

ALTRUISM AND CHRISTIAN LOVE

by *Don Browning*

Abstract. Sociobiological theories have had little impact on Christian concepts of neighbor love. Since sociobiological theories of altruism depict love as a form of egoistic interest in enhancing one's general fitness, they are often thought to contradict Christian theories of love. However, altruism as defined by sociobiology has more affinity with Roman Catholic views of Christian love as *caritas* than Protestant views of extreme *agape*. Sociobiological views of altruism may provide more updated models for defining the orders and priorities of love, which has been an important aspect of Roman Catholic ethics. The family's role in mediating between kin altruism and wider love for the community is investigated.

Keywords: *agape*; altruism; *caritas*; *eros*; family; kin altruism.

I will discuss the relation of altruism to Christian love. More specifically, are altruism and Christian love the same? Do they refer to the same human realities—the same modes of relating or interacting with other people? Since I hold the initial hypothesis that they are not the same, I will reformulate the question to ask, How are we to conceive the proper relation between altruism and Christian love? Anticipating, to some extent, the direction of my argument, I will ask a second question: What is the role of the family as a mediating factor between altruism and Christian love?

The first question is meaningful in light of certain typically modern ways of defining both altruism and Christian love. It is possible, I think, that certain ways of defining both terms could conceivably move them into close if not identical orbits. But this is difficult to achieve in light of certain customary modern ways of defining these

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terms. For example, one of the most powerful contemporary ways of defining altruism has arisen within the field of sociobiology. Within this discussion, altruism is frequently defined as behavior that appears to sacrifice one's immediate reproductive advantage but which, in the long run, in fact contributes to one's reproductive advantage; i.e., the continuation of a percentage of one's genes in the genes of one's children or close relatives. This is the view associated with what is frequently called kin altruism (Wilson 1978, 53-56; Degler 1991, 279-85). Altruism, or self-sacrificial behavior, in this theory, is portrayed as a form of egoism. It is a complicated and circuitous way of preserving oneself or, more accurately, one's genes (Singer 1981, 12-14). This same view of self-sacrifice, in highly complex ways, would also apply to what is known as reciprocal and group altruism (Singer 1981, 16-19).

Such more or less egoistic views of altruism place it in striking contrast to most definitions of Christian love, especially some of the more influential views to be found in Protestant movements since the Reformation. Here Christian love, at least according to Anders Nygren's discussion of the subject, has been characterized as a form of self-sacrificial love. *Agape*, the Greek word most often used to refer to the rule or law of love in the New Testament, is defined in many Protestant sources as entailing primarily impartial, self-sacrificial action on behalf of the other and without regard to oneself (Nygren 1953, 61-67). When the more egoistic definitions of altruism found in sociobiology are compared to Christian love in its more extreme self-sacrificial formulations, the tension between the two concepts seems striking indeed.

THE BROADER ISSUES

There are several possible implications which follow from this tension. One might point to the eventual cultural demise, before the prestige of evolutionary biology, of any normative hold that Christian love might have on the imaginations of people in Western societies. The outcome might be the possible use of sociobiological theory to justify more explicit forms of egoistic behavior, somewhat along the lines of the way in which social Darwinism functioned around the turn of the century (Degler 1991, 10-16). As important as this trend might be, I want to investigate a more subtle concern. Sociobiological views of altruism end in emphasizing the importance of genetic, blood, or family relations as mediators between our self-love and our love for distant neighbors, strangers, and perhaps even enemies. As Peter Singer, Mary Midgley, and many others suggest,

we learn to love our distant neighbors by generalizing to others—through the mechanisms of kin and reciprocal altruism—the affections and identifications we achieve with our biological mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters (Midgley 1978, 136; Singer 1981, 127-36).

THE FUTURE OF ALTRUISM AND THE DECLINE OF FAMILIES

If there is at least some truth in this theory, two threats to social solidarity may plausibly emerge. In fact, they may be unfolding before our very eyes in modern societies. First, many important commentators such as David Popenoe, Christopher Lasch, and Brigitte and Peter Berger have argued that families in all Western industrial societies are in decline (Popenoe 1988; Berger 1984; Lasch 1977). The growing rates of out-of-wedlock births and divorce,¹ the high cost of divorce to children,² the feminization of poverty, the growing poverty among the children of single mothers,³ the resultant feminization of kinship, the declining role of fathers in families (Stacey 1990, 268), and the declining belief in the importance of families are trends visible in every Western industrial society. Mary Ann Glendon, the distinguished Harvard Law School authority on comparative family law, wonders whether families in industrial societies are now sufficiently strong to function as viable extenders of our natural affections to larger spheres of citizenship and social solidarity. She refers to research produced by Alice and Peter Rossi, the sociological team from the University of Massachusetts, which shows a “strong correlation between the sense of obligation people report that they feel for their kinfolk and their sense of obligation to a wider community and society at large” (Glendon 1991, 67). If the two are correlated, the decline of families in Western societies would suggest a corresponding decline in an expansive and sympathetic citizenship.

Second, extreme self-sacrificial formulations of the Christian concept of love may themselves unwittingly work against the spread of our kin and reciprocal altruism to the wider community. Formulations of Christian love that exclude all self-regarding motives, as certain extreme self-sacrificial models are thought to do, may fail to harness the natural forces fueling kin, reciprocal, and group altruism and therefore fail to extend them to wider circles. Hence, in the name of an expansive, other-regarding and self-emptying love, these formulations may in the end, in stark contrast to their professed goals, actually function to diminish wider identifications and social solidarity.

SYMPATHY, FAMILIES, AND THE GROUNDS OF SOCIAL
SOLIDARITY

These two issues point to a great debate that has echoed throughout Western philosophical and religious history. This debate first began with Aristotle's criticism of Plato's position in *The Republic* on the relation of the family to public empathy and justice. In order for the philosopher-kings of Plato's ideal republic to have empathic sentiments for the entire state rather than just their own flesh and blood, Plato imagined couples mating, but then having their children taken away and raised by the state. The purpose was to create the conditions under which neither children nor parents would know one another (Plato 1968, bk. V, 461–65). Plato believed that this situation would push the philosopher-kings to extend their sympathetic and altruistic feelings to include all the children of the nation-state and not just their own. Since the philosopher-kings would have no way of knowing which specific child was their own, they would tend to hold all children in common and “thus more than others have a community of pain and pleasure” (Plato 1968, 464a).

Aristotle in his *Politics* did not respond in a kindly spirit to Plato's thought experiment in *The Republic*. Aristotle believed that people's sympathy for the wider community spreads outward from their particular, embodied, and special family relations. He believed that what is everyone's responsibility in general easily becomes no one's responsibility in particular. Plato depicts Socrates as hoping for a community in which everyone would say “mine” and “not mine” at the same time about both the community's children and about all material possessions (Plato 1968, bk. V, 462). But Aristotle believed “that which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it” (Plato 1968, bk. V, 462). Aristotle believed that parents who are biologically attached to their children and who see themselves in their children are far more inclined to care for them than are exchangeable caretakers in some common pool of adults and children. Furthermore, he believed that children who see themselves in their parents are also likely to be more responsive to adult guidance and direction.

The issue between Socrates and Aristotle can be stated as follows: Does sympathetic and altruistic behavior spread to the wider community through our natural family affections as Aristotle thought, or is it achieved through the suppression of our natural familial affections as Socrates is portrayed as believing? In passages such as Matt. 10: 37 (“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me”), Jesus is often interpreted to be making a point similar

to that of Socrates; to serve the transcendent aims of the Kingdom of God, one must suppress one's natural familial affections. Aquinas, however, clearly follows Aristotle on this matter. Jesus, he tells us, "commanded us to hate, in our kindred, not their kinship, but only the fact of their being an obstacle between us and God" (Aquinas 1917, Q26, a7). But Aquinas's point is even more positive than this. We are positively commanded to love our own and to see this as an asset for the love of God.

In light of these preliminary considerations, let me state the two theses that will guide this paper. First, I will hold that although altruism and Christian love should be distinguished, it is proper to see them as complementary and mutually enriching. I will further argue that the family is an important mediating institution between our natural affections and Christian love; as such, the family is both essential for the development of Christian love but, at the same time, must be transcended in certain respects for Christian love to find its fullest expression. I will further argue that altruism as understood in sociobiology is both useful and limited in helping us understand how our natural familial affections get transformed to apply to wider nonfamilial circles and begin to approach the expansiveness of Christian love.

THE RETURN OF THE *CARITAS* MODEL OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

Garth Hallett in his book *Christian Neighbor-Love* (1989) identifies six alternative ways in which Christian love as *agape* has been interpreted in the history of the church. There is Christian love as (1) self-preference, (2) parity, (3) other-preference, (4) self-subordination, (5) self-forgetfulness, and (6) self-denial (Hallett 1989, 2-10). One can see at a glance that these definitions move from relatively more egoistic and self-regarding definitions (self-preference and parity) to more other-regarding and self-sacrificial definitions (other-preference, self-subordination, self-forgetfulness, and self-denial). Hallett shows that examples of all of these definitions can be found in both early and modern Christianity, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. There has been, however, a tendency for certain classic Protestant definitions of Christian love to gravitate toward the last two definitions—some form of love as self-forgetfulness and self-denial. In addition, Roman Catholic models have, on the whole, found more of a place for elements of the first two definitions; i.e., they have found more of a place for elements of self-regard. Catholic models have tended to define *agape* in the direction of *caritas*, which,

in turn, attempts to balance the features of self-regard and other-regard.

It is safe to say, I believe, that more recent definitions of Christian love in Protestant circles have tended to move in the direction of *caritas* while downplaying earlier classic Protestant definitions built around strong models of self-sacrifice or self-denial. There are various social and cultural reasons for these shifts. There are pressures from feminists and minorities to modify extreme self-sacrificial models of Christian love in view of the many ways they have been used historically to justify the suffering, subordination, and chronic injustice done toward women, minorities, and other disadvantaged groups. The implications of sociobiological perspectives on altruism should be seen as constituting an additional cultural source that will push Christian definitions of love to include elements of self-regard.

Certain classic Protestant definitions of Christian love are often portrayed as de-emphasizing a place for natural self-regard. This seems to be the position of Anders Nygren in his classic *Agape and Eros* (1953). Nygren sharply distinguishes *agape* from both *eros* and *caritas*. Nygren defines *agape* as spontaneous and unmotivated, as indifferent to the value of the object of love, as creative of value in those objects where little value exists, and as empowered by God rather than brought about by *eros* or human desires, needs, and strivings (Nygren 1953, 75–80).

Nygren tells us that “*caritas* is not simply another name for *agape*” (Nygren 1953, 55). *Eros* represents the love that strives for a higher value and should be seen as contrasting strongly with the concerns of *agape*. According to Nygren, *caritas* as a synthesis of the Greek *eros* and the New Testament *agape* had more to do with the egocentricity of *eros* than with the self-giving qualities of *agape*. The *caritas* doctrine was an inadequate way of communicating the agapic themes of Jesus, Paul, and John. It was the great founders of the Protestant Reformation, especially Luther, who uncovered the true meaning of *agape* as spontaneous, creative, downward reaching, and impartial Christian love.

It is precisely this strong definition of *agape*, with its radical disjunction between *agape* and *eros*, that is now being tempered, even in Protestant theological circles. Sociobiological definitions of altruism, as we will soon see, contribute further to the mellowing of these extreme formulations of *agape*. Brunner and Bultmann are both associated in the theological literature with variations of the strong agapic formulations.⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr tried to state a less dichotomous relation between *agape* and *eros*. He ended, however, in defining *agape* as self-sacrificial love, and calling it the norm of the Christian life even

though it was an “impossible possibility” in a world marked by the realities of finitude and sin (Niebuhr 1941, 82–85).

THEOLOGICAL FEMINISM AND THE REJECTION OF EXTREME *AGAPE*

Several feminist theological writers have rejected all the strong agapic formulations and have even been critical of Niebuhr’s more moderate views. Christine Gudorf, Judith Vaughan, and Judith Plaskow have all criticized Niebuhr’s modification of strong *agape* (Gudorf 1985; Vaughan 1983; Plaskow 1980). The feminist critique of strong *agape* ends in redefining Christian love more toward *caritas*. It does this by characterizing the norm of love more toward mutuality; i.e., a balance or equilibrium between the claims and concerns of the self with the claims and concerns of the other. These critiques aspire to bring *eros* into a redefined understanding of Christian love that emphasizes a rigorous form of mutuality and equal regard in the place of self-sacrifice and self-denial. This clearly moves Christian love closer to *caritas* formulations more typical of Catholic formulations.

But the feminist concern with *eros* is more typically modern and liberal in its limited interest in the category of nature and its primary concern with autonomy and self-actualization—an autonomy and self-actualization that are suppressed by patriarchal institutions and by calls to endure through self-sacrifice the suffering of oppression. From the standpoint of sociobiology, most feminist writers rely on a thin view of *eros*. My point is this: Although the feminist rejection of strong *agape* reintroduces *eros* and brings Christian love closer to *caritas*, the leading authors of this movement are fearful of making use, however limited, of evolutionary or sociobiological formulations of altruism. This hesitation probably stems from their fear that Christian theology would become entrapped once again in a static and rigid biologism of the kind that Aquinas is thought to have inherited from Aristotle.

It is my view that feminist theological resistance to the insights of biological perspectives on altruism is understandable but to be regretted. Biological perspectives on altruism can further contribute to balancing the excesses of extreme *agape*. Furthermore, they can add essential insights into the role of families in shaping Christian love, a role which some forms of feminism tend to overlook, probably out of fear of being trapped by the conventional constraints of families that Western societies have sometimes prescribed.

THE RELEVANCE OF BIOLOGICAL ALTRUISM FOR
CHRISTIAN LOVE

We have reviewed some recent reactions to extreme *agapism* and the beginnings of a shift toward *caritas* models of love, especially under the impact of theological feminism. Biological perspectives on altruism promise to contribute a note of realism to this trend. They promise to go beyond a concern with finding a place in Christian love for *eros* defined as autonomy and self-concern. Biological perspectives provide insight into the natural springs of human love and affection that all genuinely other-regarding love must necessarily build upon, even if these perspectives must also be expanded and transformed. More specifically, modern sociobiological views on the origin of altruism can offer to Christian ethics an updated biology to replace the metaphysical biology that Aquinas is said to have inherited from Aristotle. This possibility is especially true for those forms of sociobiology which have been reformulated based on the thought of such philosophers as Mary Midgley, Peter Singer, George Pugh, and William James.⁵

To make this point, I will turn to the recent writings of a former student who has developed some of our early conversations into a mature position on the relevance of sociobiological perspectives on altruism to a balanced view of Christian love. Professor Stephen Pope is concerned that recent Roman Catholic ethics tends to adopt a personalism disconnected from nature and biology, best illustrated in the thought of Karl Rahner. Although Pope understands the problems with Thomistic metaphysical biology, he believes that a personalism uninformed by philosophically reconstructed modern sociobiology is also shortsighted (Pope 1991). Pope has in mind a flexible sociobiology of the kind projected by Mary Midgley in her book *Beast and Man* (1978).

Such a view avoids the rigid determinism of the early E. O. Wilson (Wilson 1978). It holds that humans have "genetically influenced behavioral predispositions" which constitute a basic system of premoral valuations. All properly moral judgments must respect and stay within these predispositions while providing hierarchical organization of values (Pope 1991, 266). Central to these predispositions are the processes of kin, reciprocal, and group altruism; although these tendencies do not determine the nature of the *moral good* in the full sense of that term, insight into their preferences helps clarify and refine what Aquinas called "the order of charity" (Aquinas 1917, Q26, a1). Pope follows Aquinas in the belief that God's moral governance is expressed through the ordering of natural

appetite. Because of the centrality of kin selection, Pope argues that parental love is the model of all love. He further argues, in a way similar to Aristotle, Aquinas, and contemporary sociobiology, that parents' love of their children is associated with self-love (Pope 1991, 264). Sociobiology gives genetic reasons for the special love relation between parents and their children, which Aquinas tried to ground with Aristotelian phenomenological biology.

Pope believes that some distinctions in the "order of charity" that Aquinas makes can be suggestive for contemporary discussions. For instance, Aquinas asks "whether a man ought, out of charity, to love his children more than his father." His answer is that we should love them differently. We should *honor* our fathers as our "creative principle" or source, who as such are nearer to God. But we should love our children more in the sense of *caring* for them. As Aquinas writes, "a man loves more that which is more closely connected with him, in which way a man's children are more lovable to him than his father, as the Philosopher states" (Aquinas 1917, Q26, a9).

Pope's point is more methodological than substantive. He is saying that as Aquinas used Aristotle's biology in Christian ethics, so can Christian theologians today use a philosophically reconstructed sociobiology for some of the same purposes (Pope 1991, 265). In addition, both sociobiology and Aquinas's biology share, in spite of their many disagreements, at least some agreements. One seems to be that more expansive forms of altruism for the wider community (reciprocal and group altruism) grow out of early parent-child investments and attachments. This is a point that the Rossis made on strictly empirical grounds. Pope writes that there are good biological grounds for "affirming that relatively stable and secure bonds of love within the family create the emotional basis for a later extension of love to persons outside the family and that the quality of these early bonds continue powerfully to inform subsequent adult affectional bonds" (Pope 1991, 276). Mary Midgley says something similar when she writes,

the development of sociability proceeds in any case largely by this extension to other adults of behavior first developed between parents and young—grooming, mouth contact, embracing, protective and submissive gestures, giving food. In fact, wider sociality in its original essence simply is the power of adults to treat one another, mutually, as honorary parents and children. (Midgley 1978, 136)

Peter Singer says much the same thing when he, too, finds the origins of mature forms of philosophical ethics in infant and child responses to parental investments. The title of his book *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology* expresses his point of view.

Universal ethical systems are not based on suppressing family commitments; they evolve from the elaboration and expansion of family affections to wider, nonfamilial circles (Singer 1981, 27–36).

Neither Pope, Midgley, nor Singer is as rigid in the formulation of the relation of kin selection to altruism as is the early E. O. Wilson (1975) or Richard Dawkins (1976). Narrow forms of egoism implied by the “selfish gene” hypothesis are repudiated by all three. I agree with their assessment that we cannot accept Dawkins’s view of humans as mere “survival machines—robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes” (Dawkins 1976, ix). Pope represents this view well when he argues that the “error of such fatalism lies not in its uninhibited recognition of biological causality, but in taking it to be a quasi-exclusive causal factor that minimizes the force of a multitude of other causal factors (personal, cultural, economic, etc.)” (Pope 1991, 273). In taking this stand, these authors agree with the early position of William James voiced in the context of his critique of Herbert Spencer’s narrow emphasis on survival as the sole motivation of human behavior. James, in his great early article titled “Remarks on Spencer’s Definition of Mind as Correspondence” (1878), acknowledges the existence of the biological interest to survive. He believes, however, that there are many other biologically grounded interests that express themselves in “various forms of play, the thrilling intimations of art, the delights of philosophic contemplation, the rest of religious emotion, the joy of moral self-approbation.” (James 1920). Mary Midgley also underscores the multiplicity of human biological motivations; the selfish gene motivation would simply be one of many. “Self-preservation is not only a strong general motive with us,” she writes, “it is also a positive duty. What it cannot be is our only motive or our only duty” (Midgley 1978, 123).

What are the implications of this discussion for the nature of Christian love? I have already claimed that sociobiological views of altruism question the intelligibility of extreme agapic understandings of Christian love and argue for reclaiming dimensions of *caritas* understandings. Basically, I have used sociobiological views of altruism, not to claim an identity between Christian love and altruism, but to inject a note of realism into typical Protestant formulations of strong agapism. In effect, I have used sociobiology in the way Owen Flanagan in his recent *Varieties of Moral Psychology: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (1991) suggests that moral psychology can be used to test normative ethics. His argument is that moral psychology can at least test what normative ethical formulations are psychologically possible. He calls this method the “Principle of

Minimum Psychological Realism" (Flanagan 1991, 32). I have basically used sociobiology in this way. My claim is that when so measured, extreme *agape* not only appears implausible, it is positively self-defeating. Its suppression or neglect of family affections deprive it of the affective energies which all more expansive expressions of love must build on even if these energies must be transformed.

Furthermore, I argue for a thicker or denser understanding of *eros* than can be found in the values of autonomy and self-actualization included in most feminist analyses, which move toward *caritas*. Sociobiological views argue for a view of *eros* built around parental love as kin altruism and its derivatives of reciprocal and group altruism. But this still leaves open the question, How can *eros* as kin altruism be expanded and generalized to individuals outside of immediate family and kin? Furthermore, how can this concept be formulated to find a place for understandings of the Christian concept of the "cross" and the stronger notes of self-sacrifice that it has historically implied?

One answer, indeed a classic one, is the introduction of the Christian concept of grace. The claim might be advanced that grace both builds on and expands kin altruism to wider social circles. In fact, at the heart of Nygren's characterization of the debate between strong *agape* and *caritas* is the question whether God's grace builds on natural human affections in some kind of synthesis between *agape* and *eros*, or bypasses them in a miraculous transformation of the will (Nygren 1953). I will argue for the first position. But before rushing to this conclusion, we should examine how various philosophical appropriations of the sociobiological view of altruism have tried to account for the way in which kin, reciprocal, and group altruism are expanded to nonfamilial circles.

CHRISTIAN LOVE AND THE EXPANSION OF FAMILY ALTRUISM

Although Pope finds a place for sociobiology in a reconstructed theory of natural law, he does not believe that biology alone can provide a complete ethic. Nor was this the belief of Aquinas. Pope follows Saint Thomas (in contrast to Roman Catholicism's contemporary fascination with existentialism and personalism) in holding that attention to the innate predispositions of human biology, as important as they are, do not completely override historical and cultural considerations in concrete moral decision making (Pope 1991, 265). Furthermore, however important parental love is in the order of charity, it cannot be seen as exhaustive of the meaning of

Christian love. If parental love points to the naturalistic wellsprings of all love, how is this basic source amplified and generalized outward to nonfamilial others? It is with this question that I will deal throughout the remainder of this paper.

Philosophers such as Mary Midgley and Peter Singer have emphasized the role of reason in expanding the circle of kin, reciprocal, and group altruism. Singer believes the capacity for reason is a spontaneous evolutionary emergent. It entails not only the capacity for memory, but the ability to generalize and to build anticipatory models for predicting the future. What we call ethics as a distinctively human capacity occurs when biological altruism and reason are brought together. Singer writes, "Ethics starts with social animals prompted by their genes to help, and to refrain from injuring, selected other animals. On this base we must now superimpose the capacity to reason" (Singer 1981, 91). Singer builds his case about the generalizing capacities of reason from sources as diverse as Lawrence Kohlberg and C.I. Lewis. But he distinguishes himself from strictly Kantian theories of generalization because of their tendency to divorce themselves from affectivity of any kind, including the affections of kin altruism. As we have seen above, Singer believes ethics emerges when reason applies the affections between parents and children to others outside the family (Singer 1981, 27-36). Mary Midgley argues for a similar role for reason in relation to our biological predispositions. From her perspective, instinct and reason are not incompatible. She would agree with William James: Reason is informed by the premoral valuations of instinct. But it is precisely because humans have so many contradictory instinctual tendencies and competing premoral valuations that they must use reason to guide, weigh, and generalize their more efficacious passions.⁶

In addition to reason, both Singer and Midgley invoke culture as an additional source for the extension of biological altruism. Singer believes that reason itself builds culture. In its capacity to remember, reapply, and retain useful forms of reciprocal and group altruism, reason gradually builds a stable culture of practical rules which encourage and guide altruistic behavior beyond the boundaries of kin groups (Singer 1981, 156-66). This suggests a gene-culture coevolutionary theory of the kind associated with the later work of E.O. Wilson and Ralph Burhoe (Pope 1991; Tumsden and Wilson 1981; Burhoe 1979).

Singer and Midgley are right to a degree; reason doubtless plays a role in expanding our biological altruism. But the Christian tradition, with its doctrine of sin, has always been impressed with the

instability and corruptness of moral reason. Reinhold Niebuhr expressed it well when he observed that the self may indeed use reason to abstractly conceive a moral universal point of view. But the self, because of its anxiety and sin, may use reason in *concrete action* to rationalize the self's partial purposes (Niebuhr 1941, 284–85). As a result, reason often fails to balance the natural affection for self and kin with the needs of individuals and families who are outside of our immediate range of intimate kin, reciprocal, and group altruisms.

In view of this reality, the Christian tradition has believed in the power of grace to overcome sin's tendency to convert ordinate self and kin regard into inordinate love of both. I am suggesting, however, that theologians take seriously the evidence of sociobiology and develop a theory that conceives of grace as building on and extending *eros*—the natural affections of kin altruism—rather than viewing grace as working solely to transform the will, as is implied by Nygren's conception of extreme *agape* (Nygren 1953, 216–17, 223).

ALTRUISM, THE CROSS, AND SACRIFICIAL LOVE

I will conclude by developing a more systematic theory of Christian love, one that will find within it a place for both sociobiologically conceived altruism and elements of self-sacrifice represented by the Christian symbol of the cross. Louis Janssens's concept of *ordo caritatis* may have these advantages (Janssens 1977, 216–30). In brief, Janssens believes that the self-sacrificial love symbolized by the cross is derived from an understanding of Christian love as equal regard. Self-sacrificial love is not an end in itself, according to Janssens. Instead, it is a transitional ethic in the service of reinstating equal regard within both kin and nonkin relations.

The meaning of Christian love, for Janssens, can be found in the second half of the love commandment—"you shall love your neighbor as yourself." A variation of this commandment is found no less than eight times in the New Testament (Matt. 19: 19, 22: 39; Mark 12: 31, 12: 33; Luke 10: 27; Rom. 13: 2; Gal. 5: 14; James 2: 8). Both Jesus and Paul use it as the hermeneutical key to the interpretation of the Jewish law. Janssens presents his own variation of the *caritas* tradition. He does this by combining formal features of Gene Outka's neo-Kantian view of love as equal regard with certain material theories about basic human premoral goods (the *ordo bonorum*) that equal regard organizes and promotes (Janssens 1977, 207–16).

At the formal level, love as equal regard means that we should love the other (and in principle all others) with the same seriousness that

we naturally love ourselves. But the reverse is also true. We are entitled to love ourselves with the same seriousness that we love the other. Christian love is, according to Janssens, a rigorous form of equal regard or mutuality. Neither self-love (ethical egoism) nor self-denying other-love (extreme *agape*) are allowed to gain the upper hand. It is because of this rigorous balance between self-concern and love of the other that Janssens's formulation has proved so attractive to the interests of both Christian feminists and minorities. It gives them grounds for a constrained self-affirmation and grounds for resisting the domination of others who make appeals to Christian self-sacrifice to encourage the exploited to endure their sufferings.

Self-sacrifice in its more extreme forms, in this view, is derived from love as equal regard. Janssens writes, "In short, self-sacrifice is not the quintessence of love, since it can only happen in a world in which conflict and sin occur" (Janssens 1977, 228). In a world of finitude and sin, equal regard is difficult to achieve or even to approximate. Self-sacrificial love is the extra effort—the second mile, the suffering we must necessarily endure—in order to attempt to reinstate relations of equal regard and mutuality. Self-sacrifice, according to Janssens's reading of both scripture and tradition, is not an end in itself.

I will conclude these more systematic considerations by stating the way sociobiological perspectives on altruism can enrich Janssens's interpretation of Christian love. Janssens's theory of self-regard needs to be enlarged by the sociobiological theory of kin, reciprocal, and group altruism. Because of the genes we share with kin, there is a tendency for us to share our self-regard from the beginning. To rigorously balance self-regard with other-regard, as the ethic of equal regard demands, Christian love would require us to balance our kin and reciprocal altruism with genuine concern for people who are beyond these more proximate family contexts. In fact, the Christian doctrine of love as equal regard is that we would be asked, at least in principle, to treat nonfamily groups with equal regard to our own loved ones. At the same time, according to this ethic, we would be *both permitted and required to love our kin and those with whom we have more reciprocal relations*. In fact, if one takes sociobiology seriously, loving the remote other will depend on the analogical extension of kin relations to this other. That there will be various degrees of conflict between these orders of love should not be denied. But Christian love, as interpreted in this essay, does not ask us to solve that conflict by denying the importance of kin altruism. Christian love more likely means that the same obligation we have to care for our own family is an obligation we must both equally respect and support for others

to care for theirs. It also means that when such equal balance between our family obligations and those of others does not exist, we must work hard, even sacrifice, to make it possible for all families to discharge their kin altruism.

Love for the remote other entails—as Aristotle, Aquinas, and Pope argue—building on, not repressing, natural kin affections. Reason and culture will be required to extend these basic affections beyond natural intimate circles. Christians will insist, however, that the grace of God must transform and extend our affections, reason, and culture for the outer reaches of self-sacrificial love to be achieved. In the end we must conclude that sociobiological altruism and Christian love are distinguishable, but that sociobiology can help clarify the natural foundations of love that the grace of God, along with reason and culture, extend.

NOTES

1. Out-of-wedlock births have risen in the United States from 5 percent in 1960 to approximately 25 percent of all births in 1988. In the black community, 66 percent of all children are born out of wedlock. The divorce rate in the United States has hovered around 50 percent of all new marriages since the 1970s and is the highest in the industrial world.

2. There is a growing literature in the United States about the high cost of divorce to children—financially, emotionally, and in terms of undermining confidence in children's capacity to form meaningful marital unions in the future. See Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade after Divorce* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989), and Andrew Cherlin and Frank Furstenburg, *Divided Families: What Happens to Children When Parents Part* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

3. For the ground-breaking discussion of this issue, see Lenore Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution: The Unexpected Social and Economic Consequences for Women and Children in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1985).

4. Reinhold Niebuhr associates Bultmann with this position in his *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 84–85; Hallett associates Brunner and Bultmann with strong *agape* in his *Christian Neighbor-Love*, 5–6.

5. Some of the same attempts to make sociobiology less reductive that have been developed by Midgley (1978) and Singer (1981) have also been developed by George Pugh in *The Biological Origins of Human Values* (New York: Basic Books, 1977). All three of these perspectives repudiate the idea that moral values are hard-wired into the human organism and that biology can tell us directly what our moral values should be. But all three believe that biology can inform us about some of our premoral needs and “central tendencies,” to use Midgley's phrase, which culture and free moral reflection must stay within. William James anticipated this argument in his famous article titled, “Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence” (James 1920, 43–68).

6. Midgley 1978, 72–82, 165–76. For James's understanding of the relation between instinct and reason, see William James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), pp. 323–72, 383–441, 486–593. See also Don Browning, *Pluralism and Personality: William James and Some Contemporary Cultures of Psychology* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 156–77.

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