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Pope Benedict XVI on Divine Eros

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THE SAINT PAUL SEMINARY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Pope Benedict XVI on Divine Eros

A THESIS

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Of the University of St. Thomas

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For the Degree

Master of Arts in Theology

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Charles R. Reinhardt

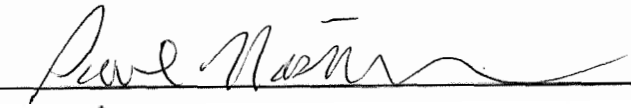
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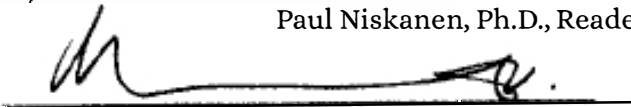
This thesis by Charles Reinhardt fulfills the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts degree in Theology approved by William Stevenson, Ph.D., as Thesis Advisor, and by Paul Niskanen, Ph.D. and by Rev. Pietro Rossotti as Readers.



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Introduction

On Christmas Day in 2005, in the first year of his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI promulgated his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. In this letter, he outlines an argument which seeks to clarify the nature of love as well as its implications for the life of the Church. While the argument is in many ways new, Benedict sees it as a continuation of the teaching of the magisterium, in particular the teachings following the Second Vatican Council. He understands his message to be essential for humanity and for the life of the Church. Benedict believes that the message, “God is love,” is so important that it should be the foundation of every Christian action and theological thesis.¹ The message that he promotes is a message of hope that every Christian is not simply adhering to a set of arbitrary philosophical principles but rather is in a relationship with a God who became man out of love for the world.² This relationship is found in the Trinity which is the foundation of Christianity and the mission of the Church in the world.³ Because of this, Benedict is seeking to develop a theological foundation that will foster a proper understanding of the relationship of love that exists between God and the Church.

The expressed goal of *Deus Caritas Est* is to “clarify some essential facts concerning the love which God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to man... so as to call forth in the world renewed energy and commitment in the human response to God's love.”⁴ Benedict however recognizes that the document itself is limited in its scope. Therefore, it is the goal of this thesis to reconstruct an important argument that Benedict expresses but does not fully develop in his

1 Pope Benedict XVI, Celebration of Vespers at the Basilica of St Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, Pavia, (22 April 2007).

2 Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical on Christian Love *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), § 1.

3 Pope Benedict XVI, Eucharistic Celebration in the square in front of the Cathedral of Velletri (Italy), (23 September 2007); Pope Benedict XVI, World Mission Day 2006, (29 April 2006).

4 *Deus Caritas Est*, § 1.

encyclical.⁵ Specifically, it will provide an argument, in three parts, for the conclusion that *eros* is rightly able to be predicated of God.⁶

The first part of this thesis examines three stages of development in the understanding of *eros*. The first stage of development is found in the movement from pagan religious cults to the philosophy of Plato. The second stage of development is found in the works of Saint Augustine in which he takes his training in Platonic philosophy and applies it to the the Christian understanding of God. The third stage of development is the rejection of Augustine in the work of the Protestant theologian, Anders Nygren.

The second part of this thesis focuses on presenting the work of Benedict. He argues that the fullness of human love is found in *eros* as perfected by *agape*. He makes clear that it is only in the union of *eros* and *agape* that one is able to fully understand the relationship that God has with His Church. This definition however presents a seeming contradiction between God's perfection and the desire that is required for *eros*.

The third part of this thesis provides the scriptural basis for Benedict's conclusion that God's love is rightly described as *eros*. The evidence is found through examining God's love in Salvation History beginning with creation and culminating in Jesus' death on the Cross.⁷ Benedict focuses on five points in Salvation History: creation, the relationship of God with the people of Israel, the incarnation, the crucifixion and the establishment of the Eucharist. Through these five points of development Benedict builds a true understanding of God's erotic love for the Church.

The conclusion of this thesis begins to present the implications of the love that God has

⁵ The work of Benedict will be limited to his official teachings as the Bishop of Rome. Joseph Ratzinger is well worth studying as a theologian, but the arguments in *Deus Caritas Est* are being presented to the Church in a different capacity and I will continue to focus on his thought which is also presented in that capacity.

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, To participants in the meeting organized by the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", (23 January 2006).

⁷ Benedict XVI, World Mission Day 2006.

for His people and His Church. Without a proper understanding of this love, the Church, which is founded on God's love, will fail to fully partake in its mission. By building a proper understanding of God's love, the rest of the Church's life becomes more clear; the love of God in the Church leads to the Church embracing the joy of the Cross and bringing that joy to the world.

Part I: History of *Eros*

It is important to understand the historical context in which Benedict is making the arguments in *Deus Caritas Est*. He himself begins the encyclical by examining the linguistic and cultural context of the word “love” and comes to the preliminary conclusion “that biblical faith does not set up a parallel universe, or one opposed to that primordial human phenomenon which is love, but rather accepts the whole man.”⁸ There are three major stages of development of the concept of *eros* to which Benedict provides a response.

The first stage of development is the movement from the pagan fertility cults to the philosophy of Plato. The ancient Greek religious practices contain the reality of fertility cults and the practice of temple prostitution. Each of these present a worship of *eros* as a form of divine madness. Plato refines the understanding of *eros* into a theory of the connection with the gods through a gradual rejection of the hindrances of the world.

The second stage of development is found in the written works of Saint Augustine of Hippo which combine the philosophy of the ancient Greeks with Christian theology in order to more fully understand the teachings of Jesus. Augustine accepts the power of *eros* to lead man to God and perfection, but he also makes clear that the love of God also leads every Christian to the love of their neighbors.

⁸ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 8.

The third stage of the history of *eros* focuses on the work of Anders Nygren and his critique of Augustine. He believes that *eros* cannot have a place in Christian thought because he characterizes it as fundamentally opposed to God's love. For Nygren, the central teaching of Jesus is the love of *agape* and to add any influence of *eros* is a corruption of that teaching.

Section 1: Plato's Treatment of *Eros*

In the pagan Greek culture, *eros* means sexual desire. This concept is deified in Eros, the son of Aphrodite.⁹ This deification portrays the power of *eros* over the human mind. It becomes a way for the oppressed of society to “posses” power through performing secret rituals in which they are able to feel a sense of freedom.¹⁰ In organized religion the power of *eros* manifest itself differently. At the temple of Aphrodite, every woman in the surrounding land was required to “make herself holy” by becoming a prostitute and give her earnings to the temple.¹¹ In this way, the city of Corinth was reported to have raised great wealth.¹² This practice of using sexual desire in religious contexts to gain profit was spread across all of the ancient world.¹³ Despite its prevalence, this form of religious *eros* was not the form that deeply influenced Christian culture. It began to change with the philosophy of Plato which changed the concept of *eros* into an understanding of the process moving from the physical world into the divine realm.

9 Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. John Raffan (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1985), 152.

10 Mary Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 273.

11 Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, I, 199, in *Herodotus: Books I-II*, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), 251-253.

12 Strabo, *Geography*, VIII, vi, 20, in *Strabo: Geography Book IV*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 189-191.

13 Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Cultic Prostitution in Orient and Occident*, ed. Harry A. Hoffner, JR (Verlag Butzon and Bercker Kevelaer, 1973), 213-222. In this paper, Yamauchi provides a survey of the practice of cultic prostitution in the biblical world. His main argument is that it spread through cultural diffusion, however, it provides a picture of the scope and verity of the practice.

In *The Symposium* and *The Phaedrus*, Plato describes different aspects of the nature of love, which, when taken together, present the key aspects of a theory of *eros*. This theory makes a distinction between love which only allows man to achieve physical pleasure and a love that increases happiness and perfection. It is the second version of love that receives the most praise by Plato's characters.

In *The Symposium*, Plato uses the speeches of each of his characters to present a series of conclusions regarding the nature of love. In order to understand the argument that Plato is making, it is important to examine how the conclusion of each speech relates to that of the others. The following paragraph presents the conclusions leading up to the argument made by Socrates.

In the first speech, Phedrus concludes that love is the greatest virtue and happiness of men.¹⁴ Following him, Pausanias argues that there are two types of love: a common love and a heavenly love. He says, "The man who is a common sort of lover is worthless, because he loves the body instead of the soul."¹⁵ On the other hand, the heavenly love leads to a greater virtue. When the lover and the beloved give to each other mutually as a single principle, he calls the result a "noble and beautiful thing".¹⁶ Eryximachus adds on to Pausanias's conclusion; he argues that the two types of love bear different fruits. The proper love, which is a balance of different elements, produces happiness and prosperity, whereas the outrageous love, which is an imbalance, produces injury and destruction.¹⁷ Changing the direction of the conversation, Aristophanes tells the story of the origin of love. He says that love is the result of man's

¹⁴ Plato, *Symposium*, 180b in *Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, trans. William S. Cobb (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 21.

¹⁵ Plato, *Symposium*, 183a, trans. Cobb, 23.

¹⁶ Plato, *Symposium*, 184e, trans. Cobb, 25.

¹⁷ Plato, *Symposium*, 188b, trans. Cobb, 27.

transgressions against the god's. As punishment for these transgressions, man was split into two parts and love is defined as the desire of the two halves seeking reunification.¹⁸ These speeches are the groundwork for the theory presented by Socrates.¹⁹ However, before Socrates' speech is directly examined, the next paragraph highlights the elements of the previous conclusions that remain in Socrates' theory.

The first element is the distinction between heavenly and human love. Socrates accepts the conclusion that heavenly love is rooted in the human experience of desire and that this love brings happiness and completion to mankind. On the contrary, it is human love which takes man away from virtue and traps him in the passions. The second element that Socrates maintains is the expression of *eros* as something that is found in human nature but is intimately tied to religious experience and perfection. Furthermore, he notes that *eros* creates relationships for man that have real consequences and rewards. Despite having these shared elements, Socrates' theory provides a significantly different understanding of *eros*.

The speech given by Socrates begins by rejecting the idea, present in many of the earlier speeches, that love is the greatest good for man. Rather, Socrates points out that love involves desire and that desire implies a lack since one only desires what he lacks.²⁰ If the lover desires goodness, then the lover cannot already possess goodness. Furthermore, he argues that since the gods possess all goodness, then love cannot be a god which is a conclusion that is very different than any reached by the other speeches.

Despite this conclusion, Socrates does not wish to diminish the power of love. Rather, he explains that love is a state of communication between the physical world and the realm of the

18 Plato, *Symposium*, 193a, trans. Cobb, 31.

19 The speech made by Agathon is not listed since his speech functions as the starting point of Socrates' reflection and he shortly thereafter abandons his conclusion upon Socrates' questioning.

20 Plato, *Symposium*, 201c, trans. Cobb, 39.

gods. Central to this communication is the desire to find and possess beauty in both body and spirit. Ultimately, Socrates defines love as the desire of a person to possess a good forever.²¹

This desire within man conflicts with to the reality of death. Therefore, the search for love leads to a search for immortality. Socrates proposes that in order to achieve both love and immortality man must move from a lesser good thing to another that is even greater. He explains:

In the activities of Love, this is what it is to proceed correctly, or be led by another: Beginning from beautiful things to move ever onward for the sake of that beauty, as though using ascending steps, from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, from beautiful bodies to beautiful practical endeavors, from practical endeavors to beautiful examples of understanding, and from examples of understanding to come finally to that understanding which is none other than the understanding of that beauty itself, so that in the end he knows what beauty itself is.²²

In this way, love connects the world with the divine in incremental steps. It is desire that moves an individual higher in the stages of that understanding and thus moves him from this world into the world of the divine.

Taken as a whole, *The Symposium* is making three main points. First that love is the desire found within human experience. Second that there is a distinction between heavenly and human love. Third that love is the means by which man is able to reach perfection in the divine realm. These three elements are also presented by Plato in the two speeches that Socrates makes in *The Phaedrus*.

These speeches provide two arguments regarding the nature of love. The first speech rejects worldly love by arguing that one ought to prefer a friend who does not love over a lover. It begins by presenting two competing principles within man: the first seeks the pleasures of the flesh; the second seeks virtue.²³ When the desire for pleasure overpowers the individuals

21 Plato, *Symposium*, 206a, trans. Cobb, 44.

22 Plato, *Symposium*, 211c, trans. Cobb, 48.

23 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 237d in *Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, trans. William S. Cobb (New York: State University

inclination to the good, this is a madness called love.²⁴ This madness seeks the gratification of the lover and ignores the welfare of the beloved. This ultimately leads Socrates to the conclusion that “the friendship of a lover does not come from goodwill, but from something like the desire for a satisfying meal.”²⁵ This definition of love necessitates the exploitation of another individual and honors physical beauty but ignores moral beauty. Thus, Socrates concludes that it is better for the beloved to associate with non-lovers who are able to lead an individual into greater perfection of virtue.

This conclusion provides Socrates' starting point for his second speech which concludes that one ought to prefer the lover over the non-lover. The second speech of Socrates begins by rejecting the central idea of the first, namely, that all madness is worse than control of senses. He shows that in fact the madness of the gods is a great blessing to both the lover and the beloved.²⁶ The value the madness of the gods is found in the nature of the immortal soul of man which draws man to the realm of the gods through the pursuit of beauty.

Socrates describes this process by which the virtuous soul is able to reach the realm of the gods: by growing wings. These wings are nourished by virtues and destroyed by evil.²⁷ When the soul maintains its wings, it is able to remain within the peace of the gods, but when it is burdened by trials and misfortune, the soul falls to the ground and is incarnate as a mortal creature. The type of creature correlates to the amount of goodness the soul perceived while with the gods. In this way, the soul cycles for thousands of years in an attempt to reach again the glory of the gods. These attempts are driven by the desire for the divine life. Finally, the soul reaches

of New York Press, 1993), 96.

24 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 238c, trans. Cobb, 97.

25 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 241c, trans. Cobb, 99.

26 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 245c, trans. Cobb, 103.

27 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246e, trans. Cobb, 104.

perfection through the recollection of seeing the material world from the perspective of the gods and then raising to the contemplation of being itself. Therefore, Socrates concludes that “it is proper that only the thinking of the friend of wisdom will make the wings grow, because, through memory, it is always as close as possible to that which by its proximity makes a god divine.”²⁸ Thus, it is beneficial for the soul to seek out ways to remember the goodness of the gods.

According to Socrates, in this mortal life, one must seek out that which will lead the soul into this divine perfection, and he contends that the most powerful way to develop the wings of the soul is to encounter beauty which entices madness of the lover for beauty.²⁹ In the virtuous, the madness brings about the growing of the wings of the soul and entices the longing and passion of the lover. Socrates does admit that the growing of the wings causes pain for the lover, but in the end leads the lover to that which will heal all suffering.³⁰ Therefore, the madness of love is not simply about gratifying pleasure, rather it is about seeking that which leads to the union with the gods through beauty.

Through embracing this theory of madness leading to the divine, Socrates makes the argument that the lover too is able to lead to the divine. Despite the fact that the madness of love characterized as helping the beloved reach the divine, the second speech does retain some of the critique of the madness of love from the first speech. In particular, Socrates argues that in the wicked, the madness enticed by beauty leads not to the gods but to hubris and actions against nature.³¹ Therefore, *eros* has the power to move either to a greater union with the gods or further from it.³²

28 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 249c, trans. Cobb, 106.

29 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 249e, trans. Cobb, 107.

30 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 252a, trans. Cobb, 109.

31 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 251b, trans. Cobb, 108.

32 Plato also uses Socrates' second speech to present the process by which the love brings both the lover and the beloved into a deeper union with the gods. This takes the form of a characterization of the soul as a

When taken together, these two dialogues seem to be developing a set of defining characteristics of *eros*. Fundamentally, it is the process that leads the soul to the gods through the passions enticed by beauty and goodness. With these dialogues, Plato is presenting these arguments within the context of the understanding of love within the ancient Greek society. On one hand, it is a formalization of the arguments for piety to the god Eros, on the other hand, it rejects many of the negative aspects that result from that piety. The cults of worship and Plato each understand the human phenomenon that the madness of *eros* connects individuals to the divine. However, the religious cults that worship Eros lead to an excessive gratification of the passions and Plato sees this act as a detriment to the perfection of the soul. Plato's arguments in both *The Symposium* and *The Phaedrus* reflect this tension between the human and divine elements of *eros*. Ultimately, he presents *eros* as a mechanism for developing the relationship of man with the divine. These ideas provide the groundwork that is retained in the work of the Christians who were influenced by Platonic ideas.

Section 2: Augustine's Treatment of *Eros*

A major development from the pagan understanding of *eros* to a Christian understanding, comes with the writing of Saint Augustine of Hippo. In his *Confessions*, Augustine explains the influence that Platonic philosophy had on the intellectual journey that led him to become a Christian. Through his study of philosophy, he sought to fulfill his desire for truth and meaning in realm of rational ideas and yet those ideas failed to satisfy him. When reflecting on this time, Augustine notes that he was being fed by these philosophies through which the seeds of

charioteer with two horses, one good and one bad. The valuation of the act of love depends on how well the charioteer is able to control the bad horse and conform it to the greater good of the soul.

Christian doctrine were planted in his mind.³³ Despite this, before his conversion, he was drawn to God by beauty but that he was continually dragged down by his body and his “carnal habits”.³⁴ Despite these failures he continued to seek fulfillment which he describes as climbing the ladder of knowledge. In this experience, Augustine realized that there is a fundamental limit to what the human rationality can achieve without the help of God:

I was fully persuaded that your invisible reality is plainly to be understood through created things, your everlasting power also, and your divinity; for I had been trying to understand how it was possible for me to appreciate the beauty of material things in the sky or on earth, and why the power to make sound judgments about changeable matters was readily available to me... Thus I pursued my inquiry by stages, from material things to the soul that perceives them through the body, and from there to that inner power of the soul to which the body's senses report external impressions. The intelligence of animals can reach as far as this.³⁵

Due to his natural limitations, Augustine was continually disappointed and was not able to succeed in making the connection with God that his heart desired.³⁶ It was in Saint Paul that Augustine encountered the truths which fulfilled his deepest desires in the Grace of Christ.³⁷ In the end, he argues that what ultimately allows for the fulfillment of the desires that he has for God, is Jesus' incarnation.

Augustine uses the platonic model of achieving perfection to develop a theory of love. When describing human love, he acknowledges that love of neighbor has a natural progression; “It only grows, though, by extending itself from married partners to children, from children to kinsfolk, from kinsfolk to strangers, and from strangers to enemies. But to reach that final point it has to go up many steps, many grades.”³⁸ This movement and growth in love comes through

33 Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 14, trans. Maria Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine* (New York: New City Press, 1997), 170-171.

34 Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 9, trans Boulding, 117.

35 Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 9, trans Boulding, 117.

36 Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 26, trans Boulding, 180.

37 Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 27, trans Boulding, 181.

38 Augustine, *Sermon 385*, §2 in *Late Have I Loved Thee: Selected Writings of Saint Augustine on Love*,

the use of reason rather than simply out of animalistic habit. Without this reason, human love would be reduced to the type of “love” that can be used to describe the relationship between horses which habitually desire to eat with each other. These habits are essentially driven by the passions. To the contrary, in the actions of a rational creature, passion decreases as love increases.³⁹ In this way, Augustine is beginning to express the nature of love's ability to move from the natural order to the spiritual.

When speaking to pastors, Augustine urges them to determine the stage of love of the faithful entrusted to their care. The faithful must realize their natural inclination to self love, but also be able to love things external to themselves in order to be lead to the love of God. In order to achieve this, the faithful must differentiate between objects of love that are below, equal, or above themselves. Those that are below must be loved as a means to an end lest they become a burden.⁴⁰ When love moves from that which is below to that which is equal or above, it must be done through the virtues. In this regard Augustine teaches, “when you strive to maintain these standards faithfully with you whole heart, you will be able to climb up by these virtues, as by a flight of steps, to being worthy to love God with your whole mind and your whole strength.”⁴¹ In this way, the nature of love becomes the measure of human actions and becomes the basis for the moral law, which leads man to unification with God.

The movement from the love of the world to the love of God is made possible because, according to Augustine, the only proper object of love is God. In the physical world, any object

ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2006), 399.

³⁹ Augustine, *The Euchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, Chapter 32, in *Late Have I Loved Thee: Selected Writings of Saint Augustine on Love*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2006), 93-94.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Sermon 368*, §2 in *Late Have I Loved Thee: Selected Writings of Saint Augustine on Love*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2006), 391-392.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Sermon 368*, §5, 393.

is able to point back to God due to the nature of creation. By creating, God is bestowing His goodness in an object. Therefore, when describing the love of earthly things, Augustine notes that it is the disposition of the lover rather than the object loved that determines whether the love is right or inordinate.⁴² Every object is able to be loved, in some way, because it was created by God. In this way, Augustine is following the form of Plato's thought about how one must begin by loving that which is lower and grow to the ultimate perfection of the love of God.

The fundamental difference between Augustine and Plato comes in the effect of pure love for God. For Plato, succeeding in *eros* means being swept up in the divine and leaving the physical world behind; for Augustine it means the opposite. In Augustine's view, the love of God, must also mean the love of neighbor. This love flows from that natural progression that leads to the love of God. He concludes, "Therefore, we love God and our neighbor from one and the same love, but we love God for the sake of God and ourselves and our neighbors for the sake of God."⁴³ And so, Augustine points out that the Church needs to start by loving God and from that love must learn to love other people on His account.⁴⁴ One could not reach this conclusion within Plato's account of *eros*.

The movement from Plato's thought to Augustine's thought, starts from a fundamental difference between the goal for each of them. In Plato, the love of earthly things moves into a realm of self abandonment in the divine, whereas in Augustine love is focused on the reality of finding personal perfection within God. According to Augustine, the reward for loving God is

42 Augustine, *City of God* XV, 22, in *Late Have I Loved Thee: Selected Writings of Saint Augustine on Love*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2006), 43-44.

43 Augustine, *Trinity*, Ch. 9, in *Late Have I Loved Thee: Selected Writings of Saint Augustine on Love*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2006), 282. Cf. Augustine, Sermon 385, §3, 400.

44 Augustine, *Sermon 385*, §4, 402.

not external to Him but rather to receive God Himself.⁴⁵ Within Augustine's theory, love does include an ascent towards God, similar to the arguments presented in Platonic philosophy, yet it also includes a love that descends again to the love of neighbor. This descending love is the love taught to the Church through Christ's incarnation. Christ became man in order to express his love to the world in which He loved in a totally selfless way. Synthesizing these two elements of love, the ascent of love from the world to God and the descent from God to neighbor, is the way in which Augustine developed the theory of Platonic *eros* into a form of love that shaped Christian thinking for centuries.

Section 3: Nygren's Treatment of *Agape* and *Eros*

Augustine's work on love became a central teaching in the Christian tradition for centuries. In the early twentieth century, Anders Nygren noted that it “has exercised by far the greatest influence in the whole history of the christian idea of love.”⁴⁶ Nygren however disagreed with Augustine. In his own very influential book, *Agape & Eros*, he produced a very thorough critique of Augustine's theory.⁴⁷ This critique centers on the historical development of the Christian concept of *agape* and its relationship to the pagan understanding of *eros*. In the end of the first section of his book, Nygren comes to a very strong conclusion that God's love is pure *agape*, and as such it cannot be connected in any way with *eros*.⁴⁸ This also holds true for a Christian's love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self. Nygren sees Augustine, who tries to

45 Augustine, *Sermon 385*, §5, 402.

46 Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 450.

47 Nygren's work is noted as having a very strong influence on the modern conversation of the theology of love. This recognition even comes from those critical of his work. Lowell D. Streiker, "The Christian Understanding of Platonic Love: A Critique of Anders Nygren's 'Agape and Eros,'" *The Christian Scholar* 47, no. 4: 1; Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Mary Francis McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 211.

48 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 211-212.

combine *eros* and *agape* into one act of love, as introducing an error into the Christian tradition. Furthermore Nygren argues that the root of Augustine's mistake is a misunderstanding that the fundamental motif of Christianity is *agape*, and that *eros* is fundamentally pagan.

Nygren defines a motif as that which cannot be changed in a system of thought while the system fundamentally remains the same. The motif is determined by answering fundamental questions about life, such as 'What is beauty?' or 'What is eternity?'. The answer to these questions then form the basic cultural world view. A shift in motif comes about when a truly new perspective is introduced.⁴⁹ The rise of Christianity constitutes one such fundamental shift from the pagan world. The results of this shift can be seen in the change from the pagan egocentric model of religion to a Christian theocentric one.⁵⁰ Nygren argues that this new motif is formed by the concept of *agape*. He sees it as “a quite new creation of Christianity. It sets its mark on everything in Christianity. Without it, nothing that is Christian would be Christian. *Agape* is Christianity's own original basic conception.”⁵¹ For this reason, any intrusion of other thought, such as *eros*, into the Christian idea of *agape*, becomes a fundamental corruption of the Christian world view. When making this case, Nygren presents very thorough definitions of both *eros* and *agape*.

Nygren lists three characteristics of the fundamental content of *eros*: it is acquisitive love, it is man's way to the divine, and it is egocentric.⁵² That *eros* is acquisitive becomes clear when one understands, as has been seen in Plato's thought, that *eros* stems from desire and is fundamentally a motivated love seeking that which is valued as good. Plato uses this reality to prove that *eros* is not one of the gods but it also shows that it cannot be spontaneous and

49 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 43.

50 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 47.

51 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 48.

52 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 175.

unmotivated.⁵³

This desire of mankind leads to Nygren's second point that *eros* is man's way to the Divine. He is careful to point out that this love only describes one side of the relationship; that of man seeking God.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in the classical world view, *eros* is the way by which man is able to escape the world of the senses.⁵⁵ Because the central goal to escape the physical world, Nygren argues that the third fundamental characteristic of the nature of *eros* is that it leads to an egocentric world view.

Thus the third characteristic of *eros* is the logical conclusion of the combination of the first two. *Eros* fulfills a need of the individual to find completion in happiness and therefore it is egocentric. When climbing the ladder of goodness as Plato describes, the beloved is continually discarded for the greater thing. Even actions of apparent self sacrifice cannot be characterized as such because they are ultimately done for the good of the lover.⁵⁶ This egocentric desire is then applied to religion since the greatest good to be desired is God. Nygren argues that each of these fundamental characteristics of love as *eros* is directly opposed to the love of *agape*.

The four fundamental characteristics of *agape* that Nygren lists are: that it is spontaneous and unmotivated, it is indifferent to value, it is creative, and it is the initiator fellowship with God. To establish the first, Nygren argues that the love of God, as expressed by the incarnation, is purely unmotivated.⁵⁷ It could not be otherwise since God himself is perfect without needs, and man is stuck in his brokenness. This leads to a rejection of any legalistic understanding of love. Man is not loved by God for any action, rather he is loved by God because of God.

53 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 176.

54 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 177.

55 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 179.

56 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 181.

57 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 76.

The second fundamental characteristic of *agape* reinforces the reality of the first. In saying that *agape* is “indifferent to value,” Nygren is reiterating the message of Jesus regarding the good life. By loving sinners, Jesus is not simply replacing the morality of the Mosaic Law with a different value system to judge actions, rather He is accepting sinners despite their sins. Jesus is simply loving regardless of any worth of the object.⁵⁸ For *agape*, the beloved needs no intrinsic value because it is God's love itself that creates any value within man.

The third element of Nygren's definition is built upon the fact that God's love creates value in man. This distinction allows Nygren to maintain the reality of the sin of man and the mercy of God. Because of sin, man has no worth, and thus is not able to be loved unless that love itself provides its worth. In this way, God loves man out of his great mercy and in doing so creates a new life in man. This reality forms the basis of man's relationship with God.⁵⁹ It is only through God's love creating a new worth within him that man is able to establish fellowship with God.

The fourth fundamental characteristic of *agape* is based on the reality of God's nature. Namely, that it is the initiator of fellowship with God. The result of God's *agape* is that man becomes united with Him through the power of God. When considering the love of God for man, Nygren says that “In the context of the Eros motif there is not much sense in speaking of God's love. It is, indeed, impossible to speak of it if we seriously bear in mind what “love” means in this context.”⁶⁰ On the other hand, he says that God's love is central to the idea of *agape*.⁶¹ Thus, in God, the conflict between the two motifs is presented in its most radical form. It is this complete separation that leads Nygren to completely reject the work of Augustine regarding the

58 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 77.

59 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 80.

60 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 211-212.

61 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 212.

synthesis of Platonic and Christian love.

Nygren sees Augustine's synthesis of *eros* and *agape* as a theory that has “real inner contradictions.”⁶² The Platonic theory that remains in Augustine's thought, namely, that man is drawn to God by *eros*, neglects the reality of the pride of man. Nygren argues, “But for pride, Eros would be able to bring the soul to God.”⁶³ Therefore, Augustine's idea of *eros* introduces an error into the faith of the Christian world view until it is “shattered” by Luther in the Reformation.⁶⁴ One example that Nygren presents as a way that Luther corrects Augustine is in his rejection of the possibility of man's achieving union with God in any way based on the merit of the actor.⁶⁵ It is through Luther's work that Nygren is able create the arguments regarding the separation of the motifs of *agape* and *eros*.

Part II: Benedict XVI on *Eros*

The argument presented by Benedict in *Deus Caritas Est* is a response to the cultural development of the concept of love and its relationship to the nature of God. The second part of this thesis presents one aspect of this argument in three sections. Section one presents Benedict's concept of *eros* and its relationship to the nature of love. Section two provides Benedict's understanding of the relationship of his theory to the historical concepts presented in part one. Finally, section three presents an underlying question raised by Benedict's understanding that will be more fully answered in part three of this thesis.

Section 1: Benedict's Treatment of *Eros*

62 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 451.

63 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 474.

64 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 692.

65 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 702.

Benedict places his theory of *eros* within the historical context of the philosophical and theological development of the ideas. Because of this, he is using fairly standard definitions of both *eros* and *agape*. He writes:

The term *agape*, which appears many times in the New Testament, indicates the self-giving love of one who looks exclusively for the good of the other. The word *eros*, on the other hand, denotes the love of one who desires to possess what he or she lacks and yearns for union with the beloved.⁶⁶

However, he does not describe *eros* as a moment of intense pleasure and intoxication, but rather describes it as a movement away from a tendency to look inward to a tendency to look outward. Fundamentally, Benedict describes the fullness of *eros* as Jesus' path to the Cross.⁶⁷ Because of this, Christians cannot not abandon *eros*, but rather the tradition brings it in union with *agape*.

Each are a necessary aspect of love that cannot be separated from the other. Benedict writes:

Yet *eros* and *agape*—ascending love and descending love—can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. Even if *eros* is at first mainly covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to “be there for” the other. The element of *agape* thus enters into this love, for otherwise *eros* is impoverished and even loses its own nature. On the other hand, man cannot live by oblation, descending love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive.⁶⁸

Therefore, it is clear that Benedict sees *eros*, the desire for union with the beloved, as an essential element of the true meaning of love.

While this connection between *eros* and *agape* is perfected in the person of Christ, Benedict finds the roots in the Old Testament.⁶⁹ Particularly in the Song of Songs, Benedict notes a clear parallel to his analysis of the Hebrew words, *dodim* and *ahabà*, which are each translated

⁶⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2007, (21 November 2006).

⁶⁷ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 6.

⁶⁸ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 7.

⁶⁹ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 4.

as “love”. The book as a whole is used to express that man can enter into union with God while remaining truly himself without being swept up into the divine.⁷⁰ Yet in order to accomplish this union, man must be purified. In looking at the specific uses of love, Benedict notes that *dodim* suggests a love that is “indeterminate and searching” whereas *ahabà*, which is translated into the Greek *agape*, involves a discovery of the good of the other. When speaking about the love that moves from *dodim* to *ahabà* he says, “No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.”⁷¹ Thus, in the Song of Songs, Benedict finds the beginning of his theory of the purification of *eros*. In speaking about the purification of *eros*, Benedict is making the case that human love, love that comes through human animalistic nature, needs to be purified.

This purification process does not eradicate *eros* entirely from love, rather it is the way that it becomes “a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence, of that beatitude for which our whole being yearns.”⁷² Through making this argument, Benedict is pointing to a fundamental part of human nature, namely, that man is meant for love with the God who is Love. In learning to purify love, man first learns to love his neighbor. Therefore, as he begins to love with perfected love, the desire of *eros* moves from the desire to fulfill the needs of the lover into the desire to fulfill the needs of the beloved. This concept is central to the understanding of Benedict's argument regarding the nature of love.

Section 2: Comparison of Benedict with the Historical Concepts of *Eros*

⁷⁰ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 10.

⁷¹ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 6.

⁷² *Deus Caritas Est*, § 4.

In his brief treatment of pagan *eros* Benedict characterizes the ancient Greek understanding of this love as “dehumanizing”. It is a love that takes for its aim an intoxication of reason which leads to a divine madness and supreme happiness. He points to the prostitutes in the ancient temples as evidence of the debasement of women who are treated as objects rather than goddesses; they become instruments to achieve bodily pleasure.⁷³ Yet, it is not just the prostitutes who are exploited by this practice. Benedict argues that the glorification of this understanding of *eros* is also harmful for the individual seeking ecstasy. This is because the body is removed from its place of integration with the whole person and exploited for the pleasure of the moment.⁷⁴ Benedict presents these arguments as a starting point in which to understand the Christian understanding of *eros*. He recognizes the reality of the power of *eros*, and then provides the means for purifying that power into true love.

When moving beyond the common pagan treatment of *eros*, Benedict seems to appreciate and accept the general development of Plato's thinking. He sees it as an important movement in the ancient religions from an *eros* that is exploited by those who wish to escape oppression as well as those who wish to perpetuate it. He writes:

Religions, therefore, were not very concerned with this God, concrete life was concerned with the spirits that we meet every day and with which we must reckon daily. God remained distant. Then we see the great philosophical movement: let us think of Plato and Aristotle who began to understand that this God is the agathon, goodness itself, that he is the *eros* that moves the world; yet this remains a human thought, it is an idea of God that comes close to the truth but it is an idea of ours and God remains the hidden God.⁷⁵

Benedict highlights the power of the love that the ancient philosophers were able to provide to

⁷³ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 4.

⁷⁴ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 5.

⁷⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Visit to the Roman Major Seminary on the Feast of Our Lady of Trust, (12 February 2010).

the early Church which is continually seeking to understand the love of God.

Furthermore, it is clear that there are some similarities in the conclusions of Benedict and Plato. For example, in the speeches of Eryximachus and Pausanias make a distinction between a love that degraded human nature and one that leads to greater virtue; likewise, the two contrasting speeches of Socrates in *The Phaedrus* can be characterized as competing theories of the nature of *eros*. In all of these cases, Plato is using his characters to present arguments, namely that there is a love that degrades human nature and one that builds it up. Benedict makes a similar distinction between a “disciplined” and “undisciplined” *eros*.⁷⁶ In each case, it is clear that there are negative effects to allowing the unrestrained desire rule.

It would take a much larger work to explore the full connection between the works of Benedict and the writings of Saint Augustine. However, one aspect that they have in common is the role that the ancient thinkers have in their work. Benedict realizes that Augustine “saw Christian faith, not in continuity with earlier religions, but rather in continuity with philosophy as a victory of reason over superstition.”⁷⁷ By accepting the truths that are found in the ancient philosophers, Benedict acknowledges that many of the thoughts in his first encyclical are deeply indebted to Augustine's work.⁷⁸ Benedict however does not simply reproduce the work done by Augustine. Rather, he takes Augustine's view of love and presents it again to the Church in the context of the modern age.

When it comes to the work of Anders Nygren, it is clear that Benedict rejects many of the claims made by him. While not mentioning Nygren by name, Benedict rejects the fundamental

⁷⁶ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 4.

⁷⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Biographical notes, (https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/biography/documents/hf_ben-xvi_bio_20050419_self-presentation.html).

⁷⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Saint Augustine of Hippo (5), (27 February 2008); Benedict XVI, Celebration of Vespers at the Basilica of St Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, Pavia.

premise of Nygren's theory, namely that *agape* and *eros* are fundamentally different motifs and that any attempt to combine them results in the corruption of *agape*. In the first part of *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict says:

In philosophical and theological debate, [distinctions between *agape* and *eros*] have often been radicalized to the point of establishing a clear antithesis between them: descending, oblation love—*agape*—would be typically Christian, while on the other hand ascending, possessive or covetous love —*eros*—would be typical of non-Christian, and particularly Greek culture. Were this antithesis to be taken to extremes, the essence of Christianity would be detached from the vital relations fundamental to human existence, and would become a world apart, admirable perhaps, but decisively cut off from the complex fabric of human life. Yet *eros* and *agape*—ascending love and descending love—can never be completely separated.⁷⁹

This is not to say that Benedict completely rejects the ideas of Nygren. For example, he acknowledges that Christianity is distinguished by its lack of emphasis on *eros* and its favored use of *agape*.⁸⁰ However, it is the extreme version of this argument that he rejects.

In each of these stages of the history of *eros* Benedict is acknowledging the truth, but where it is necessary he is rejecting any errors. Thus, it becomes more clear that the nature of love is deeply connected with fundamental aspects of the human condition. The connections change however when one considers the relationship between the nature of God and love. In the next section this thesis will raise a question that arises when one considers to love of God.

Section 3: *Eros* of God

One major criticism that Benedict seems to have been likely to face from Plato and Nygren is his acceptance of the existence of *eros* in the love of God.⁸¹ In the speech of Socrates in *The Symposium*, Plato presents the case that there can be no *eros* in the nature of the gods. He

⁷⁹ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 7.

⁸⁰ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 3.

⁸¹ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 9.

does this by acknowledging that love desires goodness or beauty, that one does not desire what one possesses, and that therefore, love does not possess goodness or beauty and so cannot be a God.⁸² This reasoning is also present in the argument that Nygren presents for the same conclusion. He writes:

In the context of the Eros motif there is not much sense in speaking of God's love... Eros is yearning desire; but with God there is no want or need, and therefore no desire nor striving... Least of all is it possible that He should have any love for man, for that would imply a descent from His Divine perfection and blessedness to something inferior.⁸³

Thus a fundamental question must be asked of Benedict's theory regarding the *eros* of God: how can God have both desire, which requires a lack, and be wholly and radically complete? It seems that since Benedict is making *eros* a necessary elemental of love, he must also be attributing a negative quality to God.

Benedict himself acknowledges the apparent contradiction by questioning what good man could give to God that He does not already possess. At the same time, however, he maintains that the love of God must also be *eros*. He concludes:

One could rightly say that the revelation of God's *eros* toward man is, in reality, the supreme expression of his *agape*. In all truth, only the love that unites the free gift of oneself with the impassioned desire for reciprocity instills a joy which eases the heaviest of burdens.⁸⁴

Thus it is clear that Benedict is attempting to hold together these seemingly contradictory elements of God's nature in relation to the nature of love as *eros*.

Immediately after acknowledging the difficulty of reconciling God's desire with His perfection, Benedict begins to make the case for his conclusion. He sees the desire of God for

⁸² Plato, *Symposium*, 201e-202d, trans. Cobb, 39-40.

⁸³ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 212.

⁸⁴ Benedict XVI, Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2007.

union with his Church in Salvation History as indications that “*eros* is part of God's very Heart: the Almighty awaits the “yes” of his creatures as a young bridegroom that of his bride.”⁸⁵ In making this claim, Benedict does not provide an explanation for how to rectify the seeming contradiction in within his theory, however, it does point to evidence that it is the case that God's love does include *eros*. The following is a formalized version of the argument that Benedict makes implicitly. The third part of this theses will further examine the evidence for this argument.

Benedict argues that Scripture reveals the relationship of God with man as a love of *eros*. If this is correct, then either desire is compatible with God's perfection, or one of two things must be false: the validity of Scripture and the perfect nature of God. It is outside of the scope of this thesis to present arguments for the validity of Scripture or the perfection of God, however, they are each widely accepted principles of the Christian tradition and so will be assumed to be true. Therefore, since Benedict does show that Scripture reveals God's love as *eros* then it is false that it is impossible for a perfect God to have *eros*. The final part of the thesis will present the argument that Benedict makes, through interpreting the Scriptures, that God's love is *eros*.

Part III: God's *Eros* in Salvation History

In making the case that God loves with *eros*, Benedict shows that the plan of salvation was an intentional choice of God to express his love:

Sacred Scripture knows no other God than the God of the Covenant who created the world in order to pour out his love upon all creatures and chose a people with which to make a nuptial pact, to make it become a blessing for all the nations and so to form a great family of the whole of humanity. This revelation of God is fully delineated in the New Testament through the word of Christ. Jesus showed us the

⁸⁵ Benedict XVI, Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2007.

Face of God, one in Essence and Triune in Persons: God is Love, Father Love - Son Love- Holy Spirit Love.⁸⁶

While following the history of salvation, there are five stages in which the fullness of God's *eros* is revealed. Each one of these stages is an expression of the *eros* of God.

The first stage is found in the act of creation of man and woman in freedom. This act presents the love between humans as a mirror of God's love as well as an expression of the love that God has for his creation. The second stage is the relationship of God with the people of Israel as His chosen people. The third stage is revealed through the life of Jesus as the incarnation; by becoming flesh, Jesus removed the physical barriers between God and His creation. The fourth stage is found in the crucifixion where Jesus removes the spiritual barriers between God and man. Finally in the fifth stage Jesus gives the Church the Eucharist which perpetuates the *eros* and *agape* of His love. Taken as a whole, these five stages reveal how the love of God shows forth the radical desire of God to be unified with his people in order to bring them joy⁸⁷; His *eros* for the people of this earth.

This progression can be seen when comparing the Old and New Testaments. Benedict points out that each has its own clear novelty and yet, there is a genuine development between the two. In this way, Benedict is expressing how the Christian faith develops out of its Jewish roots.⁸⁸ The Old Testament is about the actions of God which are unique in the world. He loves the people of Israel in a unique and personal way. In the New testament, the novelty is redefined in the person of Jesus.⁸⁹ In Jesus, the personal love of God for his people becomes flesh. It is in

⁸⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, Eucharistic Concelebration in Piazza della Vittoria, Genoa, (18 May 2008).

⁸⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, XXVII World Youth Day, §2 (15 March 2012).

⁸⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Penitential Celebration with the Youth of the Diocese of Rome in preparation for the 22nd World Youth Day, (29 March 2007).

⁸⁹ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 12.

the person of Jesus that the love of God is brought to each individual.⁹⁰ The New Testament represents the love of God to the world by fulfilling the promises that made the Old Testament unique. Benedict describes the revelation of God's love as a single story:

In the love-story recounted by the Bible, he comes towards us, he seeks to win our hearts, all the way to the Last Supper, to the piercing of his heart on the Cross, to his appearances after the Resurrection and to the great deeds by which, through the activity of the Apostles, he guided the nascent Church along its path.⁹¹

As the completion of the God's revelation of love, Jesus becomes the Bridegroom and the ultimate expression of God's *eros*. Therefore, it becomes clear that there is no contradiction between God's existence and his love of man as *eros*.

Section 1: Creation

When considering the act of creation Benedict makes two arguments that give expression to the erotic love of God. These arguments are the starting point for the full revelation of God's *eros*. The first argument concludes that since God created man and woman in His image and also created them with *eros*, it is likely that He too has *eros*. The second argument concludes that the very fact that God created man in freedom expresses a desire of God to be loved. Benedict bases these arguments on the reality of creation as expressed in the two versions presented in Scripture.

The book of Genesis reveals the nature of mankind as created in the image of God as male and female: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply'" (RSV Gen 1:27-28). In this act of creation God is expressing His love for mankind. In doing so, He is providing a model for action that man is able to follow. Through creating

⁹⁰ Benedict XVI, XXVII World Youth Day, § 2.

⁹¹ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 17.

mankind in His image, God is giving mankind the vocation to love.⁹² Benedict argues that conjugal love is the means by which men and women are able to participate in this act of God's love.⁹³ Furthermore, the body, in its sexuality, is an expression of the human person necessarily as male and female.⁹⁴ By blessing mankind and giving him the command to multiply, God is providing a glimpse into the order of love within the Trinitarian life.⁹⁵ This love requires self-gift in conjunction with pure desire for the other. The gift of love given to mankind in his nature is seen more clearly in the second creation story in which the nature of human desire is revealed.

In the second creation story, God says, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen 2:18). Scripture is expressing a fundamental aspect of human nature: that man is not complete in himself. Benedict points out that this aspect was understood by Plato. In *The Symposium*, Aristophanes's speech describes man as being punished by the gods by being split into two separate beings. Each of these beings goes through life searching for completion in its other half. Benedict compares this story with the Genesis account:

While the biblical narrative does not speak of punishment, the idea is certainly present that man is somehow incomplete, driven by nature to seek in another the part that can make him whole, the idea that only in communion with the opposite sex can he become “complete”.⁹⁶

By creating man in need of a helper, God put into his very nature a higher order of love that was lacking in the rest of creation.⁹⁷ When describing this love, Benedict focuses on the love between

92 Pope Benedict XVI, To the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, (6 June 2005).

93 Pope Benedict XVI, To participants in the International Conference promoted by the Pontifical Lateran University on the 40th anniversary of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, (10 May 2008).

94 Benedict XVI, To the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome.

95 Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Cameroon and Angola: Meeting with Catholic Movements for the Promotion of Women at Santo António Parish of Luanda, (22 March 2009).

96 *Deus Caritas Est*, §11.

97 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Cameroon and Angola: Meeting with Catholic Movements for the Promotion of Women at Santo António Parish of Luanda.

a man and a woman which seems “to be the very epitome of love”.⁹⁸ The order is found in the nature of desire for completion of self that seeks the other.

Benedict highlights three elements of human *eros* that result from the creation of mankind in the image of God. The first is expressed as a harmony between both *eros* and *agape*. This image of harmony is expressed by human nature which is body and soul. If there is a balance between the two elements of human nature, it allows each person to flourish.⁹⁹ In the case of disordered love, either the soul or the body are expressed to the detriment of the other. In this way, the lack of authentic love debases human life and drives God away.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, it is necessary to develop a context of love that fully allows for the harmony between *eros* and *agape*.

The second element is the expression of love as desire. Benedict notes that “in the heart of every man, begging for love, there is a thirst for love.”¹⁰¹ This thirst is the desire for companionship which can be seen in the dreams of young people when they are thinking optimistically about the future; they see themselves together with someone forever and that through this, they will fulfill their destiny.¹⁰² This desire is for a relationship that will be lasting and committed. When it is less than this, it leaves a feeling of emptiness in the lover.

The third element expresses love as the completion of the end of man. Benedict writes: “when we love we are fulfilling our deepest need and becoming most fully ourselves, most fully human. Loving is what we are programmed to do, what we were designed for by our creator.”¹⁰³

98 *Deus Caritas Est*, §2.

99 *Deus Caritas Est*, §5.

100 Pope Benedict XVI, To the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, (6 June 2005).

101 Benedict XVI, Penitential Celebration with the Youth of the Diocese of Rome in preparation for the 22nd World Youth Day.

102 Pope Benedict XVI, Pastoral visit to Loreto: Vigil of prayer with the young people at the Esplanade of Montorso, (1 September 2007).

103 Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Sydney: Meeting with a group of disadvantaged young people of the rehabilitation community of the University of Notre Dame in the Church of the Sacred Heart in Sydney, (18 July 2008).

Therefore, we have a need to love and to be loved which Benedict argues is more fundamental to our nature than our reason.¹⁰⁴ In order to understand how love is most fundamental to our nature, one must examine the reality of our creation. When thinking about the story creation of Genesis, he points out that Adam is incomplete without Eve. Therefore, it is the nature of man to seek his own completion. In this way, *eros* is part of our nature.¹⁰⁵ But, it must not be *eros* alone such as drives the pagan fertility cults, rather, it is an *eros* that drives men and women into a monogamous marriage. It is in this context that the summit of human love is found.

Through these three elements, the *eros* of the spouses becomes transformed into *agape* as expressed in their service for each other and in the gift of children. They receive the ability to transform *eros* into *agape* through the love of the Creator's goodness.¹⁰⁶ In particular they follow their natural inclinations, given to them by God, and follow the example of Jesus who had perfect love. In this way, the spouses are following Jesus to the Cross.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, by seeking the good for the body and for the soul, the members of the Church must learn to purify *eros* and unify it with *agape*.

The connection between God's love and the love between man and women is not simply an analogy. The love of God is an example and measure for human love. Benedict makes the argument that this way of understanding love comes from the Scriptures:

From the standpoint of creation, *eros* directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive; thus, and only thus, does it fulfill its deepest purpose. Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love. This close connection between *eros* and

104 Pope Benedict XVI, Pastoral visit to Verona: To the participants in the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention, (19 October 2006).

105 *Deus Caritas Est*, § 11.

106 *Benedict XVI*, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (2006).

107 *Benedict XVI*, To participants in the meeting organized by the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum".

marriage in the Bible has practically no equivalent in extra-biblical literature.¹⁰⁸

In marriage, the spouses are called to reflect the nature of God's love in the world through the fulfillment of their own love. The love between spouses necessarily includes *eros*, therefore, God's love also must include *eros*.

This true love is also expressed in the love between parents and children. In the begetting of children, parents are participating in the creative work of God and the nature of His love passes from the parents to their children. Benedict argues that this happens in the continued love of the parents:

Thus, with the constant witness of their parents' conjugal love, permeated with a living faith, and with the loving accompaniment of the Christian community, children will be helped better to appropriate the gift of their faith, to discover the deepest meaning of their own lives and to respond with joy and gratitude.¹⁰⁹

This love, the *eros*, that is shared between a man and woman, comes from the Creator as the possibility of becoming fulfilled into self-giving love.¹¹⁰ Then, as in Augustine's account, the love is passed on to others.

This expression of love in man can only be achieved with a full understanding of human nature. As a union between body and soul, man must love with body and soul unified. In this way, man finds his ultimate fulfillment in love as being made in the image of God.¹¹¹ This image is fulfilled in the person of Christ who redeems man's fallen nature through the fullest expression of the love of God.¹¹² Therefore, by creating mankind in his image as men and women who are

108 *Deus Caritas Est*, § 11.

109 Pope Benedict XVI, Holy Mass in Valencia on the occasion of the Fifth World Meeting of Families, (9 July 2006).

110 Pope Benedict XVI, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, (18 January 2006).

111 Pope Benedict XVI, Holy Mass for the 23rd World Youth Day at Randwick Racecourse in Sydney, (20 July 2008).

112 Pope Benedict XVI, Pastoral Visit to Arezzo, La Verna and Sansepolcro: Visit to the Shrine of La Verna, (13 May 2012).

complementary, God is revealing the truth about the nature of His love.

The second way the creation story expresses God's *eros* is the very act of creation. He created freely and intentionally; man is not the result of chance, rather, through love, God planned for his existence from the very beginning.¹¹³ Benedict argues that this is truly an act of God's love for man, for “to be a creature means to be loved by the Creator, to be in the relationship of love that he gives us, through which he provides for us.”¹¹⁴ This love could not have been only *agape*. *Agape* takes another being as its object, whereas the principle of *eros* is an absence which leads to a desire. In this way, Adam's desire for Eve was an expression of *eros* and could not have been *agape* for she did not yet exist. In the same way, when God created in love, He was love that which did not yet exist.

The freedom which God bestowed on man is further evidence of His *eros*. God created man free so that he might truly return God's love. Benedict argues: “God instilled in men and women, created in his image, the capacity for love, hence also the capacity for loving him, their Creator.”¹¹⁵ Benedict argues that this capacity to love is freedom. Each human person, as a created being, is free only in the love that God gives him.¹¹⁶ This condition of human nature is what draws each of us toward God.

Furthermore, the more one loves with human love, the more he realizes that his desire for love is really a need for unconditional love.¹¹⁷ It is precisely in the dependence on the love of God that man finds freedom and a call to love in return.¹¹⁸ The nature that God bestowed on

113 Benedict XVI, Holy Mass in Valencia on the occasion of the Fifth World Meeting of Families.

114 Pope Benedict XVI, Visit to the Roman Major Seminary on the occasion of the Feast of Our Lady of Trust, (20 February 2009).

115 Pope Benedict XVI, Opening of the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, (2 October 2005).

116 Benedict XVI, Visit to the Roman Major Seminary on the occasion of the Feast of Our Lady of Trust (2009).

117 Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical on Christian Hope *Spe Salvi* (30 November 2007), §26.

118 Benedict XVI, Visit to the Roman Major Seminary on the occasion of the Feast of Our Lady of Trust

humanity indicates that it is in order that man may return His love.

This freedom of man also allows man to reject the love of God and to refuse to return that love. Despite this fact, God continues to desire our love. In order to achieve this, He takes it upon Himself to complete this relationship with His creation.¹¹⁹ God is greater than the sins of man and the love of God is able to make each man worthy of His love.¹²⁰ This desire is evidence of the *eros* of God; He does not stop with the relationship that he has between a creature and the Creator. Instead, God enters into a covenant with the people of Israel. This covenant is a deeper expression of God's *eros*.

Section 2: The Prophets

After the fall of Adam, the balance of love between man and God was destroyed, and by strict justice, man ought to be punished for his infinite transgressions against God. Despite this fact, God has not abandoned man, rather in His love, God calls out to each man in order that He may heal the wounds caused by sin in the world.¹²¹ To this end, He enters into several different covenants with Abraham and his decedents. God desires the prosperity of the people of Israel as well as the happiness of the Church. This desire does not lead God to reach out and take that which He desires. Rather, God waits for the consent of His people to follow His will and attain happiness through His grace.¹²² It is this desire for our happiness that leads God to lead the people to salvation despite the conflict of justice. It is in the fullness of love as *eros* and *agape* that allows God to overcome the conflict between justice and His love. Benedict makes this point

(2009).

119 Benedict XVI, Opening of the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

120 Pope Benedict XVI, Mass of the Lord's Supper, (13 April 2006).

121 Benedict XVI, To participants in the meeting organized by the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum".

122 Pope Benedict XVI, Pastoral Visit to Turin: Meeting with the young people in St. Charles Square, (2 May 2010).

when he says:

We have seen that God's eros for man is also totally agape... God's passionate love for his people—for humanity—is at the same time a forgiving love. It is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice. Here Christians can see a dim prefigurement of the mystery of the Cross: so great is God's love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love.¹²³

This forgiveness is a result of the love of God as both *eros* and *agape* which come from the nature of God's relationship with His people.

By setting Israel apart from other nations, God is building a specific relationship with them. He remains faithful to this relationship even when the people continue to go astray. Benedict finds the clearest expression of this love in the forgiveness that God bestows on his people that is beyond reasonable explanation.¹²⁴ It expresses the desire of God to be united to His people despite their continual betrayal of the Covenant.

While the nature of this love for God's chosen people is expressed using many images throughout scripture, one of these images is of the marriage between God and His people. In the prophecies of Ezekiel and Hosea the relationship between God and His people is expressed in erotic images of the lover seeking the beloved and the beloved betraying that love. The desire of God for the love of His people is expressed as the reaction of forgiveness to the idolatry of the people.¹²⁵ The imagery used is of a bride committing adultery against a lover. Benedict concludes that “These biblical texts indicate that eros is part of God's very Heart: the Almighty awaits the "yes" of his creatures as a young bridegroom that of his bride.”¹²⁶ While on one level this is clearly an analogy, just as in the case of creation, it is expressing a deeper truth that is

¹²³ *Deus Caritas Est*, §10.

¹²⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Eucharistic Celebration at Saint Apollinaris Wharf at the Port of Brindisi, (15 June 2008).

¹²⁵ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 10.

¹²⁶ Benedict XVI, Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2007.

expressing the deep desire of God for the love of His people. In looking at the words of the prophets the *eros* of God becomes more clear.

The sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel contains a message in which the relationship of God with His people is described in terms of a lover and a harlot. It begins by describing the people of God as a child abandoned by her parents in the elements to die. God rescued her and allowed her to grow into her beauty. Then, He entered into a marriage covenant with her:

When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. (Ezek 16:8)

In this covenant, God gives his people a great many gifts which were squandered by the people playing the harlot with anyone who came by. For these actions against the covenant, the Lord promises to punish the people, and yet, He will not abandon His people completely. In the end, the Lord promises that He will maintain the promises that He made in the covenant: “I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant.” (Ezek 16:59-60). Thus, the Lord's love for His people remains stronger than their transgression. Despite their disregard for the covenant, the Lord is willing to honor His end without their participation.

In the book of Hosea, we see a similar example of the Lord's love for His people as expressed in erotic terms. In chapter two, the people of Israel is described as a harlot having sought after many other lovers. The Lord then tells how He will frustrate her in her search for lovers and He will bring her back to himself. He says, “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her” (Hos. 2:14). Here again, the Lord is

described as the husband of His people and even though they have abandoned their covenant He will not forsake them. He will love them because of His great love for his people: “My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy one in your midst, and I will not come to destroy.” (Hos 118-9). The love of God for His unfaithful people overcomes the great disrespect and betrayal of man. Indeed it is this betrayal that moved God to “to manifest his love in all of its redeeming strength”.¹²⁷ In this love, God pines for union with His people and this love is far greater than the sins committed by the people of Israel.

These images are explicit expressions of the desire that God has to be with His people. By using the imagery of marriage, the prophets are attributing to God the desire that is fundamental in human nature. In this way, just as with the creation story, the Scriptures are pointing out the connection between the fundamental nature of human love and the expressions of God's love. It is in this way that the justice and love of God are reconciled. The erotic images of the prophets develop the argument further than the connection that is made by the creation story. They present the love of God as a specific love that accomplishes the reconciliation of God with His people. These images become a reality and are fulfilled through the incarnation of Jesus.¹²⁸ In both the act of creation and the making of the covenant with the people of Israel, God is providing the groundwork for the coming of Jesus into the world while at the same time expressing His love as *eros*.

¹²⁷ Benedict XVI, Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2007.

¹²⁸ Benedict XVI, XXVII World Youth Day, §2.

Section 3: Incarnation

The effects of the incarnation on the reality of the human body contradicts the very core of Platonic *eros*. Plato argues that *eros* connects man with the divine by raising man to the gods. This understanding is in fundamental opposition to the revelation of Jesus' entrance into the world when he took on flesh. As has been seen in Plato's writing, the body is the very thing that separates man from the gods, therefore it would be impossible that God would take on a body. Benedict points out that this very difficulty is expressed by the Athenians when they encounter the teachings of Paul.¹²⁹ The incarnation transforms the human relationship with God in a way that is fundamentally different than any other religion. It is not a break with the expression of God's love for His people Israel, rather the incarnation becomes the first part of the final step in the revelation of God's love in the world.¹³⁰

When looking at the treatment of the story of Jesus' birth in the Gospels, the power of God's love is expressed in several different ways. The beginning of the Gospel of Matthew presents the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecies of Old Testament. This is the revelation of the name of Jesus as “Emman’u-el (which means, God with us)” (Matthew 1:23). The Gospel of John emphasizes the divine nature of Jesus who is one with the Creator as the light and life of men (John 1:1-5) but then makes clear how this great power “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). These passages make it clear that the power of God's love is manifest in the incarnation.

The Gospel of Luke presents God becoming incarnate at the permission of mankind speaking through the response of Mary: “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). In

¹²⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, *The Importance of Christology: The Theology of the Cross*, (29 October 2008).
¹³⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *XXII World Youth Day*, (27 January 2007).

this, we see that Jesus does not force himself upon the world, He seeks us as a lover rather than as a hunter. Furthermore, the Gospel presents the first effects of this love which is made manifest in a humble powerless child. Saint John the Baptist leaps in the womb of Elizabeth (Luke 1:44) and the Shepherds rejoice at the fulfillment of the message of the angels (Luke 2:20). In the temple, it is revealed to Simeon that He is “A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel” (Luke 2:32) and Anna “spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” (Luke 2:38). Through these witnesses, the love of God is revealed in infancy of Jesus. It is a love that is coming into the world seeking to bring joy and healing into the lives of the people of God.

There are two aspects of the love of God that are expressed through the infancy of Jesus. The first is found in the weakness with which He came into the world. In coming as a child, He takes the humble path instead of coming in might and power; He strips Himself of all grandeur in order to guide man to the love as a light in the darkness. The second is that Jesus has become small so that man might love Him in return.¹³¹ Therefore, the love of the infant of Jesus is the fact that he came into the world to be united to His people, but also that he became small so that they could love Him in return, for He desires their love.

In this way, the love of God is revealed as both *eros* and *agape* in the person of Jesus. Benedict argues that, “In Jesus, God comes to give love to us and to ask love of us.”¹³² This love is for the redemption of the people of Israel and for the sanctification of the whole world, but He expects man's love in return. The incarnation is necessary for the salvation of man because it teaches him how to loose himself and be free.¹³³ Once man is loved by an incarnate God, the

131 Pope Benedict XVI, Christmas - Midnight Mass, (24 December 2006).

132 Pope Benedict XVI, Holy Mass on the occasion of the 850th anniversary of the foundation of the Shrine of Mariazell (Austria), (8 September 2007).

133 Benedict XVI, 850th Anniversary of the foundation of the Shrine of Mariazell, Eucharistic Celebration

ability to truly love becomes a possibility. This true love results in the will of man becoming one with God.¹³⁴ Therefore, man's desire for union with God is fulfilled while, at the same time, this relationship also fulfills the desire of God to be unified with mankind. However, the incarnation in itself was not the most fitting way to repair the infinite breach in justice that is caused by sin. It is for this reason that the incarnation of Jesus did not remain in Bethlehem but rather moved forward to the Cross.¹³⁵

Section 4: The Crucifixion

It is the crucifixion of Jesus that perfects the expression of God's love for man and then in return elicits a response of genuine love.¹³⁶ The forgiveness of the people of Israel is only a foreshadowing of the love revealed by Jesus.¹³⁷ The love of Jesus, through the incarnation, gives flesh to the ultimate turning of God upon Himself, but it is for the sake of man that Jesus accepts the Cross as the deepest expression of God's love.¹³⁸ God loves humanity, but He also loves each individual human. Benedict argues that in contemplating the pieced side of Jesus every Christian finds the path to love.¹³⁹ Furthermore, Benedict sees that the sign of the Cross became a synthesis of faith based on love. Therefore, the Cross becomes a source of life and salvation.¹⁴⁰

When examining the crucifixion in the Gospels, it is clear that the Cross is an essential element of Jesus' mission. Throughout the synoptic Gospels, He predicts his death and

Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI.

134 *Deus Caritas Est*, § 17.

135 Benedict XVI, Address during a Visit to the Soup Kitchen run by the Rome Caritas on the Colle Oppio (04 January 2007).

136 Pope Benedict XVI, To the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, (6 June 2005).

137 *Deus Caritas Est*, § 10.

138 *Deus Caritas Est*, § 12.

139 Benedict XVI, XXII World Youth Day.

140 Pope Benedict XVI, Torchlight procession at Rosary Square in Lourdes, (13 September 2008).

resurrection on several occasions.¹⁴¹ This is presented as the purpose of the incarnation; Jesus came to liberate his people by dying for them on the cross and then rising in three days. This can be seen in the descriptions of the crucifixion itself. Looking at the words of Jesus during the crucifixion, He speaks mainly of the welfare of other people. He tells the women to weep for themselves (Luke 23:28), He forgives the soldiers for their participation in his death (Luke 23:32), He promises paradise to the good thief (Luke 23:43). In these examples it is clear that Jesus continues to consider others through His crucifixion. He shows His desire for union with men which made the Cross a necessary element of His life and mission.

The Gospel of John presents Jesus' prediction of the crucifixion directly into the conversation regarding the nature of love. After declaring that the time has come for His crucifixion, Jesus commands His disciples to love each other as He loves them (John 13:34). He continues explaining how He must leave them in a short while but that He will manifest Himself to them, for “if a man loves me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). As the conversation continues, the disciples reach a point of understanding. They say, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure! Now we know that you know all things, and need none to question you; by this we believe that you came from God” (John 16:29-30). Jesus, satisfied with their expression of faith, begins to pray for them that they may remain strong in their future trials. Jesus again acknowledges that He is returning to the Father knowing that it is not yet time for them to be in the Father. He ends the prayer by saying:

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

¹⁴¹ Cf. Matthew 16:21-23; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34; Luke 9:21-22; 9:43-45; 18:31-34.

so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:22-26).

In this prayer, Jesus is expressing that the love of God for the Church is the same as the love of God for His Son.¹⁴² Furthermore, this love requires Him to leave the world. Therefore, the Gospel of John is making the case that Jesus, in His preparation for the crucifixion, is detailing how the life of the Church must move forward in His love.

The crucifixion of Jesus is a unique element in history precisely because it is seen as a failure. For both orthodox Jews as well as ancient philosophers the idea of the sacrifice of God was impossible. But, Benedict points out that this love is both passionate and personal. He makes this point following St. Paul who makes the Cross the core of his teaching. When reflecting on Paul's teaching in relation to the Church Benedict writes, "Centuries after Paul we see that in history it was the Cross that triumphed and not the wisdom that opposed it. The Crucified One is wisdom, for he truly shows who God is, that is, a force of love which went even as far as the Cross to save men and women."¹⁴³ It is the love of Christ that has changed the heart of man.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Christ is making the path toward union with God clear. He makes clear the essence of love which is the fundamental desire of the human heart.¹⁴⁵ The Cross becomes the sign of life

142 There is a second argument that Benedict makes for the existence of *eros* in the love of God which is not covered in this thesis. It flows from the nature of love within the Trinity as the basis for the love that God bestows on the Church. This argument shows how it is possible that God's desire is compatible with his perfection. Cf Benedict XVI, XXII World Youth Day; Pope Benedict XVI, Vigil of Pentecost - Celebration of First Vespers and encounter with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, (3 June 2006); Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Sydney: Vigil with the young people at Randwick Racecourse in Sydney, (19 July 2008); Benedict XVI, To the participants in the International Congress sponsored by the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family.

143 Benedict XVI, The Importance of Christology: the Theology of the Cross.

144 Benedict XVI, XXII World Youth Day.

145 *Deus Caritas Est*, § 6.

for all Christians to follow. It is a sign of God's love that must be kept in focus.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, it brings about healing in the life of the Church through bringing Christ's love to her members.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, what separates Christianity from other religions is precisely what brings about its success. Everything centers around Christ's death on the Cross and the love that He transfers to the Church.

In his message for Lent in 2007, Benedict makes the case Jesus' love expressed by His death on the Cross is *eros* as well as *agape*. He writes:

Dear brothers and sisters, let us look at Christ pierced on the Cross! He is the unsurpassing revelation of God's love, a love in which *eros* and *agape*, far from being opposed, enlighten each other. On the Cross, it is God himself who begs the love of his creature: He is thirsty for the love of every one of us.¹⁴⁸

The love on the Cross is described as *eros* because of the way in which Jesus is seeking union with each individual human. He is not simply seeking to create a path for the reconciliation of man to Himself for the good of humanity. It is precisely because He desires union with us that He suffered and died. In this way, the Cross becomes the highest expression of love as both *eros* and *agape*. This leads to the final revelation of God's love. For the expression of love on the Cross is continually carried out in the practice of the Eucharist.

Section 5: The Eucharist

The victory that Jesus won on the Cross is the perfect expression of love that is for the Universal Church but also for each individual member. The presence of this love is made

¹⁴⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, Pastoral visit to the Roman Parish of "Dio Padre Misericordioso", (26 March 2006).

¹⁴⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Eucharistic Concelebration with the Italian Bishops of Lombardy, the Mass with Episcopal Ordinations Priests of the Diocese of Pavia and a group of Augustinian Fathers, (22 April 2007).

¹⁴⁸ Benedict XVI, Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2007; Benedict repeats the message that he presents in this homily to the youth preparing for the 22nd world youth day. Benedict XVI, Penitential Celebration with the Youth of the Diocese of Rome in preparation for the 22nd World Youth Day.

perpetually present in the Church through the Eucharist. Benedict points out that they are both essential elements of the life of the Church:

There is no love without suffering - without the suffering of renouncing oneself, of the transformation and purification of self for true freedom. Where there is nothing worth suffering for, even life loses its value. The Eucharist - the centre of our Christian being - is founded on Jesus' sacrifice for us; it is born from the suffering of love which culminated on the Cross. We live by this love that gives itself.¹⁴⁹

It is through this connection between the the Cross and the Eucharist that presents the power of Jesus' love into the Church. It is the way in which the *eros* of God remains in the world.

The Gospel of John presents the theology of the Eucharist early in the ministry of Jesus. After a miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, the people came seeking Jesus and He began teaching them that He was the Bread of Life. The people did not understand and questioned Him until finally He said to them:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever. (John 6:53-58)

In this teaching, Jesus is making a few points very clearly. First, He makes clear that eating His flesh and blood grants eternal life. Second, He makes clear that it is for this reason that He was sent by the Father. Finally, He made clear that eternal life is accomplished by the union of abiding love between Himself and those that partake of His Body and Blood. In this teaching, Jesus is revealing how much the Father desires union with His people and the nature of that

¹⁴⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, First Vespers of the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, on the occasion of the opening of the Pauline Year (Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls), (28 June 2008).

union. God came to earth so that He might have a physical union with His people

This teaching comes to fruition in the meal that Jesus celebrates with His disciples on the night that He was betrayed. This meal is described in each of the Synoptic Gospels. They all recount that Jesus took bread and wine, distributed it to his disciples calling it His Body and Blood.¹⁵⁰ In each of these accounts of the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus goes out to the garden to pray immediately after celebrating this meal. He prays there until He is betrayed and the sacrifice of the Cross begins. In this way, the Eucharist flows directly into the Cross and is finally completed in it.

It is not until after the Resurrection that the Eucharist is revealed to have characteristic of the perpetuation of the Cross. The Gospel of Luke begins to reveal this when recounting the story of the disciples traveling to Emmaus. They do not recognize Jesus as he walks along with them. It is not until he breaks the bread that their eyes were opened and they recognized Him (Luke 24 13-31). In this we begin to see how the Eucharist reveals Christ to the Church. This understanding is developed by the apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. In his preaching, Paul makes clear that participation in the Eucharist is participation in the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Furthermore, that the celebration of the Eucharist is the proclamation of the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). In these examples, we see that the early Church presents the Eucharist as a way that Christ continues to reveal Himself, crucified, to the Church.

Taking all of these passages of Scripture together, there is a progression of the theology of the Eucharist. In it, Jesus institutes the Eucharist as a means of seeking unity with His disciples. This unity brings life to the Church through unifying it with His sacrifice perpetuated

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Matthew 26: 26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22: 14-23.

in the Eucharist. The Scriptures show that the desire of God is to be unified with His Church and that he chooses to do this through the Eucharist.

In addition to representing the sacrifice of the Cross, Benedict points out that the Eucharist also fulfills the imagery of the marriage between God and His people. It moves from the idea of the people of God standing in His presence to the Church perpetually remaining in full union with God.¹⁵¹ In this way the Eucharist is the way in which God fully unifies His Church to Himself. His desire is expressed in the Body and Blood of His son just as it was on the Cross, but in this case He physically interacts with each member of His Church. The Eucharist contains the power to change the external appearance of the brutal crucifixion into the life giving love of the God.¹⁵² This love is what unifies the Church to God. There is no greater union possible on earth. It is this union which gives man the possibility to respond to the love of Christ with love of our own.¹⁵³ Thus, while the Cross brings about the love of salvation, the Eucharist becomes the continuation of God's *eros* in the world.

This love is indestructible and bears good fruit for the Church and world.¹⁵⁴ Benedict concludes, “Therefore, the Eucharist is, in itself, an act of love and it obliges us to the reality of love for others: that the sacrifice of Christ is the communion of all in his Body.”¹⁵⁵ The love that is given in the Eucharist is not meant for the individual alone, it is for the sanctification of the whole world.

Conclusion

151 *Deus Caritas Est*, § 13.

152 Pope Benedict XVI, Mass at Marienfeld area, (21 August 2005).

153 *Deus Caritas Est*, § 17.

154 Pope Benedict XVI, Opening of the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, (2 October 2005).

155 Pope Benedict XVI, Vigil on the occasion of the International Meeting of Priests, (10 June 2010).

The preceding evidence from the Scriptures points to the conclusion that God does in fact love with *eros*. By examining this evidence, Benedict is providing an argument that desire is compatible with God's perfection. Benedict makes this argument within the historical context that developed into a complete separation of Christianity and *eros*. Benedict argues that the personal love of God is such that He desires union with the beloved. The revelation of this love begins with creation, becomes personal with the calling of the people of Israel, and finds its culmination in the life and death of Jesus.

The result of this love is that Christ sends the Church into the world to spread this love. Thus, Benedict is able to conclude, "Since God has first loved us, love is now no longer a mere "command"; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us."¹⁵⁶ This love won the victory for salvation on the Cross and comes to the Church in a special way in the Sacrament of the Eucharist as the most intimate bond of God with His Church.

In this way, the Church is a unique human institution. It has as its core mission the requirement to spread the message of love in the world, it is a love includes care for both the spiritual and physical well being of the people of the world.¹⁵⁷ Benedict describes it as "wakening in our hearts the impulse to love, a reflection of the God-Love who makes us in his image."¹⁵⁸ This love is expressed both in the universal Church as well as in each member of the Church.

As the Church grows in love for God and accepts the love that God gives for it, His love must be spread into the world. This happens through the transformation of the will of every Christian into the will of God. Benedict expresses this when he says:

¹⁵⁶ *Deus Caritas Est*, § 1.

¹⁵⁷ Benedict XVI, To participants in the meeting organized by the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum".

¹⁵⁸ Benedict XVI, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (2006).

The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself.¹⁵⁹

This is the perfection of love in each Christian. The desire to possess the good, becomes consumed by the desire for the good of the other. Thus, the perfection of love, expressed by the death of Christ on the Cross, becomes the love with which each Christian is also transformed.

It is this love that Benedict seeks to foster in the second half of his encyclical letter. He points out the many ways that the philosophical reflections presented in the first part of the letter are produced in the life of the Church. God passionately loves each person and seeks union with them. In order to see Him clearly and bear witness to this love, each Christian must be able to understand and keep love close to their hearts.

The Christian is called to be part of the body of Christ in the world; a world which has begun to debase human love and suppress the human capacity for love.¹⁶⁰ In practice this means that each member of the Church must go out of themselves and “enter into the great adventure of God’s love.”¹⁶¹ In this way the Christian changes their reaction to the world. United to the body of Christ and His suffering, the Church must embrace the pain and suffering that the world brings. Even in the face of unjust persecution and violence the Christian must persevere in love:

[The Christian response to violence] should certainly not be revenge, nor hatred, nor even flight into a false spiritualism. The response of those who follow Christ is rather to take the path chosen by the One who, in the face of the evils of his time and of all times, embraced the Cross with determination, following the longer but more effective path of love.¹⁶²

159 *Deus Caritas Est*, § 17.

160 Pope Benedict XVI, To the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome.

161 Benedict XVI, Vigil on the occasion of the International Meeting of Priests.

162 Pope Benedict XVI, Visit to the Roman Shrine of Divine Love, (1 May 2006).

In this response, the Church becomes a sign of contradiction that changes the shape of history; the Church becomes the sign of the glory of the Cross.

Furthermore, Benedict notes that it is the practice of the Church to mark themselves with the sign of the Cross in prayer. This sign bears witness to the love of God for each person. It tells the world that the incarnate God has died to free mankind from bondage and allow him to love.¹⁶³ It shows that this love is stronger than human weakness and sin in which God loves man in his fallen state. Rather than man working to become worthy of God's love, God Himself raises man to a greatness worthy of His love.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, this love which brings about the forgiveness of man is the source of Christian joy.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, it is the joy of love which brings each Christian to the Cross.¹⁶⁶ This cycle of love becomes the center for the life of the Church.

This truth leads each Christian to love of God and makes the Cross and Eucharist essential elements of the Christian life.¹⁶⁷ Benedict holds up his predecessor, Saint John Paul II, as an example of a man who is allowed to embrace the suffering of the Cross and bring a powerful force of love into the world.¹⁶⁸ In this way the saints act as witnesses to the love of God. They guide the Church into a deeper union of love with the Cross and the Eucharist, a union essential to the redemption of the world. Through expressing the love of God in terms of *eros*, Benedict is bringing about an understanding of the life of the Church that has been lost. This truth is reflected in the fundamental nature of man as an image of God. By recovering this truth, the Church is able to continue her mission in the world. God desires to be unified with every

163 Pope Benedict XVI, Eucharistic Celebration on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Lourdes, (14 September 2008).

164 Benedict XVI, Mass of the Lord's Supper, (2006).

165 Benedict XVI, To the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome.

166 Benedict XVI, To the seminarians during the visit to the Pontifical Roman Major Seminary on the occasion of the Feast of Our Lady of Trust (2009).

167 Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with the clergy of the Dioceses of Belluno-Feltre and Treviso in Auronzo di Cadore, (24 July 2007).

168 Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with the clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, (6 August 2008).

person that He has created, and Benedict is reminding the Church that she is the an expression of that love.

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