. The love of God is not a yearning to acquire, but rather, it means that God in His grace takes man into His communion in spite of his unworthiness: In the same way, the love now received by man is manifested in that, being moved by that divine love, in gratitude he offers his complete will and surrenders himself, that he might belong to God completely. Thus, love for God becomes totally theocentric, where man's will and man's choice is excluded. Man loves God, not because by comparison with other things he finds Him more satisfying than everything else, but because God's selfless love has overwhelmed him and taken control of him, so that he can do nothing else but love God. Man has not chosen God, but God has chosen man. As a consequence of all the above, this has its impact on:

c. Man's love for his neighbor: And here the differences between Eros and Agape become even greater, despite the fact that in many instances the exact same vocabulary is used.

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<sup>34</sup> 1 John 4:19

Eros does not seek his neighbor itself, but seeks him only as a means to his own advancement. Eros is not itself focused on the other, but seeks to divest itself of its connection to its object and uses it as a means, as a further ascending step towards absolute beauty. The object of love, in this case the neighbor, must be set aside. Love is directed only towards objects that participate in the beauty of the divine.. Thus, love for one's neighbor never becomes pure and simple love, but always has an ulterior aim. The neighbor is only an intermediate object in the path of ascension, while the ultimate object is God. Only so far as the object participates in the divine, and only in that particular, it is appropriate to love him. Yet what really becomes the object of love is not the whole human being in himself, but the divine idea in him, the divine in him. Thus, Eros seeks to pass directly from love for my neighbor to love for God. Thus, love for one's neighbor is a meritorious act, a step that brings me closer to God, and hence its necessity.

Agape love for one's neighbor, on the other hand, has a completely different character. It is directed entirely toward the neighbor in his being and circumstance, without calculation or further thought. And here we ask ourselves, what is it that can lead a man to love his neighbor in this way, without any ulterior purpose? What is it that can lead a man to love his enemy? When my neighbor is my enemy, obviously I can no longer find any reason in my own being to love him. Unless love for my neighbor is totally spontaneous, devoid of any motivation, without any additional aim in view, including earning God's love, it cannot be called Agape nor be according to the divine model of Agape. Loving my neighbor and my enemy carries in itself no meritorious character to make me a recipient of God's love. In fact, what takes away its meritorious character is precisely knowing the totally undeserved love of God freely given. If we ask what motivates Agape , we can only say that it is God Himself. Thus, God is not the ultimate goal of neighborly love, but the principle of love received from God in the first place. God, being Himself Agape, gives



Agape. It is by loving that God engenders love in His recipients. Thus, everyone who is loved by God and has allowed himself to be conquered and possessed by that love, cannot help but pass that love on to his neighbor and enemy. Thus, the love of God passes directly to his neighbor. And finally, let us see:

d. Self-love: Eros is primarily self-love. All that has been said so far is sufficient to establish this point. It is not too much to say that self-love is the very basis of all love that bears the stamp of Eros. In other words, all self-love is Eros itself. Love for God and love for one's neighbor and any other love in this context is ultimately reduced to all benefactors of the self. Even in its most altruistic and spiritual sense, love for one's neighbor is thought of as a step toward greater communion with God, a meritorious act that will win us to God. And love for God is firmly based on the conviction that God is the fulfillment of all man's desires and needs.

Agape, on the other hand, excludes all kinds of self-love. Christianity does not recognize self-love as a legitimate form of love. Christian love moves in two directions: toward God and toward one's neighbor, and the main opponent to this love flowing freely is self-love, whereby it must be totally surrendered to God, it must be abandoned. It is self-love that distances man from God, preventing him from giving himself completely, and it closes his heart to his neighbor. When one begins to speak of self-love as a third form of love, and the true basis of love for one's neighbor, Agape is blurred to accommodate Eros, and thus Agape is changed to bear the characteristics of Eros from then on. Thus, it is no longer Agape.

Having thus viewed love in these dimensions, we can conclude the following aspects. The emphasis on Agape and Eros fall just at opposite poles. Great emphasis is given in Eros to self-love. Eros demands the satisfaction of one's own needs and desires. And here, ample room can be found for love for God, since God is the highest

good and the chief benefactor of the self in the satisfaction of every desire. However, there is less room for love for one's neighbor; indeed one might even say that love for one's neighbor is alien to Eros. When it was first introduced, it was as a response to the Agape lived by Christian communities. When Eros love is directed at the neighbor, it is always not directed at the neighbor himself, but at the concept of the ideas of beauty or the higher world that can be seen in him, and it is only a means for the ascension to that world. And finally, in Eros, there is no place for the love of God, because in Eros God does not love.

Agape, on the other hand, takes its course towards exactly the opposite direction, because Agape is precisely the love of God, which is why it becomes the source and model of Christian love. This divine love, whose characteristic is unrestricted self-giving, has an unrestricted continuation in complete and total self-giving to God in the first place, thus manifesting love for God. Now, it is no longer a self-centered, acquisitive love, which is so opposed and irreconcilable with total and unreserved surrender. And Agape continues, unrestricted, in the love for one's neighbor, sharing the blessings thus received. Here, it is not necessary to find a motivation to love one's neighbor, because having received everything from grace, from grace it is given. It is the love of God that seeks to expand and spread throughout the world. And so, self-love has no place in Agape.

Thus, we see how the emphasis on each dimension is given by each type of love:

<b>Agape</b>		<b>Emphasis</b>
Love of God	↓	Total/Complete
Love to God		Unrestricted self- giving
Love to neighbor		An extension of the love of God
Self-love		Non-existent

<b>Eros</b>		<b>Emphasis</b>
Love of God		Non-existent
Love to God	↑	Natural
Love to neighbor		Almost non-existent, or extremely motivated
Self-love		Total/Complete

Having placed these two systems side by side and having compared them, we can now realize that there is a whole complex set of ideas and doctrines associated with each of these concepts. These ideas, doctrines, or understandings are the forms in which either Eros or Agape find their expression. By this we do not mean that whoever believes this or that is having one kind of religion or another. We do not want to pass judgment on personal experiences; we only wish to look at what concepts and ideas each of these two understandings of love bring. And perhaps, without being aware of it, certain ideas or concepts carry or bring in an underlying understanding of love that we had not even imagined. And these ideas, beliefs and concepts shape our religious experience and life.

In addition, and even more so if we look at personal experiences, we do not find pure experiences of Agape. In the first place, this is because of the very condition of humanity, which is corrupted by sin. However, in Christ Jesus – the begotten Son - we find the Agape of God; He is the love of God incarnate, He is the Beloved. That is why we are invited to behold Him<sup>35</sup>. But if we look purely at the concepts, we will see that there are ideas that are intimately linked and related

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<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18

to the concept of Agape, and on the other hand, there are other ideas and concepts that are linked to and find their most fertile and natural development in the field of Eros. These ideas and concepts can be identified as symptoms that indicate the presence or tendency towards one system or the other.

1. Perhaps one of the first things we have already mentioned above is that all mysticism really belongs to the Eros-based belief system. Its main concern is man's path to God. It is basically self-salvation through the ascension to the divine.

On the other hand, the religion of revelation is clearly proper to the Agape context. Only divine revelation can establish communication and communion between God and man. It is clearly the way of God to man, God revealing Himself and making Himself known to man.

2. The contrast between Eros and Agape is often also shown as a contrast between works and faith. As we have seen previously, the return of the soul to its original habitation is presented in Eros under the figure of an ascension. In that context, the figure of using a ladder is widespread and it clearly expresses the concept that man's goal is that of striving to reach the other world. To reach it, man depends on his own effort and achievement. Within this, he then begins to carve out the concept of merit, and of offering, giving or doing things to earn divine favor or to attain the divine sphere. We have the beginning of that path clearly revealed in the Scriptures. Thus it was presented to Eve:

Genesis 3: <sup>5</sup> ... in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, ...

Here we see the promised ascension, the manifestation of need and of taking to satisfy that need, of snatching in order to gain value, of helping oneself in order to be like God.

In a totally opposite sense, Agape has the spirit of a receptive attitude. This is why Agape has always manifested itself intimately

with faith, because it is not something that man climbs onto, but something that is offered to man by the grace of the divine Agape that proceeds from above. Thus, a humble and receptive attitude is the proper attitude of the heart in a religion governed by Agape. Therefore, the biblical testimony tells us:

Philippians 1:<sup>6</sup> Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:

and

Romans 1:<sup>17</sup> For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

3. The other notable contrast has to do with self-worth. Eros begins with the presumption of the divine origin and value of the soul. The soul is a pearl that has been lost and tarnished, but nevertheless retains its imperishable value. Thus, different terms are used, such as the soul being part of the soul of the world, or mysticism speaking of the divine spark. For Eros, what makes the union of the soul with the divine possible is the resemblance to the divine in the soul – that is what establishes the point of contact. Our task, then, to use Plotinus' words, is to bring the divine in us back to the divine in all. And we find this concept again in the garden, for our first parents were told this.

Genesis 3:<sup>4</sup> And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.

Agape, on the other hand, begins with the conviction of worthlessness: when man fell, he was lost.

Isaiah 52:<sup>3</sup> For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought; And ye shall be redeemed without money.

Isaiah 50:<sup>1</sup> Or which of my creditors *is it* to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, ...

Of his own choice, man would have perished unless God's love had set in motion its infinite sacrifice to rescue him. Nothing of man himself would rescue him, but only the love of God. By sinning, man sold himself, and became a slave to the enemy of God. By choosing the lies of the serpent, by seeking his own, by trying to gain a new identity and value through what was forbidden, by choosing the love of self over the Word of God, man rendered himself useless and became the enemy of God.

Romans 3:<sup>12</sup> They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Matthew 15:<sup>18</sup> But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.  
<sup>19</sup> For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

Romans 8:<sup>7</sup> Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

The human race destroyed its identity as beloved children of God and exchanged it for the worthlessness and slavery of sin. Our true identity was lost. But right there is the point of contact with God, because God comes to seek what was lost. God comes to save the lost; God comes to heal the sick; He comes to make friends with what is at enmity. Thus, all thought of merit is excluded. And it is in God's love and self-giving that He creates value in humanity. Man's value lies in the fact that God loves him, in spite of his condition.

4. The next contrast we note is with respect to the ethical view. From the point of view of Eros, there is a dualism between good and evil, and a dualism between spirit and matter. And the thought that spirit is always good and that matter is evil is expressed in a variety of ways. According to Eros, the soul is itself good by nature, but it is in subjection to the body as in a prison, and this reinforces the concept of the body as the root of all evils. The work of man is to consequently

free himself from the bondage of the senses. In that sense, virtue in the world of Eros has a strongly ascetic character. Evil lies in looking to the things of the lower world, the things of the senses, while good consists in looking upward to spiritual things. The conversion of man, according to Eros, consists in a conversion of his desire. The desire that was once directed to the senses is now directed to the transcendently spiritual.

On the other hand, the vision of Agape is radically different. Here, the opposition between good and evil is conceived rather in terms of the will. Sin itself has nothing to do with the body. Sin is the perversion of the will; it is iniquity, disobedience to God; it is rebellion centered in man himself against God. Conversion, therefore, has quite a different meaning. It no longer means simply the change of desire but the change of heart, where the selfish will is put to death and the power of the Holy Spirit gives birth to a theocentric will a will directed by God.

This conflict between the two concepts is clearly manifested, for example, in the conception of Jesus, the Son of God. One of the contentious points is precisely the incarnation. In the Babylonian religion that ends up taking over the world completely, centered on Eros, we read that:

Daniel 2:<sup>11</sup> ... the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.

Added to that, we read:

1 John 4:<sup>1</sup> Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: <sup>3</sup> And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

Thus, we see that the antichrist's battle is to precisely deny that Christ is come in the flesh. The spirit of the antichrist denies that Christ can manifest Himself in the flesh. In the proper conception of Eros, it is inconceivable that God would dwell with men. It is inconceivable that God should approach sinful man to the point of making Himself equal to them in the person of His Son<sup>36</sup>. Thus, in this line of thought, some go so far as to deny the Biblical testimony by placing the condition of incarnation on a supposed flesh that Adam had before his fall. However, the Scriptures declare:

John 1:<sup>14</sup> And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,  
...

Romans 8:<sup>3</sup> ... God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

Philippians 2:<sup>6</sup> Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: <sup>7</sup> But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: <sup>8</sup> And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

To be in the likeness of man is to be as a man. He was in the likeness of man to the point that He was a descendant of Abraham, and of David<sup>37</sup>.

Hebrews 2:<sup>14</sup> Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; ... <sup>16</sup> For verily he took not on *him the nature of* angels; but he took on *him* the seed of Abraham. <sup>17</sup> Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto *his* brethren, ...

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<sup>36</sup> Philippians 2:6-8

<sup>37</sup> Romans 1:3



Thus we see that God's will is to approach the lost and estranged, to the point of taking their condition and seeking reconciliation, and He does that without sin.

5. If we ask ourselves what it is that awakens love in man, we have two totally different visions.

It is the beauty of the divine that attracts the soul in Eros, and awakens and sets the attraction in motion.

In Agape, on the other hand, it is the love of God shown for man and poured out by His spirit that leads man to give himself completely to God because he recognizes that he possesses nothing outside of God, all is given to him. Therefore,

2 Corinthians 5:<sup>14</sup> ... the love of Christ constraineth us ...

The compelling power of Agape is not found in using fear to coerce someone into loving Him. That's why it says:

Zachariah 4:<sup>6</sup> ... Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, Saith the LORD of hosts. ...

Hebrews 2:<sup>14</sup> Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; <sup>15</sup> And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

1 John 4:<sup>17</sup> Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

The compelling power of Agape is found in self sacrifice and a willingness to suffer for His enemies.

6. Additionally, when we speak of the soul, within Eros, the immortality of the soul is always present. Immortality is a proper attribute of the soul, which is only a witness of its divine origin. All that is needed is for the soul to purify itself from its slavery to the senses in order to return to its divine origin. The divine life of immortality is its natural condition. Thus, the immortality of the soul is an essential foundation of a religion of Eros character.

In Agape, however, the immortality of the soul is a totally foreign concept. In its place, we find the resurrection of the dead. If participation in eternity is possible for man, that participation is not based on any natural quality in man, but only on a mighty act of God. It is God alone who can make the sinner righteous, so too, it is God alone who can make the dead live. Resurrection in that sense is a hallmark of the Agape system of thought. Death is thus the consequence of man's sin, and resurrection is the act of love arising purely from the will of God.

7. Finally, we see that there are two different conceptions of God in systems based on Eros and those based on Agape.

In Eros, the God of Christianity manifests Himself as a Trinity, that is, as one God, a unity of three coeternal persons. And surely this might come as a shock to some. However, we invite you to dispassionately consider the evidence. In what does Eros manifest itself?

*If God is truly—in His very essence—the God of “love” (John 3:16 and 1 John 4:8), then we need to consider the following implications. Could one who has existed from all eternity past and who made us in His loving image—could this God truly be called love if He existed only as a solitary being? **Is not love especially divine love, possible only if the one who made our universe was a plural being who was exercising “love” within His divine plurality from all eternity past?...** The Unitarian professes to agree with the statement that ‘God is love.’ But these words ‘God is love,’ have no real meaning unless God is*

*at least two Persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God were a single person, then before the universe was made, he was not love. For, if love be of the essence of God, he must have possessed an eternal object of love. Furthermore, **perfect love is possible only between equals**. Just as a man cannot satisfy or realize his powers of love by loving the lower animals, so God cannot satisfy or realize his love by loving man or any creature. **Being infinite, he must have eternally possessed an infinite object of his love, some alter ego**, or, to use the language of traditional Christian theology, a consubstantial, co-eternal, and co-equal Son.*

*[God's] self communion and association within Himself, wholly independent of the created universe, is impossible to an essence destitute of personality. Only the plural unity of the Trinity explains this, for there must be someone to be known. Likewise there must be someone to be loved. There was a time when the universe was not, and if God blessedness and perfection depended upon the universe, then there would have been a time when God was neither self-conscious [nor] blessed. Inspiration and reason both demand a triune God composed of Father, Son and Holy Spirit"<sup>38</sup>.*

We find in these words the very essence of Eros in the Trinity, an echo of the Greek philosophy. Love really exists when it finds value in the object. This description is self-love; outside of this it is claimed that it is not love, or it cannot find its satisfaction nor bring it to its fullness. 'I love you because you are like me' is the motto. That is why the Trinity is demanded – because it is self-love. Therefore, it is affirmed that God must be at least two persons. It is self-love, because love is only towards the one who is its alter ego. It is by finding equality of characteristics, which in the Trinity is based on power, knowledge

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<sup>38</sup> Whidden, W., Moon J., Reeve, J., *Trinity*, (2008).

and age, that love can really happen. Only between equals is perfect love possible. It is a denial of the sure promise given to mankind to receive the perfect and total pure Agape love of God:

Romans 8:<sup>32</sup> He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

1 John 14: <sup>17</sup> Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love; but **perfect love** casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

It is evident that present-day Christianity has drawn from Greek philosophy in its conception of God and continues to draw from it to build its religion.

*“Indeed, contemporary Christian approaches to the doctrine of God are often framed as either an endorsement, modification, or rejection of classical theism of some variety”<sup>39</sup>.*

And this translates to the rest of its teachings, as for example when Agape is defined with the very qualities of Eros.

*“Charity. Gr. agape, “love,” the higher type of love, which recognizes something of value in the person or object that is loved; love that is based on principle, not on emotion; love that grows out of respect for the admirable qualities of its object. This love is that which is seen between the Father and Jesus (see John 15:10; 17:26); it is the redeeming love of the Godhead for lost humanity (see John 15:9; 1 John 3:1; 4:9, 16); it is the special quality demonstrated in the dealings of Christians with one another (see John 13:34, 35; 15:12-14); it*

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<sup>39</sup> John Peckham, (2020), *The Doctrine of God*, page 21, T&T CLARK, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

*is used to signify the believer's relation to God (see 1 John 2:5; 4:12; 5:3). Love for God is shown by conformity with His will; this is proof of love (see John 2:4, 5). See Additional Note on Psalm 36; see on Matt. 5:43, 44.”<sup>40</sup>*

But, isn't it man's way to God to abandon revelation in order to make use of philosophy? The struggle that has pervaded the history of Christianity, which we will not refer to here, in which Eros intrudes into the pure concept of Agape love revealed by Christ Jesus and His apostles, defiling it in the mud of self-love, finds its expression also in the largest body of Christianity. John Paul II in his Theology of the Body General Audiences asserts:

*“... that fullness of eros, which means the aspiration of the human spirit toward what is true, good and beautiful, so that what is erotic also becomes true, good and beautiful. Therefore it is indispensable that ethos should become the constituent form of eros.”<sup>41</sup>*

And Benedict XVI's first encyclical deals precisely with issue the of eros:

*“In the critique of Christianity which began with the Enlightenment and grew progressively more radical, this new element was seen as something thoroughly negative. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, Christianity had poisoned eros, which for its part, while not completely succumbing, gradually degenerated into vice. Here the German philosopher was expressing a widely-held perception: doesn't the Church, with all her commandments and prohibitions, turn to bitterness the most precious thing in life? Doesn't she blow the whistle just when the joy which is the Creator's gift offers us a happiness which is itself a certain*

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<sup>40</sup> *Seventh Day Adventist Commentary*, on 1 Corinthians 13:1, Charity.

<sup>41</sup> [https://stmarys-waco.org/documents/2016/9/theology\\_of\\_the\\_body.pdf](https://stmarys-waco.org/documents/2016/9/theology_of_the_body.pdf)

*foretaste of the Divine? But is this the case? Did Christianity really destroy eros? ... But it in no way rejected eros as such; rather, it declared war on a warped and destructive form of it, because this counterfeit divinization of eros actually strips it of its dignity and dehumanizes it. ... Two things emerge clearly from this rapid overview of the concept of eros past and present. First, there is a certain relationship between love and the Divine: love promises infinity, eternity—a reality far greater and totally other than our everyday existence. Yet we have also seen that the way to attain this goal is not simply by submitting to instinct. Purification and growth in maturity are called for; and these also pass through the path of renunciation. Far from rejecting or “poisoning” eros, they heal it and restore its true grandeur. This is due first and foremost to the fact that man is a being made up of body and soul. Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united; the challenge of eros can be said to be truly overcome when this unification is achieved. ... True, eros tends to rise “in ecstasy” towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing. ... It is part of love's growth towards higher levels and inward purification that it now seeks to become definitive, and it does so in a twofold sense: both in the sense of exclusivity (this particular person alone) and in the sense of being “for ever”. Love embraces the whole of existence in each of its dimensions, including the dimension of time. It could hardly be otherwise, since its promise looks towards its definitive goal: love looks to the eternal. Love is indeed “ecstasy”, not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God ... We have seen that God's eros for man is also totally agape. ... The philosophical dimension to be noted*

*in this biblical vision, and its importance from the standpoint of the history of religions, lies in the fact that on the one hand we find ourselves before a strictly metaphysical image of God: God is the absolute and ultimate source of all being; but this universal principle of creation—the Logos, primordial reason—is at the same time a lover with all the passion of a true love. Eros is thus supremely ennobled, yet at the same time it is so purified as to become one with agape.”<sup>42</sup>.*

Is it not a description of the God of philosophy, impregnated with self-love Eros, the path of man's ascent to God? Thus we see in the concept of the God of present-day Christianity the pure traits of Eros.

But on the other hand, in Agape, God is not a Trinity<sup>43</sup>. There is only one God, the Father<sup>44</sup>, and He has a Son<sup>45</sup>, who is His Beloved<sup>46</sup>. As the Son of God, He inherits all things, including the name Jehovah<sup>47</sup>; He is of the same substance and becomes our God<sup>48</sup>, because it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell<sup>49</sup>. And the key here, the cornerstone, is in Jesus' identity as the only begotten Son of God<sup>50</sup>. The Father truly had a Son to give<sup>51</sup>, not Himself, or a partner or companion as in the tri-theistic Trinity. The One sent from

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<sup>42</sup> Benedicto XVI (2005), *Deus Caritas Est*.

[https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html)

<sup>43</sup> For further study on this topic, see:

Adrian Ebens, *The Return of Elijah*,

<https://maranathamedia.com/book/view/the-return-of-elijah>

Daniel Bernhardt, *A Study on the Divinity*

<https://maranathamedia.com/book/view/a-study-on-the-divinity>

<sup>44</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:6; John 17:3; Ephesians 4:6

<sup>45</sup> Hebrews 1:5, 6; John 18:36-37

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 3:17; Proverbs 8:30

<sup>47</sup> Hebrews 1:1-4; Exodus 23:20-21

<sup>48</sup> John 5:23; Titus 2:13

<sup>49</sup> Colossians 1:19

<sup>50</sup> John 3:16; John 5:18; 10:33-36; 1 John 5:10-12

<sup>51</sup> Isaiah 9:6; Romans 8:32

heaven is the only begotten Son, not another. This fact all Eros-influenced systems try to obscure. This is the stone on which they stumble, and which many end up discarding. For it is in the condition of Son that it is revealed that all things come from the Father<sup>52</sup>, that the Father has loved the Son and has given Him all things, and the Son has thus become the divine pattern for the whole universe, for the recognition and glory of God. The Son, in His condition of son, and by His condition of son, negates or nullifies each of the central points of Eros. The Son is God's way to all His creation, including especially man in his fallen condition. The Son is the author and finisher of His faith, hence He is the Amen<sup>53</sup>. It was given to the Son to have life in Himself<sup>54</sup> – that's His identity, and His value is that His Father loves Him and finds His delight in Him. It is the love of the Father for the Son that constitutes the pattern and the invitation that Jesus makes to all of us to participate in this communion<sup>55</sup>, so that we may know and participate in the love with which the Father loved the Son from the days of eternity. And it is in His condition as Son that He could say, I lay down my life and I take it up again<sup>56</sup>. Thus, the condition of Jesus as Son of God in His divinity and as Son of man according to the flesh of David<sup>57</sup>, constitutes the central stone, the cornerstone of Agape love. For in this love was shown, that God sent His Son<sup>58</sup>. Thus, the Son is the Agape of God revealed.

We therefore can see all these concepts revolving around Eros on the one hand and Agape on the other. Even though the individual and collective human experience is so full of inconsistencies, being able to see these concepts, their origin, where they come from, and what they are based on, allows us to see the two great centers of thought

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<sup>52</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:6; 2 Corinthians 5:18

<sup>53</sup> Hebrews 12:2; Revelation 3:14

<sup>54</sup> John 5:26

<sup>55</sup> 1 John 1:3; John 17:20-23

<sup>56</sup> John 10:19

<sup>57</sup> Romans 1:3

<sup>58</sup> 1 John 4:9-10



that are in conflict. The big question obviously is, what will we do about this? Who will we follow? May God help us and give us the Spirit of His Son, which cries “Abba Father”<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Galatians 4:6

Paul, describing the impact of the message of pure primitive Christianity, says:

*1 Corinthians 1:19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

The life of Christ and his message disrupted the ancient world, both devout Jews and also the pagan and intellectual world represented at that time by the Greeks. What specifically did this message consist of? What was it that so disturbed these two very dissimilar groups? The answer to this question is centered on the love of God, and what Christ and His apostles preached and lived. In this booklet we trace the thread of this revelation, and see how the serpent's lies gave life to the religions of the ancient mysteries, leaping into Greek philosophy, and intermingling into those of today's society. We see and contrast these two philosophies and discover in the cross the Agape of God.

# AGAPE LOVE OF GOD OR EROS