
TO BE LOVED AND TO LOVE

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Love is a powerful force in human life. It seems to be one thing, but takes on many forms. A major task in therapy is to tap into intrinsic motivations for healthy change; to help people to fall in love with what they can, at their best, become. The Christian Scriptures offer a definition of love that can encourage healthy growth without the narcissistic overtones of self-esteem, which psychology can fall into, or a mechanical set of doctrines into which Christianity can fall. In this article, the nature of love is considered from psychological and theological literature. The various nuances of love are explored in relationship to attachment theory, altruism, some therapeutic schools, and Biblical perspectives. Finally I John 4, as the prototypical theological discussion of love, is applied to the counseling and growth process.

Love is a big word. It refers to attraction, liking: wanting to be with, to help, to please. It can be invested in memories, visions of the future, or inanimate things. One can love organizations and nations. It can be directed to God. It can be intentional or unintentional. It may or may not be reciprocated. In the end, love is a good example of the inadequacy of words: It is greater than the sum of its parts.

What one loves is what one hopes, dreams, and to what one is attracted. Love is ultimate direction framed in terms of the current situation. Love is experienced as a perception of reality rather than as a chemical reaction, a rewarded behavior, or a persuasive illusion. A purely materialistic worldview grounds love in the individual. From a Christian point of view, love can arise both from within the individual and from external reality. It can also be rightly or wrongly, healthily or unhealthily directed. For therapeutic purposes, love is inextricably tied to motivation. To love something is to be strongly attracted by it, willing to change for it. It is in the nature of love to believe that the person, thing, or condition loved is, in some sense, objectively real. If

love is defined as purely self-generated or subjective, it is trivialized and its power is diminished. The Christian position, that love is a discovery rather than a craving, can ground therapeutic motivation in a reality outside the individual. The Christian view of love can allow for impartial reflection on the person's ego ideal, their wishes, hopes, and desires, and the best strategy for seeking a fulfilling life. (When considering a Christian worldview, one should take care not to judge it by popular Christianity gleaned from TV and radio any more than one should glean one's psychology from such popular sources.)

A Christian philosophy is one of several which psychologists can consider when forming their therapeutic objectives. This paper relies on key psychological and Christian concepts that are related to love which, I believe, can be mutually enriching. But, to understand those concepts, it is important to remember that psychology, the newer, more specialized school of thought, and traditional Christianity, the older, more comprehensive one, use words differently. Psychologists, as scientists, try to clearly delimit words, defining them by observations. The Judeo-Christian tradition uses a different linguistic approach. It defines words in ways that expand their meaning beyond the merely observable. For scientists words point to things; in the Bible words point beyond them.

That is why even all psychological definitions taken together do not exhaust the Christian definition of love. Love, from a Christian point of view, is part of the nature of God: intended to be lived rather than described. Still, both psychology and Christianity are potent forces that can learn from each other. People can critically incorporate both psychological and Biblical perspectives into their understanding of love and into psychotherapy. Through a process of mutual interaction, psychological and Biblical perspectives can enrich one another.

Therapy generally begins with developing a relationship and subsequently problem solving: which is tapping into the client's stated motivation. But therapists have philosophical assumptions about the context of problem solving and what constitutes a

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truly effective, healthy human being. Carl Rogers was especially philosophically clear that problem solving was not central to the process of therapy. The more necessary therapeutic task was genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard that allowed the competent, genuine person to emerge. Rogers (1942) assumed the desire to be affirmed to be rooted not in pleasure-seeking, but in a natural human tendency to grow toward health. He believed that he observed this formative tendency and went so far as to refer to it as a directional tendency in the universe (Rogers, 1980). He viewed this actualizing tendency as a fact open to investigation. Internal motivation was God-given, if you will; external motivation was generally coercive and distorting.

William Glasser is equally clear about his assumptions that people are decision makers, radically free to choose their actions. He is also clear regarding which decisions and motivations are healthy and desirable, and which are unhealthy and not desirable (Glasser, 2000). Albert Ellis believes in the ultimate value of reason, the value of the individual human self, that evil lies in wrong views, and that individuals control their destiny (Ellis, 2004).

Motivation is often viewed as the absolutely necessary precondition for therapeutic change, sometimes in and of itself sufficient. Different therapeutic schools assume different motivations for change. The Reality Therapy technique is to clarify motivation by asking, "Will your current actions get you what you want?" Or, we may tap into the Cognitive Behavioral paradigm and ask, "Is your thinking reasonable, rational, and efficient?" In both cases, it is assumed that human behavior is chosen, motivated by basic needs, and tied to an inherent desire to reduce discomfort by building problem-solving skills. The therapeutic process focuses on personal responsibility and reality testing: Assuming that accurate perception, logic, and reason are sufficient for good decision-making. We may tap into the Rogerian belief that all humans seek health and wholeness, and that being loved, accepted, and affirmed facilitates achievement of those goals. Devotees of each of these schools of therapy assume a priori that people are motivated by personal satisfaction, reason, or desire to love and be loved respectively.

People may come for therapy, counseling, or spiritual direction out of an internal motivation to function at a higher level. But they can also come because their life is in a state of crisis: the pain from natural consequences, social consequences, or legal conse-

quences serving as an external motivator. When an individual has both motivation to improve and the ability to do so, he or she is ripe for personal growth. For motivation to be lasting, it has to move from the outside inward. Deci and Ryan (1994) investigated human motivation, looking at intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. They found Rogers to have been, generally, correct. Intrinsically-motivated behavior represents the prototype of self-determined behaviors; "they are perceived as wholly volitional, as representative of and emanating from one's sense of self, and they are the activities people pursue out of interest when they are free from the press of demands, constraints, and instrumentalities" (p. 5).

For a goal to be truly motivating, people inherently define it as actually, objectively important, not merely subjectively "important for me." They need to fall in love with something that is really, truly worthy. The word love includes a wholehearted personal conviction, but includes, in its nature, a belief that the commitment which is both subjectively and objectively worthwhile.

Individual instances of love are generally operationalized by the characteristics of the relationships in which they dwell. In their discussion of virtues, under love Peterson and Seligman (2004) write,

Love represents a cognitive, behavioral, and emotional stance toward others that takes three prototypical forms. One is love for the individuals who are our primary sources of affection, protection, and care ... The prototype of this form is a child's love for a parent. Another form is love for the individuals who depend on us to make them feel safe and cared for...The prototype of this form is a parent's love for a child. The third form is love that involves passionate desire for sexual, physical, and emotional closeness with an individual whom we consider special and who makes us feel special. The prototype is romantic love. (p. 304)

Yet even this basic analysis lacks the brotherly, sisterly, friendly form of love where both parties mutually depend on one another, make sacrifices for one another, and benefit from one another. Love can also be categorized along an intensity-sustainability continuum (Lopez & Snyder, 2003) or between the poles of passionate and compassionate (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993).

Love, even in its simplest form, is not necessarily unreservedly positive. Strong attachments entail selfish interest and fear of loss or abandonment and can be repressed, distant, uneasy, or unsure. Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, is a systematic fleshing out of the multiple forms of relationships we can experience, especially

as children in families. It observes love from both developmental and evolutionary points of view (Bretherton, 1992). Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) described the basic attachment patterns that they observed in children exposed to strange situations. Depending on the temperament of the child, the temperament of the parent, and the social and physical conditions, the parent-child attachment (relationship) could be described as *secure*, *avoidant*, or *anxious-ambivalent*. Secure relationships were close, comfortable, and confident: a source of nurture and strength for both parties. Avoidant attachments were distant, disinterested, and disconnected. Anxious-ambivalent attachments were desperate, discordant, and dangerous: Simultaneously seeking comfort, being fearful, and showing anger. These patterns of relatedness are descriptive of human and some non-human relationships and useful predictors of subsequent relationships (e.g., Harlow & Zimmerman, 1959; Weaver & deWaal, 2003; Wartner, Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombik, & Suess, 1994; Sroufe, Carlson, Levy, & Egeland, 1999).

Attachments are based on the climate of emotions, expectations, and familiar relationship styles within which love operates and suggest a link to projection, transference, and self-fulfilling prophesies. Sroufe, Carlson, Levy, and Egeland (1999) write, "...varying patterns of attachment represent 'initiating conditions' in systems terms. In this regard they do play a dynamic role in pathological development because of the way in which environmental engagement is framed by established tendencies and expectations" (pp. 10-11).

Attachment theory can provide a context within which to view relationships to God or the church through commitment, participation, ideation, and conversion. Pargament (1997) sees Religion as a "frame of reference, a blueprint of oneself and the world that is used to anticipate and come to terms with life's events" (p. 100). A client's religion can be an appropriate topic of conversation where his or her worldview is brought into dialogue with relationships and events. Coping occurs in that dialogue and consists of "concrete thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and interactions" in the real world in difficult times (Pargament, p. 104). Rowatt and Kirkpatrick (2002) extended the study of attachments to God by creating and piloting an attachment to God scale. Their findings confirm that people's attachments to God correlate with their quality of life and their relationships to others. "Even after statistically controlling

for social desirability, loving images of God, intrinsic religiousness, and doctrinal orthodoxy, anxious attachment to God emerged as a significant predictor of negative affect, positive affect, and neuroticism" (p. 648). Peterson and Seligman add,

Children who were securely attached in infancy are later more likely than their insecure counterparts to exhibit what has been termed assertive relatedness toward parents...They explore more enthusiastically and are more persistent in problem-solving tasks but also more inclined to ask for help and seek contact comfort when needed...In other words, they show a healthy balance between dependency and autonomy. In relation to teachers, they require relatively less contact, guidance, and discipline and are less likely to show attention-seeking behaviors, impulsivity, frustration, and helplessness." (p. 314)

Altruism is also often used as a synonym for love. While the two words overlap in meaning, they are not the same. King (2004) distinguishes between the two.

Altruism is then a term always related to others, to collaborative and cooperative ways of acting, to transcending the individual self, whereas love has many different dimensions that are probably not covered by the more neutral-sounding "altruism." Would we speak of a metaphysics of altruism? Love and altruism are of course intrinsically related to each other, for love expresses itself through "works of love," through altruistic action, and such action can spiritually and socially transform human individuals and communities ... love also can mean affectionate love between friends, or it can relate to divine love, as both the love of God for us and our love for God. Many theological treatises could be quoted on the active and passive aspects of love—on human loving and being loved. The very nature and essence of God is, according to Christianity and some other religions, love itself—pure, outpouring love, which is the fountain and goal of all human love. (pp. 81-82)

People can be altruistic as a result of social learning, masochism, or a faith in the ultimate justice of the universe as well as out of love. The New Testament word *agape* (ἀγάπη) is sometimes thought of as a near synonym for altruism. But *agape*, which was once translated as "charity," now connotes more than mere unselfish acts or even unselfish love. It connotes a social, mutual, full-blooded form of love which is ultimately unselfish not because it focuses on the good of the recipient, but because it comes from God through the giver and is directed toward all: giver, receiver, bystander, and society alike for health and wholeness of a personal, social, and moral nature. Love is not diminished if there is a benefit to the giver as well as the receiver, but self-benefit makes altruism suspect. Gratitude is a fully acceptable expression of love but taints altruism with the embarrassment of quid pro quo. One can

feel and show gratitude as part of a mutually upbuilding relationship. But altruism in response to love no longer appears unselfish and perhaps can no longer be unself-conscious.

Love, from a Christian viewpoint, is a bit of the *imago dei* written into our lives and into the fabric of the universe. Yet, we are separate, embodied consciousnesses inescapably viewing the world from inside ourselves. At an adult developmental stage we realize that there is an objective “God’s eye” view from which we are only one of the world’s players; but each feels whatever happens individually to him or her more vividly than what happens to another. Every individual is always, psychologically, at the center of every room in which he or she finds him or herself. Everything one experiences is automatically passed through self-reference and personalized. This self-consciousness awakens one’s anxiety. Reinhold Niebuhr observed from a theological point of view what Attachment Theorists observed directly: Everything (everyone) we love we can (will) lose. Human self-awareness, not properly dealt with, makes anxious-ambivalent attachments inevitable. “Anxiety is the internal precondition of sin. It is the inevitable spiritual state of man, standing in the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness” (Niebuhr, 1964, p. 182).

On the other hand, love—because it involves desire to take care of another—can reduce anxiety. Love inherently involves an “other” (cf. the opening line of the Peterson and Seligman quote above, “Love represents a cognitive, behavioral, and emotional stance toward others [*italics added*]”). Insofar as the person who loves is involved in working for the benefit of another, he or she can lose his or her self-consciousness as he or she focuses on productive action. Adler (1964) provided a clinical prescription that drew on that very observation when he recommended to clients that they “consider from time to time how you can give another person pleasure. [because] It would very soon enable you to sleep and would chase away all your sad thoughts. You would feel yourself to be useful and worthwhile” (pp. 25-26).

Loving involves an other. Feeling loved involves an other as well. If one experiences one’s self loved by a powerful and benevolent other (in Christian thought the Creator of the Universe), one’s “freedom and finiteness” are bounded by love. They are contextualized, and anxiety is put to rest. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear,

because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (I John 4:18).

At this point the reader may be feeling that something is lacking in this discussion of love so far—a discussion of self-love. While self-love is highly emphasized today, the roots of the concept go back at least as far as the book of Leviticus, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). The purpose of this passage is not to make self-love primary, nor to contrast love of neighbor with love of self, but to recognize the inseparability of different expressions of love. Parsing out these different expressions, Weaver (2002) writes,

Self love and love for God are actualized in neighbor love because the self is an embodied and social person. We cannot identify, much less morally assess, self-relation or our relation to God apart from our being and acting in relation to others and in the world. (p. 141)

Moreover, he continues, “... love for God identifies false and destructive forms of self-relation ... and love for neighbor checks the pursuit of self-realization by emphasizing ‘responsibility’ as the correlate of freedom” (pp. 79, 86).

The origins of our current esteem for self-love lie in the humanistic psychology movement, specifically in the psychology of Carl Rogers. Rogers was convinced that the origins of neuroses lay in people’s experiences of not being loved and accepted, and of being coerced into distorting or denying their real selves. He had a strong trust, probably theological in origin, in the goodness of the self. His famous example of observing potatoes sprouting in a cold cellar speaks directly to the point.

The conditions were unfavorable, but the potatoes would begin to sprout—pale white sprouts, so unlike the healthy green shoots they sent up when planted in the soil in the spring. But these sad, spindly sprouts would grow 2 or 3 feet in length as they reached toward the distant light of the window. The sprouts were, in their bizarre futile growth, a sort of desperate expression of the directional tendency I have been describing. They would never become plants, never mature, never fulfill their real potential. But under the most adverse circumstances, they were striving to become. Life would not give up, even if it could not flourish. (p.118)

In an effort to free people from the unfavorable conditions that were stunting their growth, Rogers’ embodiment of love was unconditional positive regard. With this attitude, he felt the counseling process would free people from the conditional love that distorted them. Unconditional positive regard, which was promptly relabeled unconditional love in

the popular mind, became the sunshine, water, good soil, and fresh air that would allow the individual to flourish.

His observations were limited: drawn from psychotherapy with middle class Americans in the 1940's through 60's, who were already motivated for self-improvement. So, in the overall counseling process, he underemphasized a crucial point. People need acceptance and unconditional love in the introductory stage of therapy, but once they know that the counselor will not reject them, label them, or shut them down, they need to move to a more genuine relationship which includes the ability of the counselor to give honest (but noncoercive) feedback expressing his or her assessments of the client's plans, actions, or thought processes. Corey, Corey, and Callanan (2003) note, "Psychotherapy is a process that teaches people how to be honest with themselves; therefore it is of the utmost importance for therapists to be honest with their clients" (p. 57).

This process of evaluative exchange occurs all the time in counseling and psychotherapy. It may occur covertly, through non-verbal reactions and direction of the session. It may occur dishonestly, as when the counselor frames his or her interventions, not as opinion, but as fact. But it occurs.

The Christian-identified counselor has an advantage and a disadvantage. The disadvantage is that the counselee may assume and project a variety of responses on the counselor and choose him or her because the counselee expects certain reactions, beliefs, support, and confrontation. The advantage is that, after listening, offering unconditional positive regard, and establishing a good working relationship, the counselor is expected to be honest about his or her religious and moral opinions. Corey, Corey, and Callanan (2003) note this can be helpful. "When therapists expose their values, it is important that they clearly label them as their own. Then values can be discussed in an open and noncoercive way, which can assist clients in exploration of their own values and the behavior which stems from those values" (p. 72).

High self-esteem is not unreservedly good but low self-esteem can be harmful. It is associated with externalizing problems, feelings of impotence, ineffectiveness, antisocial behavior, and delinquency (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005). In fact, self-esteem per se, is not the issue but rather internal or external locus of control and narcissism. Luhtanen and Crocker (2005) write,

The unique effects of level of self-esteem, narcissism, and contingencies of self-worth assessed prior to college on alcohol use during the freshman year were examined Narcissism predicted alcohol use, but level of self-esteem did not. Basing self-worth on appearance predicted more alcohol use, whereas the virtue, God's love, and academic competence contingencies predicted less alcohol use, independent of other personality measures and joining a sorority or a fraternity. (p. 99)

People who have been raised with affirmations devoid of content may either become narcissistic or uneasy, realizing that arbitrary definitions are meaningless. The healthy definitions of "good" are based on good goals, good accomplishments, or because, as children of God, they are a good or valuable part of a larger whole.

Self-worth is most firmly grounded when it results from discovering, assessing, and pursuing worthy goals based on the individual's values and the values of society, both of which are viewed as reflective of and corrected by ultimate values. Deci and Ryan (1994) proposed steps by which beliefs can move from the outside inward. The most extrinsic of the motivations is *external regulation*, where actions and professions of belief are made primarily on the basis of external considerations: e.g., to gain benefit or avoid punishment. The next step is *introjected regulation*, where the actions or beliefs comport with the person's ethics, goals, or ego-ideal. The actions and beliefs are not fully owned, but the ideals or goals they represent are. The third level is *identified regulation* where the actions are even more tightly identified with self-set goals and beliefs. Finally, *integrated regulation*, where ideals, beliefs, and actions are now fully experienced as a person's own, as natural parts of him or her self. The traditional Christian word for this process is *Sanctification*, the gradual replacement of old actions, habits, and desires by new ones through assenting to the ideal: self-awareness, repentance, confession, absolution, and practicing the new, ideal behavior. Perhaps Alcoholics Anonymous provides the simplest summary of this process in the slogans: "Keep coming back," "Fake it 'til you make it," and "It works if you work it."

As AA members have a general notion of a good recovery, therapeutic goals are a combination of the client's goals, the client's ego-ideal, and the therapist's general notion of a mentally, socially, and spiritually healthy individual. Psychologists and psychiatrists have devoted a great deal of time and careful thought to definitions of mental disorders. Definitions of mental health are more vague, but

include reasonableness, good coping skills, a sense of humor and perspective. These definitions also include quasi religious concepts such as: the ability to be productive, healthy social involvement, empathy, kindness, love of the truth as well as being able to see it, the setting of and meeting of positive goals, maintenance of manageable levels of anxiety even in the face of human vulnerability, and the ability to love and be loved. Definitions of mental health assume a set of values and come from cultural, religious, and philosophical resources.

The Biblical tradition, Wuthnow (1991) writes, sees love as: “a duty to divine law, as a response to divine love, and a sign of commitment to the Judeo-Christian ethic” (p. 50). In the Christian tradition, love is elevated to the highest of the Theological, or sanctifying virtues (Childress & Macquarrie, 1986, p. 77). The Cardinal Virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and courage are the highest virtues of which people themselves are capable. The Theological Virtues—faith, hope, and love—are only possible by God’s grace (p. 623).

The Johannine literature is the most theologically sophisticated treatment of love in the Bible. People who know no other Bible verse know John 3:16. But love can be misdirected. People can want to do and enjoy things that are harmful to themselves or others. “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). At this point, a psychologist might protest that “evil” is a judgmental word based on a very particular worldview. But all psychotherapy schools assume that healthy people feel lured toward the good and away from the bad. All counseling books stress helping clients actualize their goals, and all books contain clear, almost always unspecified, definitions of good, worthy goals and bad, unworthy goals. No book, for example, ever suggests helping a child molester whose goal is to continue to molest, an addict whose goal is to continue to overindulge, or a spouse abuser whose goal is to continue to abuse. All psychological literature assumes an ethical imperative to reduce pain in self and others, to pursue long-term rather than short-term goals for happiness, and to enhance interpersonal relationships. Many assume that a sense of spirituality, at least feeling connected to the larger universe and good will toward humanity, is characteristic of healthy people.

The idea that being attracted by the proper things will lead to a better life is stated in the Gospel of John

in the form of an axiom, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23[b]). John, like contemporary therapists, held that loving the good brought good results: That is a statement of fact rather than a *quid pro quo*.

I John 4 is the prototypical passage dealing with the Christian view of love. Generally viewed as written by the same author or school as the Gospel of John, the letter is not written in a clear genre. It resembles a sermon (*The Interpreter’s One-volume Commentary*, p. 935) and may have been written to combat heresy; but it could also have been written to encourage readers to build up spiritual discernment (Lindars, Edwards, & Court, 2000). John’s description of love that binds the community together deals specifically with teaching, conflict resolution, and leadership, and has relevance to counseling.

I John 4 opens with the call to test the spirits. Testing spirits is not a simple task and generally requires the counselee to wrestle with formulating, considering, and assessing beliefs and courses of action. Pessimists tend to be more accurate than optimists, but less happy. Is optimism a worthy goal for therapy? When people have tried, unsuccessfully, to improve a difficult marriage for many years; is it time to divorce? John might suggest that the appropriate therapeutic question would be, “What is the most loving thing to do?”

The Bible can be quoted without a healthy therapeutic interaction taking place, and highly God-centered counseling can take place without the Bible being quoted at all. Yet therapy must ultimately address issues like meaning, feeling, values, hope, fear, and purpose. People generally realize that valuing something does not necessarily make it good. Wishing something were true does not make it true. Neither is reason sufficient because reason is only as good as the data on which it is based. Unlike Cognitive Behavioral thinkers, Christians value reason, but do not view reason as the ultimate virtue. Reason is a tool. Its effectiveness depends on the data that the reasoning individual has, and the goals toward which reason is directed. Worthington and Berry (2005) put it this way,

For most Christian traditions, reason is necessary, but not sufficient for salvation (see I John). Virtues are built and vices decrease in gratitude and love in response to Jesus’ substitutionary death for humans as the Triune God is allowed to control one’s will. (pp. 154-155)

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.... Whoever does not love does not know God, because

God is love... This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us ... Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4: 7-12)

Here John directs the reader to love-as-a-gift. In so doing, he gives us a periscope through which to view the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, from a vantage point above the limitations Niebuhr described. Christians, through awareness of the nature of God, and Buddhists, through awareness of the nature of life, use awareness to reduce anxiety. When people move from immediate experience to self-observation, anxiety is reduced. Both religions observe that the focus on the self is misplaced and, while people are inherently self-centered, in love there is an element that transcends the self.

To truly love my neighbor as I love myself, I must put aside the human tendency to make myself the center of the universe. The person who successfully makes progress in this area faces a second danger of temptation. Other people will be made uncomfortable by his or her example. The person who seriously loves the neighbor must not expect social rewards or approval, but rather should not be surprised if other people try to persuade him or her not to strive so high. If this persuasion is resisted, the individual may be bitterly resented. This is particularly true if the one who loves the neighbor reaches across social barriers to love "the other" who is marginalized in a society. (Evans, 2005, p. 85)

Contrary to a doctrine of American culture, loving one's neighbor as one's self does not necessarily proceed from self-love. People with Antisocial Personality Disorder are often very high in self-love and self-esteem. If self-love is directed only toward the self, it can motivate the person to seek satisfaction at the expense of others and irrespective of any higher good. Self-love can become good when it is coupled with empathy. As such, the admonition to love one's neighbor as one's self is a restatement of the Golden Rule. Self-love becomes good when people who want to be treated decently treat others decently; when people who want security seek the security of others as well; when people who want to be appreciated show appreciation; when people who want to be treated justly act justly; and when people who want to be cared for care for others. It means valuing all persons, including oneself, to the same degree as God values us: equally.

All Christian thinkers agree that love is the central theme of Christian religion. Love refers both to the nature of God (1 John 4:16) and the divinely created nature of relationship. Thus it concerns a broad network of interdependent relationships: between God and the universe; God and human beings;

God and the church; between human beings and God; between one human being and another; between human beings and the universe; between human beings and their diverse cultural and religious traditions and expectations; and between each human being and her or his own emerging self. (Jeanrond, 2003, p. 640)

From a Johannine point of view love is rescued from subjectivity by being an expression of the Logos (λογος). The Logos is what makes the world understandable, both objectively (logic and observation) and subjectively (love and valuing). It is the natural drive, particularly present in people, which creates, organizes, and structures knowledge. The Logos unites and transcends the personal and the impersonal. On the far impersonal end, it is logic; on the personal end, the ultimately rational person is one who falls in love with the good, the true, and the beautiful. The split between reason and emotion is overcome since the Logos (logic) includes the ability, not simply to visualize the possible or calculate the probable outcomes of behavior, but deep, personal attraction or repulsion by those outcomes. It implies the presence of attraction and repulsion – the valuing emotions. Knowing the truth isn't effective unless one loves the truth.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him... There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:16(b), 18)

Most religions value love, compassion, and empathy. Christianity grounds love in the nature of God. Adolph Schlatter (cited in Loos, 2002) writes, on the nature of the Trinity.

[L]ove does not work absorbingly. A Godhead which annihilates all the reality beside itself is power but never has the good will. Goodness gives, but does so by making its gift the property of the recipient and by enriching, strengthening, and giving life to him through it. Only an egoistically distorted love brings about the weakening and abolition of its recipient. However, when love arises in us as the undistorted affirmation of the other, it has the power to overcome the logical mistake that we commit in perverting the unity into an empty One. Whereas the one who exercises his union with God as amalgamation with him, desires unity only as uniformity, love institutes that type of unity which unites those, who are alive in themselves, in the same thought and will. (p. 263)

Viewing one's actions, beliefs, and attitudes from the viewpoint of how a truly loving person would be is a cure for the tendency—inherent in all people, religions, and secular philosophies—to demonize and dehumanize outsiders. To be sure, Christianity has had its share of serious sins. But,

because the Christian Scriptures describe God as love, some Christians will always be discontent with demonizing or dehumanizing people. Christian self-examination, confession, the awareness of sin, the desire to be godlier, and the desire to make restitution, are the great Christian corrective. Self-examination is not conducted primarily in terms of whether one has fulfilled the rites, rituals, obligations, and ideals of the religion, but in terms of assessing how loving one has been.

Love is popularly thought of as the opposite of hate. More often, psychologists and the Bible contrast love with fear. Fear is a uniquely creaturely emotion. God can love and hate (e.g., Proverbs 6: 16-19), but God does not fear. We are urged to love God and to fear God, but never to hate God. Love and fear can be edifying, even saving. Hating cannot be. Hating evil may be a natural result of salvation but hating people isn't and hate, in and of itself, is not salvific.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4: 19-21)

1 John 4:19 is the ultimate summation of the process of sanctification, and, one might suggest, the best possible outcome of counseling, therapy, or spiritual direction. We love because he first loved us. We, who have felt loved, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, become more loving. We, who have felt forgiven, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, become more forgiving. We, who have felt known, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, become more honest. We, who have felt healed, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, become more healing. James Fowler (1981) puts it this way, "The [person's whole] self at [the highest stage of spiritual maturity] engages in spending and being spent for the transformation of present reality in the direction of transcendent actuality" (p. 200). Thus we grow when we give ourselves more and more to the Kingdom of God, the new creation, the vision of everybody and everything being what it, at its best, could be. Here altruism, obedience, sacrifice, faith, hope, and love meet.

But this is no illusion or projection; it is the real, but far-off vision that all people sense and to which they are drawn. As events such as September 11th showed, "I just want you to know I love you" are the words that people call, write, or yearn to send when they are in mortal danger. When death is suddenly certain, people almost universally want to leave, by

word and deed, a message of love. The Logos shows itself therapeutically as love: the deep energy that motivates us to seek spiritual direction, therapy, counseling, mentoring, education, advice, sermons, worship, and community. It lives in our affection for our children; our debt to our parents; our concern for one another; and our responsibility to the earth, to other species, and to God. Love challenges and convicts us. It is the living reality that drives and can ground "discourse" and "meaning-making" in existential psychotherapy and post-modernist psychology: It is the basic motivation which must be addressed in counseling. As the cliché goes: Love is a verb, not a noun. It is the action of the Logos, the nature of Being itself, the motivator and director towards growth in all psychotherapy, towards meaning and understanding in all psychology.

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