

AMOR DEI

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A STUDY OF THE RELIGION OF ST. AUGUSTINE

THE HULSEAN LECTURES FOR 1938

BY

JOHN BURNABY

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Foreword to the 2007 Edition

IN THE seventy years since John Burnaby launched *Amor Dei*, and even in the sixteen since I had the satisfaction of waving from the quay as it set out on a second voyage, a great deal has changed in the navigation of Augustinian waters. Remarkably, there are more authentic Augustinian texts in circulation than John Burnaby could have known: whole collections of Sermons recovered from sources where they lay unsuspected, and a remarkable collection of letters. Considerable strides have been made in the historiography of the late Roman Empire. A classic biography has appeared, reappeared, held the field for a generation, and now been caught up by rivals. The chronology of the Augustinian writings, which in Burnaby's day had not advanced far beyond what Augustine himself told us in the *Retractations*, has been extensively filled in. There are first-rate critical editions of works that in the thirties could only be read in the seventeenth century recensions of the Maurists. And what is one to say of the new discussions? There have been critiques from all approved points of view, feminist, postmodernist and whatever; there have been constant arguments about the significance of his political thought; there have been reappraisals of aspects of his doctrine which had been supposed uninteresting. Most strikingly, Augustine figures strongly in discussions of an untheological, even anti-theological nature. One thinks of recent works of moral philosophy and of political theory that have devoted chapters to evaluating his legacy. In this most eclectic and diverse generation, where virtually nothing is left that everybody can be thought to have read, there remain very few popular refrains. But "Augustine began it all!" is certainly one of them.

The reader seeking an a more or less up-to-date account of major themes and topics in Augustinian scholarship is likely to turn first to the Encyclopedia, *Augustine through the Ages*, edited by Allen Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001). But one of the few weaknesses of that work is a lack of interest in scholars who made Augustine accessible to earlier generations, and I can find no mention of John Burnaby in its

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pages. Yet I run into his name fairly frequently elsewhere, in a widely eclectic range of writings. Scholars and thinkers are still turning to *Amor Dei* when it matters to them to find an authoritative exposition of the central core of Augustine's reflection on the relations of God and man. In what John Burnaby set out to accomplish in his Hulsean Lectures, he has not been superseded.

Oliver O'Donovan
New College, Edinburgh

FOREWORD TO THE 1991 EDITION

by the Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology

JOHN Burnaby's *Amor Dei* can be read in two ways. On the one hand it is part of an important and exciting debate about the nature of Christian love which was sparked off in the thirties with the publication of *Agape and Eros* by the Swedish thinker Anders Nygren. It might better have been called 'Agape or Eros'. As Burnaby wrote: 'Against the Both-And of the Catholic Protestantism . . . sets with obtuse insistence its Either-Or' (p. 4). There is nothing like a sharp antithesis to stimulate a sharp debate, and this one proved sharp enough to keep going for forty years or more. Among the many traces of it in mid-century theological literature, the general reader will perhaps remember one of the most popular contributions, C. S. Lewis's *The Four Loves*, which, without mentioning Nygren by name, opens with some sly remarks on how easy the author thought his task would be when he first approached it intending to write . . . *Agape and Eros!*

Of those who responded to Nygren's Either-Or, Burnaby alone saw the importance of contesting his interpretation of Augustine. This was the more remarkable as Nygren's second volume, which contains his account of Augustine, appeared in German only the year before Burnaby's Hulsean Lectures. Nygren's view that Augustine formed a 'synthesis' of agape and eros thus supervened rather late upon Burnaby's maturing thoughts. But few readers will have felt any discomfort as a result, since Burnaby makes Nygren seem quite inevitable. He was, in fact, Burnaby's great opportunity. He provided the prism through which Augustine's thought could be focussed on the questions of contemporary Christian theology in the wake of the anti-idealist reaction. The introductory chapter to *Amor*

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Dei is an impressively taut evocation of the theological situation, sketching in the main postures with judicious economy of line. And there in the centre of it all we find Nygren, ready to enter the lists as a champion of the present age against the Christianity of the greatest doctor of the Western church. How, we wonder, could the book have been conceived without him?

The other way of reading *Amor Dei* is against the background of a scholarly discussion of St Augustine's religious ideas. The "eudaemonist" features of Augustine's theory of love had been the subject of debate for a decade or more before Nygren wrote. Adolf Harnack and Karl Holl had published a weighty exchange on their bearing on Augustine's conversion, and this had excited wide interest in Germany. Heidegger and Jaspers both had views on the subject, and when, in 1929, a gifted young philosophy student called Hannah Arendt wished to clarify her position in relation to these two teachers, she did so by means of a thesis called *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*, surely one of the most fascinating curiosities of twentieth century scholarship! At the same time as Burnaby was publishing *Amor Dei*, another Swedish theologian, Gunnar Hultgren, was publishing a work on the same subject in French. But of all this literature only Burnaby's book has left a lasting impression. It is easy to see the qualities that gave it its influence. Notwithstanding his concern for the systematic questions, Burnaby had the rare capacity, won through intellectual self-discipline, for self-effacement. Where other works superimpose their own interpretative schemas upon Augustine, here the cool sympathy of the true exegete allows the master's voice to sound with its own note. Burnaby quickly earned the trust of readers who wanted to know what Augustine really thought, and how he came to think it.

It heightens the interest of this book that it is the one major legacy of a scholarly career which was not, by our present standards of mass-production, over-prolific. When John Burnaby gave the Hulsean Lectures in 1938, he was a layman in his mid-forties, a classics Fellow of his Cambridge college, hitherto

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unpublished. *Amor Dei* and the war between them changed the direction of his career. He was ordained to take responsibility for his college chapel during the war years; and when they ended he joined the Divinity Faculty, becoming Regius Professor of Divinity from 1952 until he retired six years later. The fruit of his teaching labours can be seen in three books intended to introduce students to different aspects of theological study, *Is the Bible Inspired?*, *Christian Words and Christian Meanings* and *The Belief of Christendom*. They fulfil the pedagogic task that they set themselves with the same sensitive Christian judgement that is evident in *Amor Dei*. But the inner eye of the scholar remained fixed where it had always been, and Burnaby returned to the study of Augustine whenever the duties of routine teaching permitted. He translated and edited a volume of selections from the *De Trinitate*, and he contributed a brief but penetrating discussion of the *Retractationes* to the international Augustine congress of 1954. When I had the pleasure of meeting him, near the end of his life, he was thinking again about the questions first raised in the Hulsean Lectures, and these were the subject of his last article, published at the age of seventy nine. It was his contribution to a volume of essays in honour of Nygren, a gracious tribute of gratitude to one about whom he could say that 'the adversary's questioning has been the occasion of learning'. He was, I would judge, neither afraid nor ashamed to end where he began, for he had found in Augustine of Hippo a Christian whose thought was large enough for a modern believer to devote a lifetime to. A new generation of Burnaby's readers will sense something of that largeness, and will, I hope, also appreciate the largeness of the sympathy that could communicate it so well.

OLIVER O'DONOVAN
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PREFACE

THE Hulsean Lectureship has generally been held by theologians of distinction ; and in appointing me to deliver these Lectures, the University conferred upon me an honour which I had done nothing to deserve. I can make no claim to be regarded either as a scholar or as a theologian, and the subject with which I have attempted to deal is one that calls for a wide learning and a profound theological capacity. This must be my excuse for having contributed but little towards a critical treatment of Augustine's doctrine of the love of God. I have confined myself almost entirely to exposition ; and I am aware that the day may be held to be past when mere exposition of Augustinian religion could serve any useful purpose.

I do not share that opinion : else these lectures would not have been written. I think that our English theology of the last half-century, in seeking fresh inspiration from the Christian humanism of Alexandria, the Logos-doctrine, and the Greek tradition generally, has been too much disposed to dismiss Augustine, with a regretful admiration for the author of the *Confessions*, as the fatal genius whose example has led the Christian Church into the diverging by-ways of Papal ecclesiasticism and Calvinist betrayal of the God of love. It matters little that English theologians should continue to father upon Augustine such particular extravagances as the identification of the visible Church on earth with the Kingdom of God—an identification which he actually called *insania*, or the belief that sexual intercourse was a consequence of the Fall—a belief which in his last

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and most illiberal work he repeatedly denied. It matters much that in a time when so eminent a Christian thinker as Ernst Troeltsch could regard 'the blend of Neo-Platonism and New Testament Christianity' as the 'only possible solution' of present-day problems in religious philosophy, we should have ceased to listen to the greatest disciple and the profoundest critic of Plotinus.

Augustine's Platonism is manifested in the centrality for his religion of *amor Dei*—the love of God which appears in men as the pursuit of eternal values and the delight in whatsoever things are lovely. His Platonism is Christian because he finds the Supreme Value and the most compelling loveliness in the love which is God's own Being; and because he believes that *amor Dei* is God's gift of Himself to His children—a gift which, offered in the divine humility of Christ's Incarnation and Death, and sealed by the continuing presence of the Spirit of Holiness, brings God and man, without confusion, into a most intimate and most real unity.

Each of the great controversies in which Augustine was engaged made its contribution to the development of his thought. But it is not in the literature of controversy that the peace which passes all understanding finds free and full expression. If all the works of Augustine were lost but his *Expositions of the Psalms* and his *Homilies on St. John*, we should still possess all we needed for a reconstruction of his personal religion; and upon these and his *Sermons*, as will be seen, I have drawn most largely. I have made my own translations, except in the passages from Plotinus, where I have to thank Sir Ernest Debenham for permission to use the fine English of Stephen Mackenna, and in those from François de Sales, of whose inimitable French the version by Dom Mackey is easier to criticise than to improve

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on. I have used the Benedictine text, correcting it by the Vienna Corpus so far as the latter has extended, except for the *Confessions* in which I have followed the Teubner text of M. Skutella (1934). I have given scarcely any references to the enormous literature, but I have added in an appendix a list of those books to which I am principally indebted. The eight lectures delivered have been expanded and rearranged as ten chapters.

The years in which this book has been written have been a time in which pride, hatred, and violence have seemed the rulers of this world, and the meditation of an ancient ideal has been too easily oppressed by a sense of futility. St. Augustine stands for the faith that an advancing knowledge and an increasing love of the Eternal God is the only foundation upon which frail men can build the love of one another and learn to live together in peace. *Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam nova, tam antiqua.* It may be that at long last a broken world will come back to the love of that Beauty which is old, but ever new.

CAMBRIDGE, *June*, 1938.

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I

Introductory: The Embarrassment of the Anti-Mystic

Despréaux s'échauffe, et criant comme un fou : Quoi ! mon Père, direz-vous qu'un des vôtres n'ait pas fait imprimer dans un de ses livres, qu'un chrétien n'est pas obligé d'aimer Dieu ? Osez-vous dire que cela est faux ?— Monsieur, dit le Père en fureur, il faut distinguer. —Distinguer, dit Despréaux, distinguer, morbleu, distinguer, distinguer si nous sommes obligés d'aimer Dieu !

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ.

I

Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things ; but one thing is needful. For Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

BURKITT once said that ‘ the greatest service the textual criticism of the Gospels has done for Christian philosophy has been to get rid of the false simplification expressed in “ One thing is necessary ”.’¹ St. Luke’s latest commentator is not so sure as Burkitt that the reading of the great uncials—‘ Few things are necessary, or one ’—preserves the original text ; and many will agree with Professor Creed that this reading ‘ does not appear to yield a tolerable sense ’.² But the confusion of the manuscripts is evidence that the gravity and difficulty of the religious question involved was felt by ‘ Christian philosophy ’ at a very early point in its development. *Unum necessarium* has been a text of Christian mysticism throughout its history. Even Meister Eckhart’s paradoxical exaltation of the active Martha above the contemplative Mary does not really oppose the mystical tradition, but only rejects its perennial misrepresentation. For what Eckhart meant, as Otto well says, is that ‘ Martha with her never-wearied doing and acting proves that she has already found what Mary still desires and seeks : the deep unmoved repose at the centre, in unshakable unity and security ’.³

When von Hügel wrote what a high authority has called ‘ the best book on mysticism in the English language ’,⁴ he took his stand deliberately on the side of Burkitt. He held the mystical to be no more than an ‘ element ’ in religion—a necessary

¹ F. C. Burkitt, *Jesus Christ*, p. 48 n.

² J. M. Creed, *The Gospel according to St. Luke*, p. 154.

³ R. Otto, *Mysticism East and West* (E.T.), p. 176. Cf. W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (3rd edit.), p. 161.

⁴ E. Underhill, *Mysticism* (12th edit.), p. 498.

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element indeed, but *not* the one thing needful. Von Hügel's typically Catholic approach refuses even to claim for religion as a whole any monopoly of human life : it is ' the deepest, the central life ', but not the only one which man has to live. And similarly ' the mystical element in religion ' is but one, albeit the most vital, of the spiritual ' forces and functions ' which lead men to God.¹

Against the ' Both—And ' of the Catholic, Protestantism here as everywhere sets with obtuse insistence its ' Either—Or '. There was enough of the Catholic spirit in Archbishop Söderblom to prevent his drawing from the distinction of ' religions of culture ' and the ' religion of revelation ' the inference that all ' mysticism of infinity ' is illusion. He still believed that the longing for the infinite and the longing for righteousness are both alike ' portals of revelation ', that they are ' the two eyes through which humanity views the divine '.² But, with all the respect due, it must be submitted that he set a false sign-post upon cross-roads of Christian inquiry, when he opposed to the ' mysticism of infinity ' a ' mysticism of personality ' as the peculiar property of the religion of revelation, and found the goal of the first to be the absorption and extinction of the human in the divine, the goal of the second to be the fellowship of man and God.³ Söderblom's ' mysticism of personality ' is mystical only in the sense in which all religion is mystical ; and the truth is rather that the recognised ' mystics ' have saved Christendom from forgetting that fellowship with God is the true end of religion. The confusion of this life of fellowship with the Eastern ideal of absorption or extinction has in the great Christian mystics, it is true, been a recurrent danger ; but that the injury resulting has been rather to the adequate intellectual expression of their Christianity than to their Christianity itself is proved by the constant warnings which they have given against the pursuit or over-valuation of the ecstatic experience.

¹ Fr. von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, esp. vol. II, pp. 387 ff.

² N. Söderblom, *The Nature of Revelation*, pp. 123 ff.

³ *Ib.* p. 100.

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The road along which Söderblom's analysis pointed has been eagerly followed. What von Hügel's accommodating hyphens had enabled him to house within a single one of his three 'elements of religion', is cloven through by the ruthless dichotomies of Friedrich Heiler in his great book on prayer. Mysticism is there defined as 'that form of intercourse with God in which the world and self are absolutely denied, in which human personality is dissolved, disappears, and is absorbed in the infinite unity of the Godhead'.¹ The goal is ecstasy, for which all moral activity serves but as the means of purification. Opposed to the mystical, both in principle and in almost every feature of practical expression, is the prophetic religion, based on the dynamic assertion of life, proclaiming God's self-revelation in the world's history, and finding communion with Him in the doing of His will and in that alone. Since Heiler was to draw most of his examples of both mystical and prophetic prayer from Christian sources, it was necessary for him to warn us that within Christianity the mystical type of religion is rarely observable in its purity. But it was, to say the least, unfortunate that he should have chosen to differentiate mystical from prophetic religion by a characteristic which in many of the examples to be quoted is not merely obscured by borrowings from the type opposed to it but entirely absent. Our confidence in a definition of mysticism as the denial of human personality is not increased when we find that Heiler is obliged to speak of mysticism in its Christian form as 'personal mysticism'. From here it is an easy step to the position of Dr. Oman, that 'in the strict sense there is no such thing as a Christian mystic, because in so far as there is use of a historical revelation and of a Church with its cult, fellowship and active service of others, the religion is not mystical'.² Did Buddha's religion, then, cease to be mystical in the moment when he chose the 'active service of others' and the founding of a Church rather than Nirvana for himself?

¹ F. Heiler, *Prayer* (E.T.), p. 136.

² J. Oman, *The Natural and the Supernatural*, p. 420.

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We are not brought nearer to the understanding of a phenomenon by the denial of its existence.

Heiler's own conclusion was more moderate. No one will dispute his statement that mysticism is not a peculiarity of the Christian religion. He is on ground less certain when he says that it penetrated into Christianity from the outside, and that Augustine and Pseudo-Denys were the 'gates by which it entered'.¹ The gate stands open in the New Testament: Christian mysticism would have been impossible without St. Paul and St. John. But Heiler does stop short of treating the mystical as the irreconcilable foe of the prophetic religion. He finds that these two tendencies attract as well as repel one another, though he offers no explanation of the fact.² None the less, it has been the natural result of his work to encourage the belief that the mystical element is not only an alien but a mischievous intruder into the Christian religion.

Our present concern is not with the general question of the mystic's title to existence within Christianity. Our subject is the form which the religious motive assumed in the thought and life of the man who was both the greatest figure of the patristic age and incomparably the most powerful influence upon the history of Western religion during the thousand years which followed his death. We may be excused, then, from either selecting one of the innumerable extant definitions of mysticism or constructing a new one of our own. It is not our thesis that *amor Dei*, as Augustine understood it, is the essence of mysticism. The love of God, in one sense or another, is the ultimate motive for the religious life not only of all who profess and call themselves Christians but of many who do not. But it will readily be allowed that while no mystic feels any need to explain what he means by the love of God, the non-mystic constantly betrays a more or less embarrassed consciousness that the words cannot for him retain their natural significance. When we are bidden to love God, what is really *meant* is that we should . . . do or

¹ *Prayer*, p. 170.

² *Ib.* p. 171.

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be this or that which to the simple mind would seem to be by no means the same thing. To the non-mystic, and still more to the anti-mystic, Christ's summary of the Law presents a *difficulty*. The first great commandment cannot mean just what it says : it needs explanation, and when we have begun to explain it we do not find it easy to stop at explaining it away.

This embarrassment of the anti-mystic can be observed at the present time in two very different regions of Christian thought. The first is that of the 'social Gospel' in its various forms in England and America. The vitality and the attractive power of this movement are derived from its profound sense of shame at the moral collapse of civilisation, and its honourable refusal to acquiesce in the disaster which seems imminent. We know, indeed, that Christ if He came to-day would find little faith on the earth, that His disciples are but a small fraction of mankind. But the faithful few may not take the easy way of repudiating their responsibility for the world's sin. For if the mystery of the Kingdom is really theirs, whose fault is it that they are still so few ? The answer which forces itself upon them is that a Christianity which has become irrelevant must have been perverted : the talent hidden in the earth must tarnish. It must be rubbed clean before the money-changers of the world will accept it for circulation.

No one has rubbed harder than Professor John Macmurray ; and we choose his work as an example of the process, not so much because the example is extreme, as because it can best be studied and has probably had the widest influence in a book published by the Student Christian Movement.¹ There is a pathetic naïveté, perhaps something of the heretic's age-long deficiency in sense of humour, about Macmurray's ideal of an 'empirically-minded' religion, 'leading the progressive movement with science as its technical adviser', and his pessimistic prediction that in default of so complete a transformation 'religion can no longer perform any positive function in society',

¹ J. Macmurray, *Creative Society*.

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and must 'fade away'.¹ The only movement that religion can ever lead is a movement of return, upon which science is neither competent nor willing to give technical advice. The greatest of the prophets have been condemned as reactionaries by their own generation; and *Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand* is not 'a demand for a revolution in mental outlook, in view of the fulfilment of a process of social development';² it is the recall of rebels from a hopeless enterprise. Macmurray himself, because his aim is religious, would call his fellow-Christians back—back from their self-inflicted exile in a far country where they are feeding upon the husks of idealism, to the one real world of experience.

His reason for preferring the Christian to the Communist view of life is just that Communism places its Kingdom of Heaven at the end of the temporal process as its goal, whereas Jesus says *The Kingdom of Heaven is within you*, and so sets the temporal process itself in the frame of an eternal reality. But this reality is 'a reality of the temporal in the temporal': it consists in the life-experience of individual men and women, in birth and death, work and love, the aspects of life which are 'eternal' inasmuch as they are unchanging—substantially unaffected by whatever variation may take place in their outward conditions. The 'core of the eternal aspect of human life' is to be found in men's mutual need of one another; and since co-operation in work has no more than the 'utility-value' of a means, while the values of love are intrinsic, it is on the mutuality of love as personal communion that religion is ultimately based. Religion is belief in the centrality for life of personal relationship, and its task is to realise communion.³ It is transcendent only in the sense that it *intends* and has the power to create a fellowship which surpasses what is real at any given moment. Its 'spiritual world' is the natural world transformable and awaiting transformation by the creative activity of love.⁴ Its method is simply

¹ J. Macmurray, *The Structure of Religious Experience*, p. 11.

² *Creative Society*, p. 62.

³ C.S. pp. 91 ff. Cf. S.R.E. pp. 25-47.

⁴ S.R.E. pp. 106 ff.

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the overcoming of love's one enemy—fear. All fear is centred and symbolised in the selfish fear of death, which sets the individual in defensive isolation from his fellows ; and death is therefore, in a sense, the last enemy to be destroyed. But death is a fact, and triumph over its power cannot be won by denying its reality, but only by accepting both the fact of death and the fact of our dependence upon one another as elements in the consciousness of eternal life. Belief in God is primarily reconciliation to the world, capacity to live as part of a whole which is in God's hands.¹

That is Macmurray's religion. He does not limit it to the kind of activity which we call practical. He recognises the functions not only of public worship as the expression and the strengthening of community, but of religious reflection (in which he would presumably include prayer) as a necessary phase in the process of development, in which intention is directed to the widening and deepening of community.² He believes, in company with von Hügel and the classical mystics, that there must be a ' polar rhythm ' of withdrawal into solitary contemplation and of return into the common life.³ But in the necessity of withdrawal he finds the danger of religious falsification. A true religious idea must be related in intention to the real life of co-operation and fellowship, and this intentional reference, together with the return to reality which it requires, can be and often is avoided by referring the idea to ' another ' world which is imagined and not experienced. When this happens, the results for religion are a false dualism of the material and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural, and a false individualism of private piety, which paralyse its energies ; and Macmurray thinks that the Christian's most urgent duty is to denounce and combat the ' pseudo-religion ' of other-worldliness.⁴

We need not dwell on the more conspicuous points of hiatus between this version of Christianity and that of the New Testament. Its author has succeeded in convincing himself, by the

¹ C.S. pp. 36-51.

² S.R.E. pp. 65 ff.

³ *Ib.* p. 88.

⁴ *Ib.* pp. 99 ff. Cf. C.S. pp. 53 f., 168.

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usual method of disregarding or distorting evidence to the contrary, that Jesus was a social revolutionary—not merely preaching a religion which must have the effect of turning the world upside down, but championing an oppressed class against economic injustice ; that the kingdom He sought *was* a kingdom of this world ;¹ that His message of forgiveness was to restore men's confidence in themselves and not to shatter all confidence save the assurance of faith.² The problem of suffering absorbs itself for Macmurray in the problem of death ; his complaint against ' pseudo-religion ', that it attempts to deny the ' reality ' of death, presumes a belief in the natural immortality of the soul instead of the very different Christian belief in a promised resurrection of soul and body from the dead ; and he overlooks³ the destructive significance, for any this-worldly eschatology, of Christ's saying that in the resurrection there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage.

It is impossible, if we believe in a God who really exists, not to believe in ' another ' world ; for that other world is posited with belief in God. If God exists, He constitutes another world. Karl Heim⁴ has analysed the relations of transcendence which have validity for the known world of human experience, and has drawn a sharp distinction between them and the ' wholly other ' kind of transcendence which belief in God implies. And if, from the scarcely-veiled Stoicism of Macmurray's theory, that the last enemy to be destroyed is not death but the fear of death, we turn to Karl Barth's exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, in which the Resurrection of the Dead becomes nothing less than a ' paraphrase for God ', a truth which bursts all the boundaries of our human thinking, it is not difficult to make up our minds which of the two has come the nearer to authentic Christianity. Most certainly there is a false other-worldliness ; but it arises not from the confession of another world, but from misunderstanding of the true relation of that

¹ C.S. pp. 63, 76-89.

² *Ib.* pp. III ff.

³ As R. Niebuhr does not (cf. *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p. 42).

⁴ See his book *God Transcendent* (E.T.).

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other world to this. The other world is not a substitute for this world, a better cosmos destined one day to replace the bad one in which we live. It is simply the eternal world of God, into which it is His will that we pass through and by means of our life in space and time.

But we have referred to Macmurray in order to illustrate the embarrassment of a certain type of professedly Christian thought in regard to the possibility of the love of God. Macmurray himself underlines the necessity of distinguishing between the belief in a God who really exists, and who would still exist though all the world denied Him, and the belief in an idea of God which is held by every idolater. He rightly refuses to lend himself to the propagation of belief in God as a 'serviceable idea', in disregard of the all-important question whether the God so conceived exists or no.¹ He thinks that a nominally atheist Communism, in its fearless and confident self-surrender to a so-called 'process of history', which uses alike the recalcitrance and the willing service of men in its infallible working, has in fact recovered 'the core of a real belief in God' which many Christians have lost.² But as a Christian he is not satisfied with the idea which is the objective counterpart of this attitude of faith. His own idea of God's nature is reached by the reflection upon mutual relationship, which universalises the experience of community. The God into whose hands we may and must commit ourselves is the 'universal Other' or 'infinite person' in whom our finite relationships are grounded.³ But the environing world with which man has to be integrated is wider than the world of his fellowmen; and that is why the idea of Man cannot be substituted for the idea of God. Humanism is not enough.⁴

Now Macmurray accepts the classification of values which goes back to St. Augustine. There are values for use and values for enjoyment or intrinsic values. Science (which for Macmurray is not the search for truth but the acquisition of mastery over the

¹ *C.S.* p. 17.

³ *S.R.E.* pp. 79 f.

² *Ib.* pp. 23 f.

⁴ *C.S.* p. 95.

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external world) deals with utility-values, art with intrinsic values ; and religion unifies the divergent or dissociated attitudes of science and art, by making mutual service the basis of human co-operation, and fellowship its aim. So love pre-supposes service but is not identified with it ; on the contrary, love is the end, service the means. But interest in utility-value concentrates attention upon general knowledge of the properties which objects possess in common, interest in intrinsic value always upon the unique individuality of the object to be enjoyed.¹ If then God is to be considered as the universalisation of concrete experiences, we ought to conclude that His being falls within the sphere of use, not of enjoyment ; for love is essentially an attitude of interest in the concrete particular. But then we shall be committing just what for Augustine was the radical error of the *Civitas Terrena* in its pagan cults :² we shall be using God that we may enjoy the world, instead of using the world that we may enjoy God. God will be really reduced to a 'serviceable idea'. The helplessness of Macmurray's position in face of this dilemma is well shown when he comes to define the intention of religion as comprehending the universal co-operation of men for the satisfaction of needs, and the universal 'appreciation' of all men by all men.³ We can conceive of a state of society in which universal co-operation was real ; but the notion of universal appreciation of every human being by every other is in the conditions of the world we know a manifest absurdity. So long as we are confined to this world, to speak of God as the 'infinite Person' can bring us no nearer to the possibility of personal contact with Him ; for within this world God is nowhere realised. His being consists in the 'intention of mutuality'—which may be a 'serviceable idea', but is certainly a poor substitute for the Father of Jesus Christ.

¹ S.R.E. pp. 25 ff.

² *De Civ.* xv. 7 : Boni ad hoc utuntur mundo ut fruuntur Deo ; mali autem contra, ut fruuntur mundo, uti volunt Deo : qui tamen eum vel esse vel res humanas curare iam credunt. Sunt enim multo deteriores, qui ne hoc quidem credunt.

³ S.R.E. p. 86.

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Between the 'social Gospel' and the 'theology of crisis', the distinctive 'heresies' of English-speaking and German-speaking Christianity at the present time, there is at first sight extremely little in common. On this side we find a markedly anthropocentric immanentism, on the other a theocentrism which at least is continually on its defence against the charge of a too exclusive emphasis upon the transcendence of God. If it is true that 'one-world' religion is prevented by the insecurity of its grasp on the divine personality from accepting the first great commandment without reservations and interpretations, there must be a different reason for the same hesitancy when it appears in a theology built upon the prophetic *Thus saith the Lord*. For the 'Word of God' in this theology is not a body of revealed truths; it is *Dei loquentis persona*, God Himself coming into touch with us in the only possible way, God 'over against us', His 'I' speaking to our 'Thou'.¹

Barth himself is too Pauline in spirit, and too deeply acquainted with the *cor inquietum*, the heart's restlessness which possessed Augustine, not to have something of the mystic in him. But the anti-mysticism of Brunner is uncompromising.² He insists that 'renunciation of the world and of all contact with the life of man is always *logically* connected with mysticism', because it is a form of religion 'which tries to *create* a relation between God and the soul of man', making union with God 'a state which has yet to be attained', and therefore requiring a 'division between God and the world as the object of our action'.³ Brunner therefore must put his own *interpretation* on the words *the second is like unto it*. The second commandment is 'like' the first only as the fruits are 'like' the tree, as the actions of a man are 'like' himself. The first commandment is fulfilled, *not* by the love which (verbally) it commands, but by something else—namely, faith.⁴ Or rather, 'the love which God commands

¹ Cf. H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 292.

² His *Die Mystik und das Wort* I have not seen; but any of his books make his position plain enough.

³ E. Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (E.T.), p. 310 (italics mine).

⁴ *Ib.* p. 309.

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is the love which He Himself is, and which He gives. To love Him truly *means* to let oneself be loved by Him';¹ and that is faith. And if in the act of faith we are laid hold upon by God's will, identify ourselves with it and affirm it, and if God's will is none other than the gift of Himself to sinful men in the condescension of the Cross, then 'in the very act of faith we turn ourselves to our neighbour'.² The two commandments become one.

The 'theology of crisis' is professedly a revival of the Reformers' doctrine of justification by faith.³ All natural ethic, says Brunner, aims at the realisation *by* man of that which is good *for* man, and this self-confidence is necessarily doomed to lie prostrate under the 'curse of the Law', where 'I ought' means 'I cannot'. And the same is true—so we are asked to believe—of all natural religion. The whole amazing history of men's search for the Unknown God, *if haply they might feel after Him and find Him*, came in principle to a full stop on Calvary. For the Cross is placarded in letters of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, with the words NO ROAD. From man to God there is no way. In the drama of salvation there is only one character that moves. The living God is from first to last the Subject, never the Object, of religion. And the man to whom God has drawn near in Christ, who in faith has accepted the divine act of forgiveness, is justified, set right with God, in the same moment that he is convinced of sin. Justification is not the end, but the beginning of everything, for it marks that 'inversion of existence' by which life begins to be lived, in Brunner's favourite phrase, '*from* God' instead of '*towards* God'. Taken up into the purpose of God, accepting his life as God's gift, the believer is free—free from the anxious moralism which makes self the centre of all activity, free 'from the world for the world', free to seek only what God seeks, the extension of His Kingdom of fellowship. In justification the divine Imperative has become the divine Indicative, yet

¹ *The Divine Imperative*, p. 133 (italics mine).

² E. Brunner, *God and Man*, pp. 119 f.

³ See esp. *The Divine Imperative*, pp. 68-81.

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without ceasing to be a claim and a command. The New Birth which is God's act must be realised from the human point of view as conversion. There remains the paradox that we have to become what we are ; and it is fair to ask a dialectical theologian why the Christian life may not be *both* 'from God' and 'towards God', why, if we are risen with Christ, we may not, must not, seek those things that are above. In fact it is difficult to distinguish the 'inverted existence' described by Brunner from the 'unitive life' which the great mystics have exemplified rather than described, except by the position which they occupy—here the goal, there the starting-point. But the anti-mystic can call no life Christian which is the goal of effort, without compromising the rigour of justification by faith. Because the mystic has sought union with God, it is *ex hypothesi* impossible for him to attain it—unless he renounce the search.

It follows that between the love of God commanded in the Gospel, and the desire for God which through the ages has inspired the struggle of minds and wills, within as well as without the Church of Christ, there is something more than a difference of nature—there is a real and irreducible contrariety. That is the theme of the Swedish theologian Dr. Anders Nygren, in his study of 'the Christian Idea of Love': a work of which the plan and premisses were announced some years ago in the short volume translated into English under the title *Agape and Eros*, and which has recently been completed by a substantial treatise upon the history of the two 'motives' in Christian thought—their rivalries in the early Church, the synthesis accomplished by Augustine and accepted by the middle ages, and its breaking-up by Luther.

Nygren's work suffers from its unnecessary and quite unjustified claim to historical objectivity. He professes to be concerned with facts not values. But apart from a theological background such as we have been describing, his method must appear arbitrary in the extreme. From the fact that the world into which Christianity brought the Gospel of divine Agape, of God's self-giving love to men, already knew that thirst for the

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Divine which Platonism called Eros, it did naturally result that when Christians spoke of love they did not always mean the same thing. It does not follow that Eros and Agape are 'by nature completely antithetic',¹ that they are 'two opposite attitudes to life',² or that an enquiry which seeks to define 'the essential difference between Eros and Agape' is 'compelled to view them primarily as rivals or enemies'.³ On the contrary, one who believes that God's providence has never ceased to guide and govern the world He created would naturally draw the inference that if God has given Himself to men in Christ, it is because men need Him, and that consciousness of the need, so far from being an obstacle to acceptance of the gift, is its necessary condition. Nygren thinks that this is to obscure the real issue. Where others see a *praeparatio evangelica*, he is more disposed to find a *praeparatio daemonica*; for he is interested in Eros not as the simple expression of a need but as the spirit of a religion which has its own way of meeting the need, and therefore must be in rivalry to the Gospel.⁴ Eros-religion is anti-Christian at bottom because it is a religion of works, because it assumes that man not only desires to find his way to God but can find it by the practice of self-perfection. And he holds this false assumption to be rooted in a false theory of man's relation to God, a false understanding of the need which is to be met, in the last resort in a false conception of the divine nature itself, the God whom men 'need'. All Eros-religion is *egocentric*, since Eros is determined by an existing value in its object and therefore seeks satisfaction in the possession of what has value for the self: its desire for God is desire for an object supremely valuable, for the *Summum Bonum*.⁵ Agape is *theocentric*, not because it is more 'occupied' with God than Eros—the reverse is true—but because God is its Subject not its Object; and it is related not to value but to the absence of value. Divine Agape is not only unmerited, but, in Nygren's phrase, 'uncaused', wholly spontaneous and unaccountable. God loves, not righteousness nor the righteous

¹ A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (E.T.), p. 23.

³ *Ib.* p. 120.

⁴ *Ib.* pp. 118 f.

² *Ib.* p. 25.

⁵ *Ib.* pp. 133 ff., 165.

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on the ground of their righteousness, but sinners.¹ The 'infinite value of the human soul' is a dogma not of Christianity but of Eros-religion,² which inherits from the Orphic-Platonic tradition the belief in man's essential divinity, the belief that man is dear to God because he is by nature a child of God, that like is known by like and loved by like, and that what prevents such communion is the defilement of sin—a barrier which is *not* insuperable, but which Eros itself can remove through the cleansing process of asceticism. So deeply was the Christian faith corrupted by this doctrine of a fellowship with God attainable 'on God's level', 'on the ground of righteousness', that it needed the 'Copernican revolution' achieved by Luther to recover the Gospel truth that God in Christ has come down to the human level, and gives men fellowship with Himself 'on the ground of sin'.³ Of course Nygren does not mean that God loves the sinner because of his sin, any more than He loves the righteous because of his righteousness. But he maintains that Agape is the reversal of a position axiomatic for Judaism and Hellenism alike—namely, that 'the Divine can have converse only with the pure'.⁴ And if we ask what then becomes of Christ's own version of *Be ye holy, for I am holy*, the answer is that the perfection of the Father in heaven, which His children are to imitate, consists just in that 'uncaused' love which makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good. It is indeed the *métier* of Agape to forgive.

Nygren is not to be disturbed by criticism of his analysis on psychological or ethical grounds. He knows that his Eros and Agape are artificial isolates : that regarded as moral qualities, as capacities of the human spirit, neither is self-sacrificing devotion a discovery of Christianity, nor is the pursuit of beauty and truth the monopoly of Platonism. He is not concerned, it must be repeated, with human morality but with the specifically religious motive, with that which makes a religion vital and

¹ *Agape and Eros*, pp. 52 ff., 165.

² *Ib.* pp. 55, 174.

³ See *Eros und Agape II* (G.T.), pp. 507 ff.

⁴ *Agape and Eros*, p. 162, quoting K. Holl.

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urgent—in colloquial terms, its ‘drive’ (in the religion of Agape), its ‘pull’ (in the religion of Eros). And he would deny that love is rightly regarded as a natural compound in which Eros and Agape are elements: if they come together, the result is an artificial mixture. But there is a third element, whose part in the nature of love is more difficult to disavow, and the neglect of which constitutes a serious, perhaps a fatal defect in his whole construction. Eros and Agape are not the only Greek words for love. The *Philia* in which Aristotle discovered the richest endowment of human personality is strange neither to the Old Testament nor to the New. It differs both from Eros and from Agape in being a mutual relation, a bond which links two centres of consciousness in one; and the Bible knows it not only as a human relationship, like that which binds together a David and a Jonathan. Behind the Law of Moses stands the Covenant which makes Israel God’s people and Jehovah their God; beyond the Body broken on the Cross is the love wherewith the Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world, the unity into which all the friends of the Crucified are to be made perfect: *that they may be one, even as we are one . . . that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them.* There, surely, is the Holy of Holies of the New Testament; and Nygren, with a candour which we may admire, owns that he can make nothing of it. The Johannine teaching is not in his view the culmination of the Gospel, but the beginning of its contamination. St. John’s ‘metaphysic of Agape’, ‘in the very act of finding the supreme expression for the spontaneity and eternity of God’s love, begins to miss something of that spontaneity and to weaken it down’.¹ For the Son cannot be other than a wholly worthy object of the Father’s love; and the characteristically Johannine ‘love of the brethren’ is not the open, ‘uncaused’ Agape which embraces in its divine indifference the sinner and the saint. Both Agape and Eros are ‘one-way’ relations, and that makes it impossible to understand both the great commandments in terms of either. That man should have Agape towards God is

¹ *Agape and Eros*, p. 113.

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as impossible as that God should have Eros towards man, upon Nygren's definitions. If man's love for God is to contain nothing of Eros, if it is not to be because in God he finds the satisfaction of all his needs, he can love God only *in the sense* of an absolute surrender of his own will in gratitude, 'because God's uncaused love has overpowered him and constrained him, so that he can do nothing else but love God'.¹ But this as Nygren knows is not Agape. Similarly, if the love of neighbour is to have no motive in Eros, if I am to love my neighbour neither because of the Divine which is or may be in him, nor because to love him confers merit upon myself and can become for me a 'stepping-stone' to God, this love cannot be accounted for by anything in my relation to him as of one man to another : it will be the direct product of the surrender of my will to God's, 'really not a human love at all, but God's own Agape operating in man'.² For it belongs to the nature of Agape never to be evoked in response to a present value, but to create value in the person upon whom it is freely bestowed. And this is the point at which Nygren's whole scheme is left hanging in the air. There is no doubt how he would answer the question, 'What is the value which Agape creates?' Agape is self-giving and creates nothing but itself : love generates love, a son consubstantial with the father. Nygren may speak constantly of the 'new way of fellowship with God' which the Gospel opens. But he is forbidden by his premisses to find in this fellowship itself any value which man may rightly desire. That would be to unbar the door again to the Eros which he has excluded.

We have spoken of two strongly-contrasted types of contemporary Christianity, both which, for different reasons, appear to give no place to the love of God known to St. Augustine and to every great Christian mystic. For the first, Christian love is *Philia*—a mutual relationship between persons, served and expressed by co-operation for the satisfying of other needs, but

¹ *Agape and Eros*, p. 168.

² *Ib.* p. 169.

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constituting in itself the highest of intrinsic values. Belief in God is grounded upon the conviction that for those who love community all things work together for good ; and a true idea of God is reached, primarily if not exclusively, through the reflective universalising of those mutual relationships in which community is experienced. But it is only in loving one another that we can realise the value of personality. We can indeed both desire and enjoy the realisation of *Philia* ; but we cannot have *Philia* for *Philia*. Its only real object is the concrete human individual with whom and for whom we live and work.

For the second, Christian love is *Agape*—a one-way relation of which the subject is God and the object man. Self-giving, it is self-creative : we can apply to it the Dionysian formula of St. Thomas—*bonum est diffusivum sui et communicativum* ; we may if we will call it the *Summum Bonum*, so long as we remember that this ' Good ' is not a value in the ordinary sense of the word. We may desire to receive it ; to possess and enjoy it, never. The divine gift of *Agape*, once accepted, makes men the channels of its outward and onward flow ; but the substance of the stream (as Berdyaev would say) is ' monophysite '—' really not a human love at all '. It cannot return upon itself : we cannot have *Agape* for the source of *Agape*. Its only object is the created world of men. And though its result is a fellowship of men with God and with one another not otherwise attainable, to think of this fellowship as the ultimate value, the end which *Agape* seeks, is to de-nature and de-throne the *Summum Bonum*.

It is not the purpose of our present study to claim that in neither of these two vital and sincere attempts to preach the Gospel to a generation in desperate need of it, is there to be found any deeper apprehension of the unsearchable riches of Christ than was or could be reached by a Platonist Bishop of Roman Africa at the beginning of the fifth century. *Deum et animam scire cupio*, said Augustine on the eve of his baptism.¹ *In multiloquio non effugies peccatum* was the text of *Proverbs* upon which, thirty years afterwards, he laid down his pen at the

¹ *Solil.* i. 7.