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Christianity and the Honest, Rigorous Thinker:
A Peculiar Love Story and its Phenomenological Interpretation

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Christianity and the Honest, Rigorous Thinker:
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By

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MA Emory University, 2007

Advisor: David Carr, PhD

An abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University
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Abstract

Christianity and the Honest, Rigorous Thinker:
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The dissertation begins with the question: Can an honest and rigorous thinker, living in our scientific world, take Christianity seriously? In part one offers an analysis of Augustine's conception of Christian charity and proffers the conjecture that putting aside questions of Christianity's objective truth and exploring instead how the Christian story expresses and responds to existential concern about the fragility and senselessness of existence will disclose a means for taking Christianity seriously. Part two investigates first what it means to be an honest and rigorous thinker, attending closely to the strengths and limitations of reason, and second what it means to interpret the Christian story as an expression of existential concern. Based on these investigations, a hermeneutic framework that makes use of the phenomenological method to interpret religious themes in terms of their meaning for the concretely situated subject is developed. Part three presents a phenomenological interpretation of Christian love as a true response to existential concern, suggesting that this interpretation discloses a means by which the honest and rigorous thinker may take Christianity seriously.

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Preface

Can an honest, rigorous thinker living in our scientific world take religion seriously? To maintain both his intellectual integrity and his religious faith does the honest thinker have to cultivate, at one and the same time, a philosophical-scientific personality which, with due skepticism, relies upon and trusts solely in autonomous reason and observable evidence *and* a religious personality which kneels in humble submission to that which is far greater than the human understanding? Must he compartmentalize his intellectual integrity, and if the two personalities encounter unavoidable conflict, must he take leave of the philosophical-scientific and defy reason? Perhaps this is a question that has been embedded in philosophy nearly from its inception. Certainly the central question in Plato's *Euthyphro*, "Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?" (10a), forces a similar question upon an engaged and critical reader. If autonomous rational thought can provide us with the ladder which brings us ever closer to knowledge of the true and the good, then is not religion superfluous for anyone whose intellect is keen enough to ascend reason's ladder?

The answer to the question of whether or not the honest and rigorous thinker can take religion seriously depends, it seems to me, on the way in which the question is taken, i.e., on what it means to be an honest and rigorous thinker and what it means to take religion seriously. The seemingly interminable debate between the skeptic and the believer gets off the ground because each side takes the question to be about whether or not religion makes objectively true claims about the nature of reality. In other words, the

skeptic and the believer both take science and religion to be talking about the same things—facts and causal explanations. The question about whether or not an honest and rigorous thinker can take religion seriously is regarded as a question about whether or not a rational thinker can accept as true and objectively valid both the claims that a particular religion makes about cosmological, historical, and metaphysical matters of fact and the causal explanations that a religion asserts alongside of its claims to fact.

While there is certainly historical precedent for understanding the question in this way, indeed from Plato forward religious skeptics and believers alike have hardly understood it in any other way, this is not the only way of understanding it, nor is it necessarily the most legitimate. Several questions come to mind which indicate the paucity of this standard understanding of the question: Does honest and rigorous thought consist solely in the attempt to get the facts straight? Is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for instance, beyond the provenance of honest and rigorous thought simply because, as a matter of historical fact, no such persons as Hamlet, Claudius, or Laeretes actually existed? Are all religious expressions, i.e., stories, songs and prayers, parables, aphorisms, koans, sutras, mantras, etc. best understood as attempts to articulate objectively valid, that is, *impersonal*, scientific claims in unscientific language? Might not at least certain religious expressions express instead some sense of the lived experience of the existing person and the concrete situation in which he finds himself inextricably and intimately involved—the situation of a being, who in his living, thinking, questioning, feeling, intending, and acting is deeply and very personally concerned for that being, not only for its sustenance but also for its meaning?

In light of the last two questions, it strikes me that the question of whether or not the honest and rigorous thinker can take religion seriously is far too broad. To answer that question it would be necessary to presuppose that all the various historically given phenomena we call religion have a common foundation. Such a presupposition, however, makes a very unsuitable first principle upon which to base any honest and rigorous inquiry. Therefore, as a thinker firmly situated historically, culturally, and intellectually in the Western-Christian tradition of thought, I address my question to Christianity in particular: Can the honest and rigorous thinker living in our scientific world take Christianity seriously?

The question of whether or not the honest and rigorous thinker can take Christianity seriously has a long tradition, which has deeply influenced the way in which this question has come to be understood up to the present day. Early in its history Christianity was interpreted as a metaphysical doctrine that articulated deep and revealed truths about the nature of reality. Augustine's interpretation of Christianity in terms of Platonic and neo-Platonic metaphysics was foundational in this respect. In chapter one, I discuss Augustine's interpretation of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine consistent with Platonic metaphysics, indicating that his interpretation entails to two consequences that have significantly affected the way in which the question here posed has been understood and addressed: By interpreting Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine composed of claims about the nature of reality Augustine has (1) provided the ground and the trajectory for the interminable debate between the skeptic and the believer over Christianity's objective truth status, i.e., over faith's compatibility with reason, and (2)

distorted the meaning of redeeming love, which gives Christianity its distinctive force and vivacity.

In chapter two I conjecture that the second consequence of Augustine's interpretation results not from interpreting Christianity in terms of a specifically Platonic metaphysic but from interpreting it as a metaphysical doctrine at all. I further conjecture that interpreting Christianity, specifically the Christian story of redeeming love, not as a metaphysical doctrine but rather as an expression of existential concern will overcome Augustine's distortion of the meaning of that love. This conjecture leads me to suggest the following answer to the initial question: Privileging the question of the meaning of Christian love over the question of faith and reason provides a way for the honest and rigorous thinker to take Christianity seriously. If, as I conjecture, Christian love, as expressed in the New Testament story of redemption, is a true response to existential concern and if existential concern is concern that an honest, rigorous thinker must face, then that thinker would do well to take seriously the Christian story of redeeming love.[1] Thus I suggest that if my conjecture holds, I will be able to answer the question in the affirmative while circumventing the tiresome debate between the skeptic and the believer.

Before I test my conjecture, however, I first investigate in greater depth the terms of both the initial question and my conjecture that the Christian story of redeeming love is an expression of existential concern. In chapter three, I address the questions of what it means to be an honest and rigorous thinker and what it means to take Christianity seriously. In chapter four, I provide a systematic characterization of existential concern, explain what it means to be an expression of such concern, and finally clarify in greater

[1] Though I do not here mean to imply that to be an honest and rigorous thinker one must take Christianity seriously.

detail my reasons for focusing on the Christian story of redeeming love rather than on Christianity as such. Based on the examinations in these two chapters, I conclude that existential concern is something an honest and rigorous thinker must face and is also something that could be expressed in a religious narrative handed down from generation to generation.

Determining whether or not the narrative of redeeming love is indeed an expression of existential concern requires the development of a hermeneutic framework different from the one that interprets Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine. In chapter five, I develop an appropriate hermeneutic framework for testing my conjecture: Nygren's method of motif research coupled with phenomenological description provides a framework that can reveal whether or not the New Testament story of redeeming love is an expression of existential concern without presupposing that it is.

In chapter six, I text my conjecture by interpreting the New Testament story of redemption through the hermeneutic framework developed in chapter five. By applying the method of motif research, I gather from the New Testament texts the various elements that compose the story of redemption and I narrate this story according to the logic of redeeming love that runs throughout the New Testament texts. After narrating this story, I describe it in phenomenological terms. By interpreting the story through phenomenological description, I disclose the attitudes and the corresponding experience of subjective reality that are expressed in the story of redemption. Based on the resulting interpretation, I conclude that the Christian story of redemption is an expression of existential concern in which redeeming love serves as a true response to that concern. As

an expression of a true response to existential concern, the Christian story of redemption is something that can be taken seriously by an honest and rigorous thinker.

Part One
Introduction

Medieval Christian thinkers interpreted Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine, i.e. as a doctrine composed of claims about the nature of reality, man's highest good, and how man comes to know and achieve these. According to medieval theologians, particularly Augustine and those who take up his line of thinking, Christianity shares its concept of the really real with the Platonic metaphysical system. Further, according to such thinkers, the two also share a similar concept of man's *summum bonum*. As these medieval theologians saw it, the chief difference between Platonism and Christianity is *the manner in which* man comes to know the nature of reality and to attain his highest good. From the perspective of Platonism, reason is the way to the truth and the light, while from the Christian perspective Jesus is. However this difference did not lead medieval theologians to conclude, as some Christian thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have, that faith and reason are incompatible. In attempting to understand their faith, Augustine and those who followed sought to show that this metaphysical doctrine, the Christian faith, was consistent with reason and therefore, to a large degree, also consistent with the Platonic metaphysical system, which represented the height of rational achievement.

This reconciliation of Christianity with Platonism was not entirely successful; even so, it forcefully influences interpretations of Christianity up to the present day. On the one hand, there seems to be no rational way to defend the idea that God loved the world so much he took on the form of a man. That what is absolutely good and incorruptible could possibly love something as wretched as the sinner and that an

ineffable and immutable being could enter into bodily existence are claims that seem to contradict all reason, particularly in Platonic terms. On the other hand, the beliefs that God—ineffable, immutable, and absolutely good—is the absolute form of reality; that material existence is but a shadow of that which truly is; and that man's highest good is to leave behind material existence and ascend to a spiritual existence fulfilled by awed contemplation of That Which Is, of I Am, have become central to much of Christian teaching. That Christianity is a metaphysical doctrine composed of claims about the nature of reality and man's *summum bonum* is so standard an interpretation we can hardly conceive of what else Christianity could possibly be.

Interpreting Christianity as a doctrine composed of Platonic claims about the nature of reality and man's highest good leads to two important consequences:

First, since metaphysical claims should be accepted or rejected based on how accurately they correspond to the matter of fact, in other words, based on their objective truth status, it seems that Christianity as well should be evaluated with respect to its objective truth status and accepted or rejected on this basis. If this is the case, then skepticism toward the truth of Christianity becomes an understandable and justifiably position. The apparently interminable debate between the religious skeptic and the religious believer about the truth of Christianity results from interpreting Christianity in this manner.

Second, the medieval reconciliation of Christianity with Platonic metaphysics clouds the meaning of the New Testament redemption story; that transvaluation of values, intrinsic to the redemption story, which gives Christianity its distinctive force and vivacity becomes lost in the shadows. In particular, the meaning of Christian love

becomes clouded when the story of redemption is reconciled with Platonism. Christian love is a fundamental motif of the Christian story of redemption—without *some* conception of love the story would lose all coherence. For, God's love for sinners is the motivation for the incarnation;[2] Jesus' life and death are the embodiment of this love, and only through these is the sinner redeemed;[3] and the redeemed sinner is given a new life, which is the life of love.[4] So it is that the concept of love is the theme that ties together other key components of the Christian redemption story: the sinner, the savior, the sinner's redemption, and the new life; in the reconciliation of Christianity with Platonic metaphysics, the meaning of Christian love becomes muddied and muddled. Thus something of the significance of the New Testament redemption story is hidden from view when Christianity is taken to be a metaphysical doctrine consistent with Platonism.

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[2] John 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . . . Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." Mark 2:16-17 "When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that [Jesus] was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard this, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'"

[3] John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"

[4] Ephesians 5:2 ". . . and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us."

Chapter One

Redeeming Love, Platonism, and Augustine's Reconciliation of the Irreconcilable

> *"When religion is made to furnish the answer to an extraneous, metaphysical question, the answer itself is changed."*
>
> —Anders Nygren

In order to demonstrate my claim that something of the significance of the New Testament redemption story is hidden from view when Christianity is taken to be a metaphysical doctrine consistent with Platonism, I will focus on Augustine's reconciliation of Christianity and Platonic metaphysics. I have chosen to focus exclusively on Augustine because he is arguably the most influential of the medieval theologians, and, throughout the history of Christianity, theologians have considered him an authority on Christian doctrine. As Spade writes, "He shaped medieval thought as no one else did. Moreover, his influence did not end with the Middle Ages. Throughout the Reformation, appeals to Augustine's authority were commonplace on all sides" (57). Though later medieval thinkers, particularly Aquinas, introduced significant changes into the interpretation of Christianity and relied more on Aristotle than on Plato, they were nonetheless responding to and attempting to improve upon Augustine, and they took for granted his assumption that Christianity was a metaphysical doctrine. Furthermore, as Nygren notes in his seminal treatise on Christian love, "Augustine's view of love has exercised by far the greatest influence in the whole history of the Christian idea of love" (Agape and Eros 450). Because Augustine's influence has been so decisive in the development of the idea of Christian love, and because his ideas were taken up by later theologians who attempted to reconcile Christianity with Platonic metaphysics, it makes

sense to refer to Augustine's thought in order to explore the influence the Platonic metaphysical system had, and still has, on the Christian idea of love.

Augustine saw a great affinity between Christianity and Platonic metaphysics. According to him, "You would only have to change a few words and expressions and [the Platonists] would become Christians" (On True Religion IV 7). For the most part, Augustine thought all that was needed to reconcile the two was to show that those "revealed truths" of Christianity—which are not found in the Platonists' metaphysical doctrines because they are not discoverable by reason—are nonetheless *not* inconsistent with reason. Augustine's attempt to discover how the articles of faith could be consistent with reason is a classic instance of faith seeking understanding. Yet, noble as it was, in his attempt to understand his faith, Augustine clouded the meaning of Christian love. In order to demonstrate this, I will first describe the Platonic metaphysical system and its similarity, according to Augustine, to Christianity. I will then discuss what makes it necessary, on Augustine's view, that some truths be revealed and are not, therefore, discoverable by reason. Finally, I will explore Augustine's reconciliation of these revealed truths with the rationality of Platonic metaphysics. This exploration will disclose the alteration to the meaning of Christian love that takes place when Christianity is made to fit with the Platonic metaphysical system.

I. The Platonic metaphysical system

I will begin my description of the Platonic metaphysical system by drawing from Plato's *Timaeus*. Though perhaps I might provide a clearer explanation of this system by focusing on several of Plato's texts, I will concentrate specifically on the *Timaeus*

because this is the only one of Plato's texts of which Augustine could have had thoroughgoing, firsthand knowledge.[5] His knowledge of Platonic themes not found in the *Timaeus* was most likely passed down to him from the teachings of Plotinus and his student Porphyry.[6] Therefore, after discussing the *Timaeus*, I will continue my description of the Platonic metaphysical system by referring to the form it takes in Plotinus' writing.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato distinguishes between two orders of existence: "that which always is and has no becoming" and "that which becomes but never is" (27d). That which is always becoming and never really is has a beginning and is generated by a cause. All that changes, all that is perceived through the senses, in short, the material world, was brought about by some cause and "comes to be and passes away but never really is" (28a). That which is and has no becoming belongs to the higher order of existence. That which is always real has neither beginning nor cause but is eternal (exists outside of time) and hence immutable. All that belongs to this realm of absolute being is only "grasped by understanding, which involves a reasoned account" (28a); it is intelligible rather than material. The two orders of existence are further differentiated by their relation to goodness. Only what is truly real can be absolutely good. According to the *Timaeus*, that which belongs to the material world is good to the extent that it is modeled after the intelligible, rationally ordered realm of absolute being. This qualification for goodness in the material world implies that absolute being in itself is

[5] The *Timaeus* was the only one of Plato's texts that had then been translated into Latin, and, in fact, only the first half, up to 53b had been translated into Latin (Spade SEP).

[6] Michael Mendelson notes that "There has been controversy regarding just which books of the Platonists Augustine encountered, but we know from his own account that they were translated by Marius Victorinus [*Confessions* VIII.2.3], and there is widespread agreement that they were texts by Plotinus and Porphyry, although there is again controversy regarding how much influence is to be attributed to each."

unconditionally good; that the form of absolute being is the ideal standard of goodness; and that this intelligible order is, in some sense, the source of goodness in all that is only conditionally good. Thus the temporal, generated, material, and conditionally good is set apart from the eternal, intelligible, and unconditionally good form of absolute being.

If all that belongs to the realm of becoming is generated, mutable, and material and all that belongs to the realm of being is eternal, immutable, and intelligible, to which order of existence does soul belong? It seems it does not belong to either order, for it is neither material nor immutable and eternal. So it is that in the Platonic system soul becomes a third, intermediate kind of existence. In the mythological framework of the *Timaeus,* the creator, or demiurge "mixed a third, intermediate form of being, derived from the other two" (35a). Therefore soul, though belonging entirely to neither being nor becoming, has characteristics of both; soul is generated and mutable but is also intelligible and immaterial.

The characterization of soul as an intermediate between the two orders of existence directly affects Plato's conception of man's highest good. In the mythological language of the *Timaeus*, the demiurge creates the human soul with a mixture of ingredients taken from both the realm of being and the realm of becoming. From this mix, he creates as many individual souls as there are stars. Plato portrays the excellence of these newly created souls by likening the harmonious, orderly motion within each human soul to the harmonious, orderly motion of the heavens, which the demiurge modeled after the intelligible realm of being. Because the human soul is so well ordered, it can gaze, with the mind's eye, upon the intelligible realm and apprehend it through

understanding. In this ordered and excellent condition, the soul may contemplate and delight in the unconditional goodness of that which is really real.

However, of necessity, souls are implanted in bodies, and so each is subject to sensations from the corporeal world, which "violently shake the orbits of the soul" (43d). External sensations mutilate and disfigure the orderly motion in the soul such that what was once harmoniously ordered now "barely holds together" and is "moved without rhyme or reason" (43e). The human soul comes squealing and squirming as a newborn babe onto the scene of its earthly existence, and from this confused and disordered state, it must strive to return to its "original condition of excellence" (42c). For, only when the soul is in this excellent condition will it be able to grasp "that which is . . . by understanding, which involves a reasoned account" (27d-28a). Man must strive to ascend to that excellent condition in which he will be able to grasp, through reason, "that which is," because man's *summum bonum* is to gaze once again upon that which is unconditionally good, the realm of absolute being.

The means of this ascent is a progression of the mind through higher and higher stages until it again reaches understanding of that which is. While this is certainly an ascent of the mind, the soul's marriage to the body is not forgotten. In order to ascend, the soul must first subdue "that turbulent, irrational mass by means of reason" (42c). Therefore, in order to return to the excellence of the soul's original condition, man must live a just life by mastering pleasure, pain, fear, and all other emotions associated with bodily existence. As the soul's motions become more ordered, it is better able to master the bodily emotions with reason so that the soul can move upward in its pursuit of its highest good. Beginning with bodily, "unreasoning sense perception" (28a), the

ascending soul progresses through a series of stages. Through sight, the soul may "observe the orbits of intelligence in the heavens and apply them to the revolutions of [its] own understanding" (47b-c). The gaze directed toward the heavens observes the movements of the sun, moon, and stars. This leads the soul to see "the periods of day-and-night, of months and of years," which in turn leads to the idea of number and "has given us the idea of time and opened the path to inquiry into the nature of the universe" (47a). From these pursuits, philosophy develops, and through philosophy, the mind is trained to grasp the nature of the universe and the ultimate reality of that which is—eternal, immutable, intrinsically good, intelligible being.

Augustine, upon encountering the ideas in the *Timaeus*, was presented with a metaphysical system that declares the true nature of reality to be an intelligible, ineffable, eternal, immutable, and absolutely good order of being, which is apprehensible only through a reasoned account. All else, all that is material and perceived through the senses, all that belongs to the realm of becoming, according to this system, is mere imitation of the true nature of reality. The conception of the nature of man's soul, as presented in the *Timaues*, places man in an intermediary position between the two orders of existence, between being and becoming. The human soul is intelligible but neither eternal and immutable nor unconditionally good. While the soul itself, due to its intermediary position, is not unconditionally good, it can, due again to its intermediary position, gaze upon and delight in that which is unconditionally good. To do so is its *summum bonum*. However, Plato tells his reader, the soul, of necessity, is implanted in a body and, in this process, becomes confused and disordered. Thus, according to Plato, the human soul must strive to return to the excellence of its original condition in which it

can apprehend the nature of reality and gaze upon that which is unconditionally good. All this, Augustine saw as very closely akin to Christian doctrine; one would have to change but a few words and the followers of such a system would be Christians.

To Augustine's mind there was very little, if any, difference between the Platonic metaphysical system and what nineteenth century thinkers would later call the Neo-platonic metaphysical system. Nonetheless, Augustine's Platonism cannot be fully described solely with reference to the *Timaeus*. One idea in particular, the idea of God, he derives partially from a Plotinian interpretation of Plato. In the sixth book of *The Republic*, Plato asserts that there is a good beyond being, "superior to [being] in rank and power" (509b). Plotinus equates this good beyond being with the "absolute one" of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (Dillon lii). Consequently, in Plotinus' Platonism, the realm of being is transcended by the supreme reality of the One, the Good beyond being, or, meanly speaking, God. The One is not itself a form of being, but is rather the source of all being; it is this supreme reality that causes and grounds all being. Therefore, it can hardly be described except to say what it is not: "Generative of all, The Unity is none of all; neither thing nor quantity nor intellect nor soul; not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time: it is the self-defined, unique in form or, better, formless, existing before Form was. . ." (Ennead VI. 9). All that can be said of the One is that it is sufficient unto itself and completely simple and that it is both goodness itself and the source of all goodness.

Leaving aside the intricate details of Plotinus' metaphysical system, which are not precisely relevant to the present discussion, it is possible to say that, with the addition of this Supreme reality, the order of existence presented in the *Timaeus* is reproduced in

Plotinus' metaphysics. For Plotinus, the intelligible realm of being, "that which always is," is closest to the Supreme reality. The material realm of becoming is of a much lower order, pure matter, unformed by any organizing principle, the lowest of the low. Soul is intermediate between the intelligible and material realms but is closer to the intelligible, as it is not material in nature.

This ordering of existence suggests the nature of man's highest good. Plotinus conceives of man's highest good as a vision of Supreme reality, which is goodness itself and the source of all goodness. The soul must seek this vision of, and in some sense, unity with the One supreme reality for the reason that, if it is to be true to itself, the soul must attain to that One principle which forms the best part of it. Plotinus' conception of man's *summum bonum* surpasses the conception of it presented in the *Timaeus*; man's highest good is not merely to understand the intelligible realm through reason, but rather to ascend beyond this knowledge to a union with the One supreme reality: "Our way then takes us beyond knowing; there may be no wandering from unity; knowing and knowable must all be left aside; every object of thought, even the highest, we must pass by. . ." (Ennead VI. 9). The soul seeking to attain its highest good must even leave behind everything that is good in order to attain to that One principle which is the source of goodness itself.

However, while it is the case that attaining to the One principle is the highest good for all souls, many have not experienced that "love-passion" which draws what is best in them to the very source of all goodness (Ennead VI. 9). This is because they have not recognized this Principle in themselves as the very foundation of their being and the goodness thereof. "From none is that Principle absent and yet from all: present, it

remains absent save to those fit to receive, disciplined into some accordance, able to touch it closely by their likeness and by that kindred power within themselves through which, remaining as it was when it came to them from the Supreme, they are enabled to see in so far as God may at all be seen" (Ennead VI. 9). Only souls that have been properly disciplined realize that in order to be true to their better nature, in order to achieve their highest good and ultimate delight, they must ascend to unity with the One. Following Plato, Plotinus conceives the proper discipline to be a form of mental training in which the soul ascends, by means of reason and philosophy, from the material to the intelligible. However, for Plotinus this ascent does not stop when the mind justly rules the body and grasps the realm of being through a reasoned account. Rather, the properly disciplined soul leaves behind material, bodily concerns all together, and, passing through the intelligible realm, surpasses all that can be known until "it is no longer in the order of being; it is in the Supreme" (Ennead VI. 9).

II. Augustine's Platonic Christian metaphysic

Along with the ideas in the *Timaeus*, Plotinus' writings influenced Augustine's articulation of the Christian metaphysical doctrine. Augustine's conception of God consists of a synthesis of Plato's description of the order of intelligible being and Plotinus' presentation of the Supreme reality. Like Plato's order of being, Augustine's God is the "invisible reality" which is "infinite but not spread out through space" and which exists "in the fullest sense" because he is and always has been "unvarying in every respect and in no wise subject to change" (Confessions VII 20 26). However, unlike Plato's order of being, which is composed of all the forms of being that exist,

Augustine's God is a single, simple unity. As Plotinus' Supreme is the One self-sufficient reality which is the source of all being and goodness, so is Augustine's God. Accordingly, for Augustine, God and the really real are equivalent. Only God has absolute being; the material world—everything that exists in time and is subject to change—is but a shadow of the true nature of reality.

Likewise, all that is good in the world is but a reflection of God's goodness; only God is unconditionally good, and only because of God can anything else be called good. It follows then, that man's highest good must be found in God himself. So Augustine writes, "For our Good, that Final Good about which the philosophers dispute, is nothing else but to cleave to him whose spiritual embrace, if one may so express it, fills the intellectual soul and makes it fertile with true virtues" (City of God X 3). Augustine makes it clear that, in this world of shadows, man is merely a sojourner who will find his "beatific homeland" (Confessions VII 20) only when his intellectual soul is filled with a vision of That Which Is. Here again the Platonic influence radiates from the Christian doctrine.

Furthermore, Augustine takes up the Platonic motif of the ascendancy of the soul into his Christian theology. Passages containing the ascendancy motif can be found throughout Augustine's writings. In his *Confessions* he describes his own experience of ascension in a way that is strikingly similar to the description of the ascension of the soul in the *Timaeus*:

> Thus I pursued my inquiry by stages, from material things to the soul that perceives them through the body, and from there to that inner power of the soul to which the body's senses report external impressions I

> proceeded further and came to the power of discursive reason, to which the data of our senses are referred for judgment. Yet as found in me even reason acknowledged itself to be subject to change, and stretched upward to the source of its own intelligence, withholding its thoughts from the tyranny of habit and detaching itself from the swarms of noisy phantasms . . . . And then my mind attained to *That Which Is* in the flash of one tremulous glance. (VII 17 23)

This ascent, like the ascent of the soul in the *Timaeus*, moves from the stage of sense perception to the power of reasoning and finally culminates in attaining to That Which Is. The ascending soul of the *Timaeus* seeks to maintain rule over its body in order to focus its gaze upward and progress to its former state of excellence in which it understood the nature of reality. Likewise, the ascending soul, as Augustine depicts it, moves from the tyranny of bodily habit upward through reasoning to its beatific homeland.

Though such passages seem to imply that Augustine simply appropriates the Platonic motif of the ascending soul and consequently that he agrees with the Platonists not only about man's highest good but also about the means for attaining it, other passages complicate this reading. In his discussion of the means for achieving man's highest good, Augustine's Christianity begins to assert itself over his Platonism. In the *Timaeus*, the souls implanted in bodies are disordered but not changed in their very nature; there is the possibility that these souls will reorder themselves in accordance with the excellence of their original condition. As a Christian, Augustine rejects this notion. According to him, the state of original sin, into which each soul is born, forms an unbridgeable epistemological and ontological gulf between mankind and God. The

soul's nature has been qualitatively changed in such a way that it cannot hope to reach an enduring vision and understanding of God on its own. Man is born into sin and is powerless over it. Therefore, he can never reach God through his own efforts. Even reason cannot restore man to his previously excellent condition; it cannot save man from his sinful nature, and so reason itself can never form the bridge leading to God.

For this reason, Augustine asserts that God must reveal himself to man if man is to have any hope of attaining his highest good. If man cannot come to God, God must come to man. So Augustine writes: "But when sin had placed a wide gulf between God and the human race, it was expedient that a Mediator, who alone of the human race was born, lived, and died without sin, should reconcile us to God . . . that man might be shown how far he had departed from God, when God became incarnate to bring him back" (Enchiridion CVIII). God revealed himself, in the person of Jesus, in order to buy man back from his sin—that is, in order to redeem him. Only if a man has been redeemed from his sin, may he enter into that spiritual embrace which is his highest good, "For it is only sins that separate men from God" (City of God 22). Therefore, man can attain his highest good if and only if God redeems him from the state of original sin.

But why should God, who, according to Augustine, is goodness itself and the source of all goodness, care to redeem man, wretched sinner that he is? And how is it that God's revelation of himself in the person of Jesus effects redemption, or buys man back from his sinful nature? The answer in both cases, as Augustine sees, is God's love. Because of his love for sinners, God himself sought to bridge the gap, and what weakened sinful nature could not do God did "by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). Because of this great love, God met humanity at its own

level: Augustine writes, "the only Son of God, while remaining unchangeably in his own proper being, clothed himself in humanity and gave to men the spirit of his love by the mediation of a man, so that by this love men might come to him who formerly was so far away from them" (City of God X 3). God's love for the sinner motivates him to reveal himself to man, and in this revelation God sacrifices himself, bestowing the spirit of his love to man. In receiving the spirit of God's love, in accepting Jesus' sacrifice, man is redeemed from his sinful nature. There is only one requirement for redemption: the soul must "offer to [God], on the altar of the heart, the sacrifice of humility" (City of God X 3). This humility consists simply in "an undoubted confession of the grace of God and the insufficiency of man" (City of God X 29). Therefore, the soul of man must sacrifice its own work, its own striving for the realization of the highest good and must replace this striving with humble acceptance of God's gift of love. Only if a soul is humble and confesses its own insufficiency can the love of God carry the soul to its *summum bonum*.

The themes involved in the account of redemption complicate Augustine's attempt to reconcile Christianity with Platonism. On the one hand, Augustine appropriates the Platonic motif of the ascending soul; man's highest good is to leave behind material existence and ascend to a spiritual existence fulfilled by awed contemplation of That Which Is. On the other hand, Augustine asserts that however much he strenuously disciplines his mind through philosophy, however much he uses reason to subdue the body and cultivate virtue, man's works alone will never be adequate to attain an enduring vision of That Which Is. No man can bridge the gulf between man and God, because every man is weakened by his sinful nature. That very thing which allows the soul to attain to its highest good, namely redemption, requires that man admit

the inadequacy of his own striving. The way to man's highest good is not the ascent of the soul by means of reason but rather the descent of God's love from on high—Jesus is the way. For this reason Augustine claims that the Platonists see the goal "but cannot see the road by which they are to reach it" (Confessions VII 20).

Yet Augustine's discussion of redemption indicates that the differences between Christianity and Platonic metaphysics may extend far beyond a disagreement over the way to achieve a particular goal. The Christian account of redemption undermines the Platonic conception of the nature of reality. No Platonist could agree that a God who loves sinners and becomes incarnate could be equated with absolute being. Absolute being is ineffable, eternal, immutable, and intelligible, and it would contradict the very nature of absolute being—being which can contain no contradiction—to condescend to become a man limited to a body. Additionally, absolute being is unconditionally good and entirely self-sufficient. It has no need of man, and it would diminish its goodness if it could condescend to love something as unworthy of love as sinful man.

Similarly, Augustine's discussion of redemption intimates that Christianity may not in fact share with Platonism a similar conception of man's highest good. If God, who is goodness itself, loved the world so much that he descended to meet man at his own level, then why should the Christian assume that his highest good is to leave behind the material world in order to ascend to the level of absolute being? After all, Jesus' sacrifice did not bring Platonic knowledge of a Platonic God. Redemption, as "the universal way for the liberation of the soul" (City of God X 32), is not bestowed solely upon those who have striven as far as human reason can take them and need only God's revelation to boost them up to that final good. If God bestows to the redeemed the spirit of his

(descending) love, perhaps it is the case that redemption leads not to the realm of absolute being but rather to a life of love for sinners here in the material world. Thus the Christian account of redemption seems to indicate that Christianity and Platonism are really much wider apart than Augustine allows, perhaps even that Christianity does not fit into the Platonic metaphysical system at all.

However, Augustine's position on the compatibility of Platonism and Christianity is more understandable if we keep in mind the medieval motto of faith seeking understanding. For Augustine, redemption is merely the first step. No man can ascend to a vision of God without first being redeemed, but this does not mean that redemption is the end of the story. In faith Augustine humbly accepts Jesus' sacrifice, but now he must attempt to understand his faith. In particular he seeks to understand how God's revelation—Jesus' birth, life, and death—is compatible with reason, specifically with the rationality of the Platonic metaphysical system. The problem for Augustine thus becomes: In what sense can man ascend to his highest good, an enduring, intelligible vision of That Which Is, when his relation to God is based on God's descent to man's level and man's humble acceptance of this descent, which requires him to sacrifice his own striving?

Augustine resolves this issue by pointing to an educational process that the Christian undergoes. He asserts that those who ascend to the highest good undertake "a process of education . . . designed to raise them from the temporal and the visible to an apprehension of the eternal and the invisible" (City of God X 14). Just as God's love for the sinner and the sinner's faith in God's love effect redemption, so apprehending the eternal and invisible involves attaining to a deeper knowledge of his love. For God is

love (I John 4:16; Trinity VIII 10) and, in order to know God "the only thing we really have to see is what true love is" (The Trinity VIII 10). For Augustine, fully seeing "what true love is" requires loving truly. That is, learning to love truly is the educational process through which the redeemed must pass in order to attain to an enduring, intellectual vision of That Which Is.

The sinner begins to see this true love by accepting God's gift, Jesus, who descended to the human level, made himself a servant, and sacrificed himself in order that all sinners might be redeemed. The redemptive power of God's love works to transform the sinner. God loves, and through God's love man is freed from the will to sin. The redeemed learns to love God rather than sin. In addition, the redeemed learns to love his neighbor, or rather, learning to love God involves learning to love the neighbor. Augustine insists that "If a man loves his neighbor, it follows that above all he loves love itself. But *God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God* (I John 4:16). So it follows that above all he loves God" (The Trinity VIII 10). In other words, by loving another with God's love, the redeemed loves truly, and by loving truly, he comes to see God "as he can be seen and cleave to him" (City of God X 3). For he who loves "knows the love he loves with better than the brother he loves" and so can "embrace love which is God, and embrace God with love" (The Trinity VIII 12). By loving his neighbor truly, man sees God and enters into his spiritual embrace.

In order to love the neighbor, man must learn the motion of love from God who is love. For, as Jesus tells his followers, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34). That God's love is characterized by descent is clear both in the New Testament, and in Augustine's writing; God came to man "in the form of a servant"

(City of God X 6; Philippians 2:6) and became the sacrifice for a world of sinners. It seems then that God's love does not love the Good, the Invisible, or the Unchangeable, but the sinner. If our love for the neighbor is to abide in God's love for us, then it must also descend. While it is certainly true that God is not of our kind and the neighbor is, the *movement* of our love for the neighbor is still analogous to movement of God's love for us. So Augustine writes, "A down to earth lowliness is stronger and safer that a wind-swept *hauteur*" (The Trinity VIII 11). To love his neighbor, man must become the servant who is "humble in heart" (Matthew 11:28). Augustine maintains that by loving with such neighborly love man learns to know God, to see God, and therefore to cleave to God.

At this point an objection surely must arise: Though the concept of a "process of education" echoes the Platonic notion of mental training, it does not seem that the process described above provides a solution to the conflict between Christianity and Platonism. This process of education was supposed to teach the soul how to ascend "from the temporal and the visible to an apprehension of the eternal and the invisible" (City of God X 14), yet it seems rather to teach the redeemed how to remain in the temporal, visible realm, living his life as a servant loving his neighbor even as God loved him. Furthermore, even if this process does teach the redeemed to see God as he can be seen, its presentation thus far does nothing to address the previously stated conflict between the Platonic characterization of That Which Is and the Christian God who loves sinners so much he became incarnate.

Augustine's response to this objection would be to further clarify what it means to *truly* love. The process of education teaches the redeemed to love truly, and, in an

analysis of what it means to love truly, Augustine defends both his claim that Christianity and Platonism have similar concepts of man's highest good and his claim that the Christian God, who is love, is also a God who fits consistently with Platonic metaphysics. However, I argue that it is in this further analysis of loving truly that Augustine perceptibly muddies the meaning of Christian love.

According to the Pauline account of redemption, God loves the sinner *while he is yet a sinner*. In Romans 5:8, Paul declares "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."[7] This means that God's love is not motivated by the worth of the beloved. The sinner, as such, is unworthy of love, yet God loves him. Nor is God's love motivated by any other external factor. For, God, being entirely sufficient unto himself, cannot hope to gain some benefit by loving the sinner. Accordingly, God's love is directed to the sinner himself and is not driven by some ulterior motive. God's love, therefore, is an unmotivated, unselfish, spontaneous outpouring.

Rather than loving an object because it is worthy of love, the outpouring of God's love is transformative. So Paul repeats that anyone who is reconciled in Christ is "a new creation."[8] Through God's love the sinner is redeemed—bought back from his sins—and given a new life of love. This transformation is accomplished because God's love descends; in loving, God meets the sinner at his own level and humbly takes on the form of the servant. In accepting this love, the sinner cannot help but respond by loving likewise.

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[7] Romans 5:6-8: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."

[8] Galatians 6:15; II Corinthians 5:17

Thus neighborly love mirrors God's love. Neighborly love is not motivated by the worthiness of the neighbor. This is particularly clear because neighborly love includes love for the enemy.[9] Further, if neighborly love mirrors God's love, then neighborly love is not motivated by any external, ulterior motive. That is, the redeemed loves for no other reason than that, in response to God's love for him, he pours out this love on others: "We love because [God] first loved us" (I John 4:19). As such, neighborly love is directed toward the neighbor himself, be he friend or enemy, and not toward anyone or anything else. In other words, the end of neighborly love is simply to love the neighbor. It is certainly not the case that the redeemed loves his neighbor in order to earn God's love. According to the Pauline account of redemption, God's love is a gift of which no man can ever be worthy; God's love cannot be earned and when he accepts God's gift, man gives up his own striving. Yet, like God's love, neighborly love imparts value by loving. Again this is accomplished when the redeemed meets his neighbor at his neighbor's own level, or better yet, when the redeemed becomes the neighbor. All this, the parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates:[10]

Regarding the Jewish law to love your neighbor as yourself, an expert in the law, "wanting to justify himself," asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responds with a parable. A Jewish man is robbed, beaten, and left for dead. A priest and a Levite, both Jewish religious leaders, pass him by. He is not worthy of their attention. A Samaritan comes along. (It is worthwhile to note that the Samaritans and Jews were enemies and would not have considered themselves to be neighbors.) He picks up the wretched, dying man, takes him to an inn, nurses him, and pays his expenses (Luke 10:25-37). In

[9] Matthew 5:44 : "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."
[10] The relationship between this parable and the meaning of Christian love was brought to my attention by William Nietmann.

this parable Jesus does not answer the question: Who is my neighbor? And so, does not advocate a moral formula, which the expert in the law might obey in order to demonstrate his righteous status. Instead Jesus illustrates what it means *to make oneself* the neighbor. Making oneself the neighbor means loving by meeting the other at his own level regardless of the other's worthiness to be loved. This act affirms the life of the other, and so bestows value upon that life where none was before. The loving actions of the Samaritan parallel Jesus' action in the story of redemption. So, then, Christian love, in both its divine and human manifestations, is an unmotivated outpouring which flows regardless of the worthiness of its object, which aims solely at loving its object (the sinner or the neighbor), and which imparts value by loving.

However, due to his aspiration to reconcile Christianity with the Platonic metaphysical framework, in his analysis of loving truly, Augustine's loses sight of some of those features of love presented in the New Testament account of redemption. According to Platonist metaphysics, love, or rather, righteous love, loves only what is truly good and loves what is good for the sake of its goodness. Likewise, according to Augustine, loving truly means loving something because it is worthy of love. The man who loves truly, "is a man who has an ordinate love: he neither loves what should not be loved nor fails to love what should be loved; he neither loves more what should be loved less, loves equally what should be loved less or more, nor loves less or more what should be loved equally" (On Christian Doctrine Book One XXVII). Because God is the only thing that is unconditionally good, God is the only thing that deserves to be loved for his own sake. Therefore, according to Augustine, to love truly means to love God because God is good and deserving of love. In this way, Augustine reconciles Christianity's

highest good with that of Platonism. Learning to love truly means learning to love God, which means coming to see God as the only object worthy of that love. Learning to love truly means ascending to gaze upon and embrace that ineffable, eternal, and immutable goodness which makes up God's being.

The concept of ordinate love however presents a problem when confronted with New Testament's charge to love the neighbor and the enemy. Ordinate love leaves no room for loving someone unworthy of love. Yet, being a Christian, Augustine cannot ignore the importance of neighborly love. For this reason, he creates a distinction between love which enjoys its object and love which merely uses its object. Only God is unconditionally good, so only God should be enjoyed. When the redeemed loves God truly, he enjoys him. When he loves his neighbor truly, he uses his neighbor in order that both he and his neighbor might enjoy God. *When the redeemed loves his neighbor, what he really loves is God's goodness.* Any goodness in the neighbor that is deserving of love points to God. "For every good of ours either is God or comes from God" (On Christian Doctrine Book One XXXI). Thus, when that unmotivated love, which is central to the theme of redemption, is juxtaposed to the goal of the ascending soul, neighborly love no longer mirrors the spontaneous love expressed in God's love for the sinner. Instead the soul loves the neighbor only for the sake of that goodness which belongs to God and which calls man upward toward his highest good. So Augustine writes, "every man should be loved for the sake of God, and God should be loved for his own sake" (On Christian Doctrine Book One XXVII). Neighborly love is not love for the neighbor at all. When the redeemed loves his neighbor, what he loves truly is God in the neighbor; the neighbor is not cherished for his own sake.

Further, Augustine must attempt to reconcile God's love for the sinner with the Platonic conception of being, which could never condescend to love something so undeserving of love. He must therefore show that God loves only that which deserves his love. Consequently Augustine maintains that God "does not enjoy us but uses us" (On Christian Doctrine Book One XXXI). Perhaps he is not altogether satisfied with this characterization of God's love, as he here interjects, "For if he did neither, I cannot see how he could love us" (On Christian Doctrine Book One XXXI); nonetheless, he continues by asserting that "God refers the use of us to His own good" (On Christian Doctrine Book One XXXII). God's absolute being, in all its goodness, is the cause of man's existence, and insofar as man exists, he participates in God's goodness.[11] So God loves man not in that he is a sinner, but rather in that, by existing, man participates in God's goodness. Though Augustine is careful to say that God uses us not for his own utility, but for ours (that we might be brought to enjoyment of God), it is still the case that God can only love us for the sake of his own goodness reflected in our existence.

Therefore, neither God's love for the sinner nor man's love for his neighbor is love for the sinner or the neighbor for his own sake. When God loves the sinner, he loves his own goodness in man's being. In the case of neighborly love, since it is God's love in us that loves, for "we love our brother out of God" (Trinity VIII 12), and since this love is now directed toward God in the neighbor, the whole process becomes the process of God loving himself—that absolute goodness which makes up his being—through man. God's love for his own goodness becomes the rationale for his mercy and forgiveness of sinners. Thus, at this point even God's love is no longer an unmotivated and spontaneous

[11] This perhaps makes more sense if we remember that Augustine asserts, with the Platonists, that there are degrees of being. This point is tied in with his attempt to resolve the problem of evil: evil does not exist as a substance, but is rather a lessening of being—a drawing away from That Which Is.

outpouring of love onto the sinner—"no sinner should be loved in that he is a sinner" (On Christian Doctrine Book One XXVII)—but appears rather to be self-love which took the torturous and mysterious road of descending to the human level to achieve itself.

III. Augustine's distortion of Christian love in his Platonic Christian metaphysic

Comparing the meaning of Christian love as it appears in the New Testament account of redemption and as it appears in Augustine's depiction of loving truly discloses the alteration that the meaning of Christian love undergoes when Christianity is reconciled with the Platonic metaphysical system. That unique transvaluation of values which gives to Christianity an original vitality is explained away. What was a spontaneous, unmotivated outpouring of transformative love for the sinner becomes a motivated, ordinate love for the Good, or God. What was a love that descended in order to meet the beloved at his own level becomes a love that descends only in order to use the beloved as a means for ascending to the highest good—an enduring spiritual vision of God which fills the intellectual soul with virtue. The Christian does not love his neighbor but only God in his neighbor, and in point of fact, the Christian's love for God in his neighbor and God's love for the sinner are really just manifestations of God's love for his own goodness. This love which uses the beloved, be he sinner or neighbor, as a means to ascend to the realm of That Which Is unconditionally good is a compromised version of that Christian love which is exemplified by the image of Jesus, God himself, on his knees washing his disciples' feet (John 13:5-15).

Though it is true that the interpretation of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine is so prevalent we can hardly conceive of what else Christianity could be, it is also the case that the interpretation of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine compatible with Platonist metaphysics distorts the meaning of Christian love. When Augustine formulated Christianity as an answer to those metaphysical questions posed by the Platonists, i.e., what is the nature of reality, what is man's highest good, and how does man come to know and achieve these, Christian love became an uneasy synthesis of Platonic *eros*, as exemplified in *The Symposium* or the *Phaedrus*, and redemptive love. Rather than emphasizing those peculiar qualities of redemptive love, which make it a powerful, transformative force, in his effort to reconcile Christianity with Platonist metaphysics, Augustine covered them over and explained them away. I think that Nygren is correct when he notes that "In this union, the Christian idea of love is the losing partner, and that is simply because ancient thought is allowed to put the question" (Agape and Eros503). If Nygren is right, and I suspect that he is, then perhaps interpreting Christianity as an answer to any such metaphysical questions will lead to a distorted presentation of the meaning of Christian love. Whether or not this is the case remains to be seen. What is clear is that, since Christian love is a fundamental motif of the Christian story of redemption, muddying the meaning of that motif in order to make it fit within a metaphysical system obscures the meaning of the redemption story. Grasping the meaning of Christian love will shed light on the meaning of the redemption story, and understanding the meaning of this story will in turn shed light on what it means for an honest, rigorous thinker to take Christianity seriously.

Chapter Two

A Conjecture Rejecting the Interpretation of Christianity as a Metaphysical Doctrine

> *"And truth? Is truth something that is lived or that is comprehended?"*
>
> —Miguel du Unamuno

My consideration of Augustine's interpretation of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine leads me to the following conjecture: *The fact that the original meaning of Christian love gets covered over in the reconciliation of Christianity and Platonic metaphysics is not an accident of the particular Greek metaphysical system but a consequence of interpreting Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine at all.* However, before I go on to develop and discuss my reasons for this initial conjecture, a caveat is in order, for, I judge that, at this point, I need to say something explicit about the source of this so-called "original meaning of Christian love."

Previously I noted that without some conception of love the redemption story would lose all coherence[12] because love is what ties together certain key elements of this story—the sinner, the redeemer, the gift of redemption, and the new life of love. Accordingly, I seek to find the original meaning of love in the New Testament account of redemption.[13] Yet, where in the New Testament is *the* account of redemption to be found? After all, the New Testament is not a single composition written and conceived of as a whole but is rather a collection of works by several authors from different time periods, backgrounds, and perspectives, whose focal points and objectives in writing vary accordingly; for instance, whereas the Gospels (both synoptic and Johannine) focus on

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[12] See page 8.

[13] More about how specifically I attempt to derive the original meaning of redeeming love from the New Testament account of redemption in chapter five on methodology.

Jesus' life and works, in his formulation of the Gospel message in his epistles, Paul focuses on the death and cross of Christ. Consequently, I can point to no single passage that sums up *the* New Testament account of redemption. Despite the many differences in authorship, however, it is possible to trace certain ideas pertaining to the salvation of sinners that recur consistently throughout the New Testament and which have been taken up into the tradition of Christianity. Though the different authors formulate these ideas in various ways, the ideas that God loves the world of sinners and sent his son incarnate in order to save it; that man can never save himself but those who believe in Jesus will be saved; and that Jesus calls those he has redeemed to a new life of love resurface throughout the New Testament. These recurring ideas, then, are what I call the New Testament account of redemption, and by investigating the nature of these ideas I hope to uncover the original meaning of redeeming love.

I return now to my conjecture that any interpretation of Christian love will conceal its original meaning if Christianity is treated as a metaphysical doctrine. To treat Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine is to begin with the assumption that it is composed of answers to the ontological question, "what really is, and what is the nature of this reality?" the ethical question, "what is man's highest good and how is he to achieve it?" and the epistemological question, "how do we come to have knowledge of these?" and then to adopt an interpretation of Christianity which is systematically structured in terms of its answers to these questions. I suspect that structuring an interpretation of Christianity along these lines obscures the meaning of Christian love as it operates in the story of redemption.

I. The metaphysical approach to creating worldviews as a hermeneutic framework

Those who formulate doctrines or worldviews[14] by systematizing answers to the ontological, ethical, and epistemological questions, i.e. by creating metaphysical systems (I will call them metaphysicians[15]), by and large, seek to discover the structure and nature of reality and man's significance, or purpose in it. Metaphysicians have arrived upon a number of different answers to these questions and have thus proposed a variety of metaphysical systems. Despite the variety of outcomes, however, metaphysicians tend to share certain presuppositions: Seeking to discover the structure and order of the really real presupposes that reality has an order and structure, which the human intellect may, at least partially, discover. Likewise, seeking to understand man's purpose, significance, or highest good, as it is given in the nature of reality, presupposes that there is some intrinsic good or value to be found in his existence. Even those metaphysicians who reject the idea of a divine intellect in their conception of reality do not ignore the question of man's good.[16]

Metaphysicians also share, very broadly speaking, a general methodology. They seek to derive their view of the world from careful, systematic inquiry, forming conclusions based on systematic reasoning and evidence. Any answer to the ontological, ethical, and epistemological questions formulated above must be rejected and the overall

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[14] Although I have adopted the term 'metaphysical doctrine' when describing Augustine's interpretation of Christianity I could as easily have said that his interpretation treats Christianity as a metaphysical worldview. I here begin to use 'worldview' rather than 'doctrine' because of the religious, dogmatic connotation associated with the word 'doctrine.'

[15] Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hegel, to name just a few, are exemplar metaphysicians.

[16] Spinoza's *Ethics* is a good example of this, as are those Enlightenment thinkers who attribute man's intrinsic worth to his rational capacity. The Enlightenment view of man's intrinsic worth is carried into the later centuries, and many would agree that "the power of human intellect, unaided by divine revelation, to uncover the secrets of our world" (Popper 132) is part of its intrinsic value.

metaphysical system modified when the answer counters reason or the available evidence. By the same token, an entire metaphysical system, or worldview, must be rejected if too many of the claims that constitute it counter reason and evidence. For, metaphysicians seek to make claims that accurately reflect the matter of fact and to formulate systems that approach the truth about the nature of reality. Therefore, metaphysical claims and the systems composed of these claims must be evaluated in terms of their objective truth status.[17]

It may seem that I am giving an overly broad description of metaphysics. After all, philosophers generally consider ethics and epistemology to be branches of philosophy alongside of metaphysics. I should therefore note that I am not attempting to define metaphysics as such. Rather, I am trying to characterize a particular approach to formulating worldviews in terms of the types of questions it addresses, the presuppositions that underlie it, and the methodology, in the most general sense, it adopts. I call this approach metaphysical not, I think, without justification. That inquiries into the nature and structure of reality are metaphysical is uncontroversial. The characterization of ethical and epistemological questions as metaphysical is perhaps problematic. However, it is clear that the question of man's highest good cannot be divorced from questions about the nature of reality, nor can we effectively address the question of the nature of reality without considering the questions of what we can come to know about reality and how we can come to know it. Incidentally, those scientists and

[17] To be sure, in philosophical discourse after Kant, the concept of "objective truth" becomes more and more problematic, for Kant's hypothesis that the human understanding in some sense constitutes our experience of reality naturally leads to skepticism about our ability to grasp the nature of reality as such. Nonetheless, to problematize the concept of objective truth is not to deny that we should reject claims about the nature of reality or man's *summum bonum* that counter reason and evidence; it is rather that the epistemological question (instead of the ontological or ethical) has become the central focus—to what extent can we know the ultimate nature of reality and what counts as evidence?

philosophers of science who adopt a realist, as opposed to an instrumentalist, view of science, such as Richard Dawkins or Karl Popper, are, according to this characterization, also metaphysicians, though in a more limited sense; they also seek to answer the question of the nature of reality, though frequently with respect to only a few specific aspects of it. Further, they also presuppose that there is such a nature to discover and attempt to do so by means of a particular method of systematic reasoning and evaluating evidence.

My deliberate characterization of the metaphysical approach to formulating worldviews in terms of metaphysical systems should help to clarify my initial conjecture. To interpret Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine is to take for granted that there is a Christian worldview that can be systematically structured according to its answers to the metaphysical questions[18] and that the value of its claims can be assessed in terms of their correspondence to reason and evidence; hence, medieval theologians seek to show that the revealed truths are not inconsistent with reason, and Dawkins, for instance, seeks to show that contemporary scientific reasoning and evidence undermine Christianity's claims about the nature of reality.[19] Yet, as I hope my discussion of the metaphysical approach to creating worldview indicates, to interpret Christianity in this manner is to view it in terms of a particular hermeneutical framework. It stands to reason, then, that if the metaphysical framework obscures the meaning of Christian love an entirely different framework may disclose it. Therefore, my initial conjecture (though still unconfirmed) can be fleshed out as follows: *In its uncompromised form, Christian love is quite*

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[18] That is, the ontological question: what really is and what is the nature of this reality? the ethical questions: what is man's highest good and how is he to achieve it? and the epistemological question: how do we come to have knowledge of the nature of reality and man's highest good?

[19] For example, see Dawkins' book, The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design.

different in nature from an answer to the metaphysical questions; therefore—because any interpretation of Christianity that uses the metaphysical approach to creating worldviews as its hermeneutical framework must treat love as an answer (or part of an answer) to at least one of the metaphysical questions—disclosing the original meaning of Christian love requires a hermeneutical framework different from the metaphysical approach to creating worldviews.

I am initially led to this conjecture by Nygren's surmise that the meaning of Christian love becomes distorted in Augustine's reconciliation of Platonism and Christianity "simply because ancient thought is allowed to put the question" (Agape and Eros 503). The metaphysical approach to constructing worldviews takes its questions, if not their answers, from this ancient Greek tradition. So, if redeeming love is a response to concerns entirely different in nature from the metaphysical questions, it is unlikely that any interpretation of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine will capture the original meaning of this love. For, the nature of a question, to a large extent, predetermines the range of its possible answers. When Augustine attempts to understand God's love for sinners in terms of the metaphysical approach (i.e. in terms of systematically structured answers to the ontological, ethical, and epistemological questions), certain types of considerations are *a priori* excluded (e.g. that love could be unmotivated), so he can conceive of only two possible ways of understanding God's love for sinners: Augustine allows that God either uses us or enjoys us, "For if he did neither," he writes, "I cannot see how he could love us" (On Christian Doctrine Book One XXXI). Yet, Augustine's apparent puzzlement over the matter leads me to suspect that, were he not limited by the

nature of his inquiry, he might have understood God's love for sinners in a different manner altogether.

More so than Augustine's puzzlement over God's love for sinners, the peculiar character of the New Testament account of redemption leads me to suspect that the logic of redeeming love is not fully apprehensible in terms of metaphysical systematization. Indeed, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes a very similar claim: he writes that "the Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified" and that the message of the cross is "foolishness" to those who seek wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). According to Paul, redemption is not apprehensible in terms of the Greek pursuit of wisdom. Further, he claims that, in Christ's crucifixion, God has "made foolish the wisdom of the world" (I Corinthians 1:20). What is salvation to the follower of Christ is foolishness to the Greek; what is wisdom to the Greek, God has made foolish.[20] This disparity is, I suspect, due to the fact that the Greeks' pursuit of wisdom addresses questions that are entirely different in nature from those concerns to which redeeming love responds.

The Greek pursuit of wisdom and, likewise, the metaphysical approach to creating worldviews, which arises from the former, address the question of man's highest good and how he is to achieve this. To seek knowledge of man's highest good is to inquire into his noblest purpose—his ultimate significance; to attempt to attain that highest good is to pursue man's crowning achievement. The redemption story seems as if it could provide an answer to the question of how man is to achieve this highest good. Yet, according to Paul, love seeks not its own.[21] In the Gospels, Jesus' message of salvation

[20] See the entire passage 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
[21] I Corinthians 13:5

requires only one thing—that man give up striving after his own pursuits and follow Jesus. The way to salvation is to accept the vanity of even the noblest of man's pursuits[22] and to deny oneself, thus receiving the spirit of Jesus' love.[23] When the redeemed follows Jesus in the life of love, he no longer clings to his own life nor is he concerned to discover its ultimate value or purpose. He does not presuppose his own potential for goodness, nor does he set store by human achievement. Rather, he gives up his pursuit of the highest in order to lower himself and become a servant.[24] Consequently, if we interpret redeeming love to be part of the answer to the ethical question, it would be the case that the answer denies the value of the very issues that gave rise to the question. In light of redeeming love, the ethical question loses its force; if this love belongs to the answer to the ethical question, then it is a very peculiar kind of answer—one that calls for a rejection of the question it answers. I think it is far more likely that redeeming love responds to concerns entirely different in nature.

II. Toward an alternative hermeneutic framework

Over and over, the Gospels emphasize that Jesus came to save the lost, the sick, and the destitute. Again and again he is moved by compassion for the suffering of the poor, the weak, and the desperate. Moreover, the New Testament intimates that all men are wretched and lost and that no amount of righteousness, prosperity, or wisdom can

[22] Matthew 19:16-30, specifically 25-26; Mark 10:17-31, specifically 26-27; and Luke 18:18-30, specifically 26-27.
[23] Matthew 16:24-25; Mark 9:23-24
[24] Mark 9:35

safeguard man from the consequences of sin, which are toil, suffering, and death.[25] So the Gospel of Luke reports Jesus' admonition:

> Woe to you who are full now,
>
> for you will be hungry.
>
> Woe to you who are
>
> laughing now,
>
> for you will mourn and weep. (6:25)

In accordance with this intimation, I submit that redeeming love functions as a response to concern over man's finitude, misery, and insufficiency rather than as part of an answer to the question of man's highest good and how he is to achieve it. I suggest that interpreting the Christian redemption story as an expression of existential concern is a viable alternative to interpreting Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine. Accordingly, I propose that some consideration of the nature of existential concern will point the way to a hermeneutical framework more suited to disclosing the meaning of redeeming love.

Existential concern—the despair, angst, disquiet, vertigo, or nausea that break through the surface of everyday life—is, first and foremost, the concern of an *existing* individual, a subject who is inextricably tied to his concrete situation. Moreover, such concern is not the concern of the subject in general—the abstract, universal human subject—but is, in each case, the concern of this particular subject *qua* existing individual. For this reason, the attitude that is attuned to existential concern is strikingly different from the attitude of the metaphysician.

The latter, to appropriate some Kierkegaardian terminology, makes use of objective reflection: it seeks universally valid knowledge by means of reason,

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[25] Luke 6:20-26; Romans 8: 9-18, 23; for the results of sin see Romans 6

observation, data collection, verification, etc (189-251). This "attitude toward reality," as Marcel eloquently characterizes it, "is that of someone who is not involved in it, but who judges it his duty to draw up its minutes as exactly as possible" (97). From this perspective, then, even the subject is transformed into an object for investigation. Accordingly, objective reflection "leads to abstract thinking . . . and always leads away from the subjective individual whose existence or nonexistence becomes, from an objective point of view, altogether properly, infinitely indifferent" (Kierkegaard 193). From an objective point of view, it is altogether proper that the subject's individual existence become a matter of indifference because only by abstracting from the particular can the metaphysician attain the universal validity he seeks.[26]

In sharp contrast, existential concern arises only when the subjects' very own existence is at issue. When seeking to make sense of or come to terms with that existence which is my very own, I cannot take up the objective attitude; I can neither abstract myself from my concrete situation nor can my own subjective, individual existence become for me a matter of indifference. Attempting to grasp the sense of my subjective existence by maintaining the objective attitude of the metaphysician is as counterproductive as attempting to measure the wingspan of my shadow by making it stand still as I stretch a tape measure across its breadth. I simply cannot simultaneously view my existence from the outside, as if it were an object of investigation, and grasp the

[26] It might seem that the ethical question and its answer are an exception to the claim that objective reflection is indifferent to the existence of the subject. However, the ethical question, as it appears in the metaphysical approach to creating worldviews, "what is man's highest good and how is he to attain it?" calls for a universally valid answer, which is altogether indifferent to my own individual existence. It is not a question addressed to each and every subject individually; it is rather a question that addresses the subject in general—the universal and abstract subject. Any answer to the ethical question depersonalizes and abstracts from the particular subject. In objective ethical knowing, the individual subject, *qua* individual, remains a matter of indifference; objective ethical reflection "turns the subjective individual into something accidental" (Kierkegaard193).

sense that it has for me *as an existing subject*. When my very existence is at issue, I can only address it as a subject existing in this specific, concrete situation. I can never confront my own existence in the abstract. Likewise, each existing subject can attain a sense of his existence only from within his situation. Accordingly, only from the attitude of an involved participant (as opposed to one of an objective observer) can existential concern begin to develop. For, existential concern arises from a particular sense of *subjectivity*—a sense of what it means to be this subject inextricably bound to this concrete situation—that emerges as the subject grasps the sense of his existence from within.

Existential concern arises when an individual becomes acutely and intimately aware of the limits of his concrete situation. With respect to his situation, he finds himself to be finite. At the moment of his birth, he is thrown into a world not of his own choosing; his existence does not open up before him into a realm of boundless possibilities. Rather, each individual is born into a specific place at a particular moment in human history, and the possibilities of his life are determined in accordance with his historical location. Only he can take responsibility for his life, yet he has not the power to surmount the limits his situated existence places upon him, nor can he provide the ground for his own existence, though he is nonetheless abandoned to it. Finally, given in his concrete situation is his knowledge of the inevitable, absolute limit to all of his possibilities—his death.

When an acute and intimate awareness of these impenetrable limits breaks in upon the familiar everyday existence of the subjective individual, that existence appears as something strange and incomprehensible. Hence, existential concern bears upon the

experience of the senselessness of the world in which the existing subject finds himself inextricably situated. Children starve, die in war, contract painful and debilitating diseases, are orphaned and forsaken, or grow up healthy and well cared for. There is no reason beyond mere contingency why one innocent should be bloated with hunger and another rosy with health, yet it is so. A woman who has unselfishly dedicated her life to nursing the sick and feeding the poor may, on a day like any other, step out of her house and suffer a death blow from a falling roof tile. The unjust prosper. Suffering and despair are ubiquitous and, with few exceptions, serve no purpose. Joy and beauty appear fleetingly, as the life of a wildflower plucked from the earth, and nothing—neither living right nor living for the moment, neither simplicity nor prodigality—can safeguard from suffering or guarantee happiness.

Existential concern thus develops out of the sense that existence lacks intrinsic value. The arbitrary and contingent character of this concrete situation undermines the likelihood that life has any necessity or ultimate purpose. The existing subject has no *raison d'**ê**tre* beyond the happenstances that led to the union of sperm and egg. Further, if nothing can guarantee his own happiness or even the happiness of those for whom he cares and if pointless suffering is inevitable, then all striving is merely an exercise in futility. One life is as good as the next. Rich or poor, righteous or unrighteous, slothful or ambitious, strong or weak, all come to the same end. No matter what kind of life an individual has lived, in death each and every one comes to nothing.

By distinguishing this sense of subjectivity which gives rise to existential concern from the objective attitude of the metaphysician, I do not mean to suggest that metaphysicians are unaware either of the apparent transitory and arbitrary character of the

world or of the apparent senselessness of suffering and death. Rather I suggest that, from the objective viewpoint of the metaphysician, what is arbitrary, transitory, and senseless is merely an appearance to be transcended in the pursuit of the really real. The metaphysician presumes that by discovering the true nature of reality, the apparent arbitrary senselessness of the world can indeed be made sense of or explained away: The transitory and finite points beyond itself to the true stability of the eternal, the contingent and arbitrary to the necessary and formal. To the eyes of the metaphysician, filled with the brilliant light of the really real, what matter the dreadful, ephemeral shadows dancing on the wall of the cave? Though cognizant of life's vicissitudes and inevitabilities, metaphysicians do not confront the arbitrary and senseless character of their fleeting existences *as such*, but rather, relying on the universal power of reason, approach this characteristic of existence as an appearance to be transcended or explained away. So they fashion metaphysical systems, which provide reasoned solutions to the problem of the appearances.

On the other hand, when existential concern breaks through the surface of everyday existence and forces itself upon the existing subject, it becomes impossible to treat the sense of being arbitrarily situated in and abandoned to a senseless world as a mere problem calling for a rational solution. However nauseating or unsettling the contingent and utterly finite character of existence, this character is nonetheless a condition of existence—a condition that could not become a problem calling for a rational solution except to someone who attempts to transcend, or abstract himself from, his existence. To face existential concern as such is to live in the presence of this condition—as cliff dwellers live in the presence of the precipice, as soldiers in war live in

the presence of the unseen enemy. When living in the presence of this condition, those who face existential concern seek neither to transcend nor explain it. Rather, each acknowledges himself to be a finite creature, inextricably but arbitrarily situated in a world of meaningless suffering and ephemeral joy, whose possibilities are limited by this world to which he is bound until he reaches the final limit to all his possibilities: his death. Therefore, unlike the metaphysical questions, existential concern calls for a response, a *modus Vivendi*, as it were, but not an answer to a problem. The ontological question, "what really is?" and the ethical question, "what is man's *summum bonum*?" rely upon objective reflection to provide objectively true, universally valid answers. Moving from observation to inference from one inference to the next, reason extends itself upward, ever seeking and approaching a systematic solution to these ultimate questions. Yet, relying upon evidence and inference to provide a reasoned answer to dread over my own inevitable death or to despair over the meaninglessness of ubiquitous suffering would be like asking for "the cube root of an ash tree" (Unamuno, 101).

A true response to existential concern differs from a true answer to metaphysical questions in the way that being true to a friend differs from the truth of the proposition, 'a water molecule is composed of one oxygen and two hydrogen atoms.' It makes sense to say that the latter is an objectively true proposition, i.e. that it can be accurately correlated to a state of affairs. It does not make sense to say that I am being objectively true to a friend. Likewise, a response to existential concern cannot be evaluated in terms of objective truth. Apprehending the truth of a response to existential concern, like being true to a friend, requires a different conception of truth.

Nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers caught up with existential concern, thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, or Marcel, point toward a conception of truth that involves our *manner of being* rather than facts about being. The indifference of the objective truth to the individual, existing subject compels these thinkers to shift from a conception of truth as something that we discover with objective reflection to a conception of truth as *a manner of being involved* in the concrete situation. The objective and therefore abstract truth is, as Kierkegaard perceives, "only for that *abstractum* which an existing spirit becomes by abstracting from himself *qua* existing, which he can do only momentarily, although at such moments he still pays his debt to existence by existing nevertheless" (Kierkegaard 191). Kierkegaard's ironic remark indicates the need for a conception of truth as something other than indifferent facts, as something that addresses the existing individual who asked about the truth in the first place. Indeed, even an exhaustive knowledge of all of the true facts with which reason and evidence could acquaint us could not provide adequate answers to the most grave of our human concerns, for the objectively valid truth does not address the existing individual who asked about the truth. Consider, for instance, the decision to marry or the decision to terminate the life support of a loved one who has survived for years in a persistent vegetative state. However many true facts I may have on the psychological theories of relationship compatibility or the mental activity of coma victims, in situations such as these, facts and reasoning can never yield a "true" decision; truth exists only in my involvement in my concrete situation—in my world with others.

Perhaps this distinction between objective truth and truth which addresses the existing subject *qua* existing will become clearer in light of the following parallel case:

Descartes seeks to assert his existence as something certain and indubitable, and, through the process of objective reflection, arrives upon a formula that allows him to make just such an assertion—*cogito ergo sum*. Marcel too seeks to affirm his existence, but he cannot be satisfied with Descartes' formulation: "Whatever Descartes may have thought of himself, the only certainty with which [the *cogito*] provides us concerns only the epistemological subject as organ of objective cognition" (90). In other words, Descartes has not succeeded in affirming the existence of that existing subject who he himself is; on the contrary, he has succeeded only in affirming the existence of an abstraction. Marcel, on the other hand, seeks to affirm that existence which is his very own; he seeks to affirm his existence as something more than an objective fact, for he is more than merely a thinking substance, more even than an amalgamation of social-psychological-biological functions.

Thus rejecting Descartes' solution, Marcel seeks to locate the affirmation his existence *in a certain manner of being involved in his concrete situation*. He writes, "I am therefore led to assume or to recognize a form of participation which has the reality of a subject" (91). The form of participation to which Marcel here refers is a participation in "presence." Someone who is present, he explains, "is capable of being with me with the whole of himself" (103) and in no way refuses or closes himself off. He who participates in presence gives himself to another in a way that allows for "genuine intimacy" (103), intimacy which could not exist if existence were no more than an objective fact. For someone who gives himself in this manner, it becomes impossible that his existence could be anything other than that very subjective reality which was to be affirmed; by *being present* to another, Marcel affirms that existence, or subjective

reality, which is his very own. Likewise, the truth which addresses the existing subject *qua* existing must be located in the existing individual himself—in his manner of being. Therefore, just as for Marcel, the affirmation of subjective existence is "an affirmation which I *am* rather than an affirmation which I *utter*" (91), so too the truth of a response to existential concern is a truth that I am rather than one I assert.

Considering the distinction between truth as a response to existential concern and truth as an answer to metaphysical questions allows me to articulate my initial conjecture in its most complete form. I have surmised that Christian love provides a response to existential concern and that its original meaning will be brought to light if the story of redemption is interpreted as an expression of existential concern. If I am correct, then the truth expressed in this story must be truth as a manner of being rather than truth about facts; if the Christian story is an expression of existential concern, then its truth must be that kind of truth which allows the New Testament figure of Jesus to claim that he *is* the truth not just that he speaks the truth.[27] Therefore, my initial conjecture, when fully developed, becomes: *If the Christian redemption story is interpreted as an expression of existential concern, the original meaning of Christian love will disclose itself as a true response to such concern; on the other hand, interpreting Christianity in terms of a metaphysical hermeneutical framework will necessarily cover over the meaning of Christian love because the metaphysical approach to creating worldviews seeks objectively true answers rather than truth as a manner of being involved in a concrete situation.*

Articulating my conjecture in this way brings to the fore a serious objection: It makes no sense to say that Christian love could be a response to existential concern

[27] "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" John 14:6

because Christian love is an essential part of a religion based on the ideas that the world is ultimately meaningful, i.e. that it has a real meaning beyond what we project onto it (God's plan, as it were), and that humans are creatures of intrinsic and inestimable value whose *raison d'être* is to live in accordance with God's plan. Because these ideas provide the foundation for Christian doctrine, or the Christian worldview, no person genuinely immersed in the Christian religion could be plagued by existential concern. If it is the case both that no Christian is troubled by existential concern *and* that Christian love is a response to such concern, then it follows either that (a) no one who shows Christian love is a Christian or that (b) the existential concern that leads to the practice of Christian love ceases to be a concern once the practice has begun. It is clear that (a) is an unacceptable option. If (b) were the case and the concern which leads to the practice ceases to be a concern once the practice commences, then Christian love would merely be mechanical exercise without meaning; continuing to practice Christian love long after becoming a Christian would be like continuing to clap along to a beat though the song is long over and forgotten. If Christian love is more than mere mechanical exercise, which it is, then (b) is also an unacceptable option. Since neither (a) nor (b) is an acceptable option, it must be the case that either Christians are in fact troubled by existential concern or Christian love is not a response to such concern.[28] But, as was stated previously,

[28] It might seem as if there should be a third option (c) such that, if it is the case both that no Christian is troubled by existential concern *and* that Christian love is a response to such concern, then it follows that (a) either no one who shows Christian love is a Christian, or that (b) the existential concern that leads to the practice of Christian love ceases to be a concern once the practice has begun, or that (c) the existential concern that leads to the practice of Christian love gives way to a different kind of concern once the practice has begun, namely the concern to live in accordance with God's plan. If (c) were a possible option, there would be a way out of this dilemma and it would be possible to claim both that no Christian is troubled by existential concern and that Christian love is, at least initially, a response to such concern. However, brief consideration of (c) shows that it is not actually an option. If, in the moment of conversion i.e. the moment in which one becomes a Christian, a new concern to live in accordance with God's plan supersedes the old existential concern, then that existential concern never led to the practice of Christian

because Christianity is founded on the ideas that God's plan gives the world meaning and that man is part of God's plan and thus of inestimable worth, no Christian could be seriously troubled by existential concern. Therefore, it must be the case that Christian love is not a response to existential concern.

My reply to this objection is that it begs the question. That is, my imagined interlocutor takes for granted that Christianity should be interpreted as a metaphysical doctrine, but this claim itself is the issue in question. To claim that Christianity is founded on the idea that man is an inestimably valuable part of God's plan is to assert that Christian doctrine answers the question of man's *summum bonum*: man's highest good is to follow God's plan. Yet, I see no reason to privilege the former claim over the equally viable claim that Christianity expresses the idea that sin has so despoiled mankind that only God's love can save him from his wretchedness and utter worthlessness.

Although the verdict as to whether or not an interpretation of the Christian redemption story as an expression of existential concern is any more appropriate than an interpretation of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine must follow the delivery of such an interpretation, a preliminary discussion of the kinds of considerations involved in this decision is not out of order at this point. Indeed, it will be beneficial to keep these considerations in mind when I present an interpretation of the New Testament story of redemption as an expression of existential concern. I have argued that the standard interpretation of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine should be reconsidered because it fails to capture the original meaning of Christian love; what must now be considered is

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love in the first place. Rather, Christian love is a response to the shift from the old concerns to the new concern, a concern which is equivalent to the concerns involved in the ethical question.

whether or not an interpretation of the Christian redemption story as an expression of existential concern more faithfully depicts the meaning of that love.

Because love is the fundamental motif that ties together the key elements of the New Testament story of redemption, any particular interpretation of the meaning of redemptive love will affect the corresponding interpretation of that story. Therefore, we may presume that, if a particular interpretation of Christian love disrupts the internal coherence of the redemption story, that interpretation does not capture the meaning of Christian love. I will clarify in terms of an already familiar example: Augustine's interpretation of Christian love as ordinate love rather than as spontaneous, unmotivated love leads him to conclude that God does not love sinners, but rather that he loves his own goodness as it is reflected in man's existence. In other words, even in sinners, there is the spark of the divine. Yet what does it mean to say that man is a sinner in need of redemption but that man's sinful nature separates him from God? If the sinner contains within himself the spark of the divine, then how could he be separated from God? According to Augustine's interpretation then, it is the case both that there is an unbridgeable gulf between God and man *and* that, insofar as man exists, God, who is both goodness itself and the source of all things good, is present in man. Based on this discrepancy, I conclude that Christian love is not ordinate love. In this way, the inner coherence of the redemption story can serve as one measure by which to gauge the inadequacy of an interpretation of the meaning of love. If the meaning that love assumes when the Christian redemption story is interpreted as an expression of existential concern yields similar discrepancies, then it is unlikely that Christian love is a response to

existential concern and likewise that the Christian story of redemption is an expression of such concern.

It will also be important to consider whether or not Christian love, as it operates in the narrative of redemption, does indeed respond to existential concern. I previously noted[29] that redemptive love is not likely to be an answer, or part of an answer, to the question of man's highest good because the love motif undermines the value of the very concerns that lead to the ethical question in the first place. For this reason, *inter alia*, I postulated that Christianity, or at least the Christian redemption story, is not best understood as a metaphysical doctrine. Likewise, if it becomes clear that the redeeming love motif undermines the significance of existential concern, then it is unlikely that the Christian story is an expression of such concern.

Additionally, since the truth of a response to existential concern is truth as a manner of participating in a concrete situation, then it will be important to consider whether this truth as lived is an appropriate category to apply to Christian love. Therefore, if it is difficult or impossible to conceive of Christian love as a way in which man is involved with his world, others, and himself or if the concerns which give rise to that love are not concerns that call for a true response, then, again, it is unlikely that the Christian story could be appropriately interpreted as an expression of existential concern.

A decision in favor of an interpretation of the Christian story of redemption as an expression of existential concern carries with it certain implications. First, as I have already indicated several times, if Christian love is a response to existential concern rather than an answer, or part of an answer, to metaphysical questions, then any treatment of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine will necessarily distort or compromise the

[29] On page 39.

original meaning of love. For, a response to an existential concern and an answer to a metaphysical question are entirely different in nature.[30]

Second, if Christian love is a response to existential concern, then asking whether or not it is objectively true makes as much sense as asking whether or not my friendship with my dearest friend is objectively true. Further, if understanding the significance of Christianity hinges on grasping the meaning of love and if the meaning of love discloses itself in an interpretation of the Christian redemption story as an expression of existential concern, then it makes very little sense to evaluate Christianity as a whole in terms of objective truth. The interpretation of the Christian story as an expression of existential concern thus makes the position of the skeptic incomprehensible unless this position is reconceived.[31] The skeptic could doubt that Christian love is an appropriate response to existential concern. Perhaps she could even doubt that existential concern is something to be taken seriously. It would not, however, make sense for her to doubt the truth of Christianity simply because it contradicts the objective truth, or the approximation of objective truth that scientific knowledge provides. For, if the Christian story of redemption is an expression of existential concern, then its significance is not related to its objective truth status.

Finally, a decision in favor of the interpretation of the Christian story as an expression of existential concern provides us with a different way to understand the question of whether or not a rigorous, honest thinker can take Christianity seriously. Namely, we can determine whether or not to take Christianity seriously by bracketing questions of objective truth and concentrating instead on understanding how what is

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[30] See the final formulation of my initial conjecture on page 48.

[31] Refer back to the two consequences of interpreting Christianity as a doctrine composed of Platonic claims about the nature of reality and man's highest good outlined on pages 7 and 8.

expressed in the story relates to the concrete situation of the existing human subject. What it means to take Christianity seriously, then, is not to suppose that it is objectively true, but rather to find it to be a true response to our concrete situation.

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Part Two
Introduction

In the previous chapter, I conjectured that any interpretation of Christianity that uses the metaphysical approach to creating worldviews as its hermeneutic framework will necessarily distort the original meaning of Christian love. I have so conjectured because I suspect that Christian love is a response to existential concern and not an answer or part of an answer to metaphysical questions. I also indicated that the verdict as to whether or not an interpretation of the Christian story of redemption as an expression of existential concern and of love as a response to such concern is any more appropriate than an interpretation of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine must follow the delivery of such an interpretation. It should be clear at this point, then, that, in order to present this interpretation, I will first need to establish a hermeneutic framework that is capable of disclosing, rather than covering over or explaining away, that sense of subjectivity that gives rise to existential concern.

However, if I succeed in establishing such a hermeneutical framework and then use it to interpret the Christian story as an expression of existential concern, am I not guilty of inappropriately importing categories from contemporary philosophy into New Testament interpretation? Am I not therefore equally subject to that criticism to which I have subjected Augustine when I claim that his use of the metaphysical approach to creating worldviews was inappropriately imported into his interpretation of Christianity? To such protestations, I must reply that my objection to Augustine is not *that* he imported philosophical concepts into New Testament interpretation. On the contrary, had those concepts illuminated the meaning of Christian love, I would not have objected to his

interpretation as I have. My criticism of Augustine is rather that the particular hermeneutic framework he used to interpret Christianity forced him to cover over something important about God's love, namely that it is spontaneous, unmotivated love for the sinner, wretched and unworthy as he is.

I do not criticize Augustine for importing external, philosophical categories into his interpretation, for I doubt that there is any "purely internal" starting point from which to interpret the New Testament message. As Thistelton correctly observes, "Even the New Testament writers themselves were willing to borrow *concepts* from the Graeco-Roman world around them in order to expound their distinctively Christian message" (10). Accordingly, Thistelton argues that borrowing conceptual tools external to Christian thought does not necessarily distort and can even clarify the meaning of the New Testament message. He maintains that, when attempting to interpret the New Testament, "categories which come from outside the Bible are not necessarily wrong or inappropriate" (9) and suggests that some philosophical categories may indeed be used appropriately to provide insight into the meaning of the text. When an interpreter uses "external" philosophical categories appropriately, "this use clarifies rather than distorts the meaning" (9). In other words, using philosophical categories can help the interpreter to translate the themes of a text into a more familiar or meaningful form without thereby distorting their message. According to Thistelton, it is fruitful to make use of philosophical categories in New Testament interpretation, provided the interpreter uses the external concepts *as tools* for clarifying the meaning of the message rather than as categories into which the message must be made to fit.

Thistelton's argument is all very well, but by beginning with the conjecture that the Christian story is an expression of existential concern and then providing an interpretation of it as such, am I not forcing the Christian story to fit into contemporary philosophical categories rather than simply using these categories as conceptual tools to clarify the meaning of the New Testament message? In answer to this question I point to the provisional character of both my *conjecture* and my subsequent interpretation of the Christian story. I maintain that my interpretation is appropriate *only if* it clarifies rather than obscures the meaning of love as found in the New Testament account of redemption; if it obscures rather than clarifies, then it is to be dismissed as an inappropriate interpretation.

Similarly, the fact that I will build my interpretation upon a conjecture that makes use of philosophical categories not introduced into philosophical discourse until the late nineteenth century should not cause alarm, nor should my suspicion about the meaning of redeeming love be construed as an unwarranted reading of my own personal, philosophical viewpoint[32] into the text or as a merely polemical and, worse, anachronistic response to my dissatisfaction with Augustine's interpretation of Christian love. Existential concern may not have been referred to as such or described in terms of angst, despair, abandonment, nausea, and so on (terms which, through the rise of existentialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have become philosophical categories) until long after the New Testament was written and canonized, yet I need only refer to the

[32] Although I do not seek simply to read my own personal views into the New Testament message, there is a sense in which the interpretation is personal and deeply personal, namely in that it is *I* who ask the question of whether or not an honest, rigorous thinker in my scientific world can take Christianity seriously and in the sense that the answer to this question will affect me who asks it in a personal way. Yet this question is not *only* personal, for it is proposed by and of importance to many who share with me the current scientific world in which I live.

Qohelet of the Jewish Scripture (the Ecclesiastes of the Old Testament) to demonstrate that this type of concern is not alien to the Judaic religious tradition from which Christianity arose.[33] Moreover, there is a whole literature suggesting that existential concepts are applicable to the New Testament. In support of using existential concepts as hermeneutic tools for interpreting the New Testament, New Testament scholar and historian, Miegge, remarks that "It is not necessary to spill much ink in order to demonstrate the affinity which exists between the formulating of problems current in existentialist philosophy . . . and that to be found in the New Testament." (62). Similarly, in contrasting the abstract character of Greek categories with the concrete nature of the New Testament, Macquarrie states, "it may fairly be claimed that there is some affinity between existentialism and the teaching of Jesus" (21). Indeed Jones and Via make use of existential concepts in order to interpret Jesus' parables, Bultmann uses existential concepts to interpret Paul's view of man, and Tillich understands Christ's work as overcoming man's anxiety before his aliened existence.

Yet even if previous literature provides a basis for my conjecture, is it not inappropriate to begin my investigation of a New Testament theme with a conjecture, the proposal of which is already an interpretive act? That is, if I do not start with a more or less impartial data analysis—be it an analysis of the linguistic-grammatical structure of the New Testament writings or of the historical, socio-cultural setting of the New

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[33] Indeed that sense of subjectivity which gives rise to existential concern is as profoundly and evocatively presented in the Ecclesiastes as in any work of a Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, or Camus. This ancient author is acutely aware of the finite and arbitrary nature of anything that happens under the sun: "I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift/or the battle to the strong,/nor does food come to the wise/or wealth to the brilliant/or favor to the learned;/but time and chance happen to them all. Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net,/or birds are taken in a snare,/so men are trapped by evil times/that fall unexpectedly upon them" (9:11-12). And likewise he expresses the senselessness and purposelessness of man's existence "I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (1:13-14).

Testament authors—am I not much more likely to bias my interpretation unnecessarily? With reference to the hermeneutical tradition, beginning with Schleiermacher and continuing through Dilthey and Heidegger on to Bultmann and Gadamer, I answer that the starting point for any interpretation is always a pre-understanding, or fore-having and similarly that, when it comes to interpretation, there is no such thing as an analysis of brute data. In Heidegger's words, "An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us" (191). Rather, "In every case this interpretation is grounded in *something we have in advance*—in a *fore-having*" (192). Though Heidegger is here referring to our interpretations of objects we encounter in the world, his insight is nonetheless applicable to interpretations of religious themes. When asking about the meaning of Christian love, it would be folly for me to believe that I could begin with an analysis that was not already conditioned by my pre-understanding.

However, to acknowledge that I necessarily begin any interpretation from a pre-understanding is not to resign myself to some form of extreme relativism based on the simplistic notion that the interpreter can never escape her biases and presuppositions. Bultmann's description of the interpreter's pre-understanding is helpful in this respect. Pre-understanding can be, according to him, "not a prejudice, but a way of raising questions" (Existence and Faith 293). And in a similar vein, Robinson writes that, because we must start from within a certain pre-understanding, we must "genuinely ask . . . *our* questions" (x) if a religious text or theme is to be meaningful *to us*. Yet if we ask only our questions, then do we not, in a sense, predetermine what types of answers are possible,[34] making interpretation completely relative to the standpoint of the interpreter? To maintain that the interpreter must begin with her questions is not to maintain that her

[34] Just as I claim Augustine did?

relationship to a religious text or theme is necessarily a static one, she posing questions and discovering (or not) their answers; if the interpreter involves herself in a circular and reciprocal relation with the text, then the religious themes can themselves modify her pre-understanding.[35] In order to realize an appropriate interpretation of religious themes, then, what is essential is to recognize this starting point—this way of asking questions—*as a starting point*. Therefore, it becomes necessary that I examine my pre-understanding, my way of asking questions, both in order to elucidate what is at stake in these questions and in order to develop a hermeneutic framework that will allow me to move from pre-understanding to a genuine engagement with and an appropriate interpretation of religious themes. That is, the examination of the pre-understanding should allow me to develop a hermeneutic framework through which I can address my questions without presupposing their answers, for if I pre-suppose their answers, then I do not genuinely ask the questions.

At the outset, I posed the question: Can an honest, rigorous thinker, living in our scientific world, take religion seriously? Noting that this question could not be asked of religion in general but only with reference to a particular religion, I narrowed the scope of my question, asking instead: Can such a thinker take Christianity seriously? In the last chapter, I waved my hand in the general direction of an answer to this question. I will now state that answer explicitly.

The meaning of Christian love, I conjectured, gets covered over when Christianity is treated as a metaphysical doctrine. Because the metaphysical approach is concerned to answer the question of the nature of reality and also the attendant epistemological question as to how and in what sense we have access to such knowledge, interpretations

[35] This is one of the instantiations of the hermeneutic circle.

(both critical and apologetic) of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine tend to subordinate the question of the meaning of Christian love to the question of faith and reason.[36] Such interpretations then construe the meaning of love in terms of the ethical implications entailed by the claims Christian doctrine makes about the nature of reality[37]—implications the significance of which is best decided only after the meaning and content of faith and its rational foundation, or lack thereof, have been decided.[38] However, tucking Christian love neatly into its niche in a metaphysical system developed by "faith seeking understanding" has the effect of undermining and obscuring the significance of what Nietzsche calls "the transvaluation of all ancient values" (38)[39] involved in the account of God's love for sinners. For instance, considering such incongruous images as an incarnate God or a crucified messiah primarily with respect to the question of faith and reason rather than in relation to the meaning of love seems to have the effect of reducing these incongruities to the level of intellectual quandaries. Indeed, from the patristic period to the present, theologians, philosophers, historians, and scientists have expended and continue to expend much effort in deliberating over the

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[36] This tendency holds equally for post-Hegelian interpretations of Christianity, which consider questions of the nature of reality in terms of God's revelation of himself in the events of human history and for more traditionally Platonic or Aristotelian interpretations of Christianity. The former, with their post-Enlightenment historical understanding, remain metaphysical, though the content of "reality" is not so much the unchanging realm of being as the revelation of the absolute through human history.

[37] That Christian love should be so treated is, I propose, a direct result of treating Christianity primarily as a metaphysical doctrine. A logical place for love to fit in any metaphysical system is as part of the answer to the question of man's highest good, and as I noted in the previous chapter, the question of man's highest good cannot be divorced from questions about the nature of reality.

[38] Augustine, though he is deeply concerned to understand his faith through reason and to ground Christianity in an appropriate metaphysical system, is to be commended for his dedication to understanding the meaning of Christian love (even if he must do so in terms of a metaphysical system) and for allowing Christian love to play such a central role in his theology.

[39] "Hitherto there had never and nowhere been such boldness in inversion, nor anything at once so dreadful, questioning, and questionable as this formula [God on the Cross]: It promised a transvaluation of all ancient values" (38). While I hope, in some sense, to overcome Nietzsche's scornful critique of Christian love in my own interpretation, on this point, at least, there is no denying Nietzsche's insight: That love represented by God on the cross is indeed a bold and dreadful inversion.

manner and extent to which rational persons can take such images to be depictions of historical realities. I surmise that inquiring into the significance of these and other such inversions that make up the New Testament account of redemption[40] primarily with respect to the question of faith and reason rather than with respect to the meaning of love covers over both what is unfamiliar and unsettling in the conception of redemptive love as well as the profoundly creative, dynamic power that such an inverted and peculiar conception of love may exert over the lives of existing persons.

Accordingly, I suspect that privileging the question of the meaning of Christian love over the question of faith and reason will disclose a means for taking Christianity seriously—a means that need not await the outcome of the debate over faith and reason. I suspect that Christian love speaks to human existence in a less readily ascertainable yet more penetrating manner than do the ethical implications derived from theories about the nature of the really real. If, as I conjecture, Christian love, as expressed in the New Testament story of redemption, is a true response to existential concern and if existential concern is concern that an honest, rigorous thinker must face, then that thinker would do well to take seriously the Christian story and the form of life it entails.

By stating my proposed answer to my initial question explicitly, I have completed the foundation for an examination of the pre-understanding involved in my interpretation. However, as I have, with Bultmann, conceived of the pre-understanding as a way of raising questions, my proposed answer to my initial question must itself take the form of a question, and, in seeking to answer this question (if I genuinely ask it), I cannot presuppose its answer. Therefore, I will begin with an examination of my initial

[40] Servant lord, the righteousness of the publican over the priest, unconditioned love for enemy/sinner, the first shall be last, those who seek to save their life shall lose it and those who give up their life shall save it

question—Can an honest, rigorous thinker, situated in our scientific, intellectual world, take Christianity seriously?—and I will continue with an examination of the question contained in my proposed answer—Is Christianity, particularly the New Testament story of redemption, an expression of existential concern in which redeeming love serves as a true response to such concern? These examinations should both elucidate what is at stake in my questions and clear the way for the development of a hermeneutic framework that allows me at once to address my questions and to engage with the New Testament account of redemption in a reciprocal manner such that it may modify my starting place as necessary for the articulation of an interpretation that is appropriate to the text. In other words, these examinations of my pre-understanding should both clarify what it means for an honest and rigorous thinker to take something seriously and allow me to develop a hermeneutic framework that is capable of revealing whether or not the New Testament account of redemption is an expression of existential concern without presupposing that it is.

Chapter Three

First Examination of the Pre-understanding: The Honest and Rigorous Thinker

> *"Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them."*
>
> –Charles Dickens

Before I can address the question of whether or not an honest and rigorous thinker living in our scientific world can take Christianity seriously, I must address the question of what it means to be an honest and rigorous thinker. By examining the general characteristics of rational, honest, and rigorous thought, the contributions of scientific rationality to honest and rigorous thought, and the limitations of science and reason,[41] I will suggest that the honest and rigorous thinker must address himself, at times, to questions that call for rationally grounded answers or solutions and, at other times, to the question of his very own existence, to which neither reason nor science can respond. Thus the honest and rigorous thinker is someone who is committed to the principles of reason and bases claims to truth—assertions, judgments, etc.—on rational grounds, and yet also recognizes the limitations of reason by acknowledging the question of his own existence and responding to that question in *his manner of being true*.

[41] I do not wish to take the concept of reason for granted. By reason I mean simply the process of reasoning—of making, presumably valid inferences from premises to conclusions. And I also mean that the premises and inferences are the reason for the conclusion. So rational thought is thought based on reason.

I. General characterization of the rational, honest and rigorous thinker

As I struggle to engage the question of what it means to be an honest and rigorous thinker—a question that stands in the shadows of my entire project—I hear the whisper of Socrates' ironic spirit, "When I do not know, I do not think I know" (Apology 21d). In Plato's Socratic dialogues, Socrates consistently employs his peculiar brand of irony in order to demonstrate that his interlocutors have failed to be honest, rigorous thinkers: They have asserted the truth of claims they do not understand; they have formed judgments without investigating the concepts involved in those judgments; and they have thought themselves to be wise and knowledgeable when, in truth, they know nothing worthwhile. The fault of these thinkers is not that they know nothing worthwhile, but rather that each "thinks he knows something when he does not" (Apology 21d). Each has failed to be an honest and rigorous thinker, because, believing himself to be wise, he has not questioned what he takes to be the truth of the matter.

The *Euthyphro*, for example, exhibits Socratic irony at work in exposing the failure of a self-proclaimed expert in religious matters to be an honest and rigorous thinker. Euthyphro, convinced he is able to discern pious from impious actions by means of his expertise in divine matters, pauses on his way to prosecute his own father for murder[42] in order to teach Socrates the nature of piety. At Socrates' urging, Euthyphro attempts to explain what makes an action pious. After some discussion, they conclude that a pious action is one that is loved by all the gods. While agreeing that this claim may be true, Socrates is not satisfied. He demonstrates the limits of this conclusion by asking

[42] As the story goes, a household servant killed a slave in a fit of drunken anger. In response, Euthyphro's father bound the murderer, threw him in a ditch, and sent a messenger to a priest to inquire about what should be done. The murderer died of hunger, cold, and his bonds before word came back from the priest, and so Euthyphro seeks to prosecute his father for the murder of a murderer.

whether an action is pious because the gods love it or whether the gods love it because it is pious. His question indicates that, though being god-loved may be a property of all pious actions, being god-loved does not explain what makes an action pious or pleasing to the gods. Socrates then suggests that it may be helpful to consider whether piety is not some part of justice, but this discussion brings them no further toward understanding, as they run full circle ending with the conclusion that piety is the part of justice the gods love. At this point, Socrates and Euthyphro are at an impasse; Socrates has not been satisfactorily instructed as to the nature of piety, and Euthyphro, still convinced that he can unequivocally discern impious from pious actions, departs to prosecute his father. The reader is left to consider Euthyphro's blind self-assurance. The fact that he remains unswerving in purpose, despite all the members of his household who maintain that his course is impious[43] and despite his inability to provide an adequate explanation of what makes his or any other action pious, reveals him as a dissembler. He is no wise and knowledgeable diviner or sage but rather a fool who has failed to be an honest and rigorous thinker.

Euthyphro's failure reveals several characteristics of honest and rigorous thinking. First, honest and rigorous thinking requires attempting to ensure the truth of judgments or assertions by means of thorough and scrupulous inquiry into the logic of the concepts contained therein. Euthyphro's failure is not so much that he can give no adequate explanation of piety as that he makes a judgment about the piety of an action without first understanding the concept involved in this judgment. Worse, once Socrates reveals

[43] "Both my father and my other relatives are angry that I am prosecuting my father for murder on behalf of a murderer when he hadn't even killed him, they say, and even if he had, the dead man does not deserve a thought, since he was a killer. For, they say, it is impious for a son to prosecute his father for murder. But their ideas of the divine attitude to piety and impiety are wrong, Socrates" (*Euthyphro* 4d-e).

Euthyphro's ignorance, Euthyphro continues to maintain the truth of his judgment and acts accordingly. Rather than persevering in his efforts to comprehend the concept, piety, involved in his judgment or, should his human reason ultimately prove wanting, suspending judgment and acknowledging that he does not know what he once thought he knew, Euthyphro persists intrepidly in his decision to prosecute his father. Euthyphro's folly demonstrates that, while investigating each concept involved in a judgment or assertion by seeking to articulate its defining characteristics[44] and to follow its implications through to their logical conclusions is necessary for honest and rigorous thinking, such investigation is not sufficient. Honest and rigorous thinking also requires the courage to call convictions into question, openness to reasonable criticism and revision, the perseverance to continue on a worthwhile course of inquiry when progress becomes difficult, and the humility to abide by Socrates' adage: "When I do not know, I do not think I know" (Apology 21d).

Just as unacceptable as Euthyphro's blind self-assurance is the retreat into what Spinoza calls the asylum of ignorance. While the honest, rigorous thinker must appropriate Socrates' adage, such a thinker cannot then use this admission of ignorance as a defensive argument for a claim to objective truth. Augustine, arguing against Porphyry over the fact of the incarnation, makes just such a move in *City of God* X. From what can be gathered in this tenth book, Porphyry's position is that the ultimate

[44] In his *Philosophic Investigations* Wittgenstein calls into question the definability of our concepts, claiming that most words and concepts cannot be defined in the way that Socrates demanded Euthyphro define piety. According to Wittgenstein's insight, there is no one quality that is shared by all games, for example, and so it would be useless to attempt to seek a definition that can tell us what makes each particular activity we call a game a game. Instead games have certain similar features by which we recognize them as games, so, in Wittgenstein's words, games share "family resemblances" but there is no overarching definition that can be generalized to all games. Even accepting Wittgenstein's analysis of concepts, the honest, rigorous thinker will investigate the meaning of concepts that play a central role in judgments and particularly the meaning that concept has as it functions in the particular context, or, in Wittgenstein's words, "language game" in which the judgment takes place.

reality, absolute being, the Good, which is the goal of the ascending soul, is ineffable, eternal, invisible, unchanging intelligence. This being the case, it would contradict the very nature of the absolute being, being which brooks no contradiction, to condescend to become a man limited to a body. Against this position, Augustine ultimately argues that "God's piece of folly is wiser than men" (28), and therefore the claim that God did in fact become incarnate only *seems,* to our limited human understanding, to be contradictory. Augustine's answer, as a defense for the claim that God did, as a matter of historical fact, become man, falls short of the standards of honest and rigorous thought. If the honest and rigorous thinker is to assert that God actually did become man, not only must the concepts of "God" and "incarnation" have been thoroughly and adequately investigated, but also there must be some rational ground on which to base such an assertion. As man's ignorance in the face of God's wisdom is not a sufficiently rational ground on which to base such a dubious claim, conviction as to the objective truth of God's incarnation on this basis would seem not to be an instantiation of honest and rigorous thinking but rather of intellectual irresponsibility.

The examples of Euthyphro's blind arrogance and Augustine's retreat to the asylum of ignorance might seem to indicate that the honest, rigorous thinker should concur absolutely with Galloway's resolution that to believe "where there were no rational grounds for belief would be sheer irresponsibility" (48). Indeed, in most cases honest, rigorous thinkers certainly must rely on reason to ground their assertions and judgments. However, to define honest and rigorous thinking by excluding the possibility of every sort of conviction that does not stand on rational grounds would be problematic. Reason cannot ground itself. Consider a fundamental principle of reason, *modus ponens*.

Reason itself can give us no account of why *modus ponens* is a valid form of reasoning.[45] Yet, if we are to be able to reason at all, we must accept and believe in the validity of this pattern of inference. Thus, if reason belongs necessarily to honest and rigorous thinking, then such thinking contains within itself a belief that is not rationally grounded, namely the belief in the validity of the principles of reason, for which reason can give no account.

If honest and rigorous thinking allows for and even requires belief in some principles that are not rationally grounded, then it is necessary to ask, why these and not others? Consider for example the conviction that an honest and rigorous thinker "ought to value obtaining truth while avoiding error" (Nola and Sankey 36). Can reason provide grounds for such a claim? If not, must an honest and rigorous thinker reject this conviction or, at least, suspend judgment regarding it? Perhaps, like the belief in *modus ponens*, the conviction that truth is better than falsity is something that an honest and rigorous thinker must simply accept, regardless of whether or not there are rational grounds for doing so. But if so, where is the line between the kinds of claims the honest and rigorous thinker can assert though there are no rational grounds for doing so and the kinds of claims that this thinker cannot assert unless there are rational grounds? I propose that holding certain beliefs or, at least, being committed to certain principles (such as the validity of *modus ponens*) is a condition for the possibility of rigorous thought. In less Kantian language, holding to certain commitments is what allows the thinker to go on—to continue to think rigorously. The line, then, stands between those commitments that are required for the continuation of honest and rigorous thought and

[45] Anyone who has taught an introductory logic course knows that, short of pointing to instances of *modus ponens* as the way we do in fact reason in our world and appealing to the students' belief that such reasoning is valid, there is no way to demonstrate the validity of this basic principle of reason. The principle of non-contradiction is a similar case.

those beliefs that are not. Though rigor requires commitment to certain principles, honesty requires the acknowledgement that this commitment is unfounded, except in the sense that it is only this commitment that allows the thinker to go on.

An honest and rigorous thinker, then, is someone who is committed to the principles of reason and who bases claims to truth—assertions, judgments, etc.—on rational grounds. In order to do so, such a thinker remains willing to question assertions and open to criticism and revision; seeks to understand the logic of the concepts involved in truth claims by means of thorough and scrupulous inquiry; and admits ignorance, suspending judgment in the absence of any rational ground for or against a particular claim. It is important to note that this description of an honest and rigorous thinker does not imply that such a thinker holds no beliefs whatsoever, or, what is the same, suspends judgment in every case in which there is no definitive argument for or against a particular truth claim. When absolute certainty is lacking, the honest and rigorous thinker may believe, provided the beliefs are rationally grounded and the thinker remains ever aware that such beliefs may need to be revised in the eventuality that further inquiry provides reason for doing so.

II. The honest and rigorous thinker in our scientific world

The notion that an honest and rigorous thinker may hold rationally grounded beliefs is especially important when considering what it means to be an honest and rigorous thinker situated in our scientific, intellectual milieu. For, in this milieu, the idea that most truth claims can be falsified or confirmed to a greater or lesser extent but never verified with absolute certainty has become almost axiomatic. If honest and rigorous

thinking excluded the possibility of rationally grounded beliefs, then likely only the most extravagant of skeptics—the skeptic who would hold no beliefs whatsoever—would qualify as an honest and rigorous thinker. Yet, as even Hume, himself a most noteworthy skeptic, acknowledges, "It is certain, that no man ever met with any such absurd creature, or conversed with a man who had no opinion or principle concerning any subject" (149). If there are to be honest and rigorous thinkers at all, then honest and rigorous thinking must allow for rationally grounded beliefs, and so it is important to consider the basis on which reason may ground belief.

As is perhaps apparent from the way I stated my initial question,[46] one feature of the pre-understanding from which this question emerges is the acknowledgement that scientific thinking is part of honest and rigorous thinking. I accept that there is a rationality underlying the scientific method; that this rationality arises from and furthers what I have sketched[47] so far as the characteristics of honest and rigorous thought; and that this method of reasoning is a powerful tool that both allows us (we who are situated in this post-Enlightenment, scientific world) to advance knowledge about our objects of investigation and provides a rational ground on which to base belief. So then, what is the rationality underlying the scientific method and in what way does this method provide for the rational grounding of belief?

In general, rational activity is directed toward an end; that is, rational activity does not consist of aimless wandering about, and scientific activity is no different. As Nola

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[46] Can an honest and rigorous thinker situated in our scientific, intellectual world take Christianity seriously?

[47] My discussion of the characteristics of honest rigorous thought has been of necessity merely a sketch, as covering this topic in depth would require an entire treatise of its own. Notably missing from this examination is any consideration of the way in both the creation and appreciation of art, music, and literature may be forms of honest and rigorous thought. Accordingly, I have neglected the role of the imagination in honest and rigorous thought.

and Sankey note, “In so far as science has something to do with rationality it too could be said to have aims and means for realizing them” (34). To grasp the rationality underlying the scientific method, it is necessary to consider the aims of scientific inquiry and the means its practitioners use to achieve these aims. Admittedly, at the personal level, different scientists have different aims, and to speak of science itself as having aims would be to reify it illegitimately; regardless, as Popper observes, “it seems that when we speak of science we do feel, more or less clearly, that there is something characteristic of scientific activity” (191). In other words, we think of certain aims as being characteristic of scientific activity and of the scientific method as a means for attaining those aims.[48]

One characteristic aim of scientific activity is the approximation of truth and the avoidance of error, though, given the debate between realists and anti-realists in science, this claim needs clarification. To the realists, it is important that scientific activity allows us to make assertions that more or less accurately represent the nature of reality—both the world we can observe and that unobservable realm of the really real, which purportedly stands behind the observable world. What is important to the anti-realists is that scientific activity allows us to make assertions that are empirically adequate, i.e., “that are true of all observable phenomena, no matter whether they are past, present or future” (Nola and Sankey 55). In both cases, the empirical adequacy of an assertion functions as an indicator of its approximation of the truth. Likewise, for both realists and anti-realists alike, assertions that are inconsistent in themselves or that imply

[48] There is no denying that scientists are frequently motivated by personal concerns; one scientist may be motivated to research cures for cancer because his wife is dying from lymphoma, while another may be motivated by the lure of renown and wealth. Although the different motivations may be personal and merely subjective, we would yet expect the two scientists to follow similar procedures characteristic of scientific activity, which requires its practitioners to abstract their work from their personal concerns, taking on an attitude of objectivity in order to arrive upon objectively valid answers to questions or solutions to problems—even questions posed for entirely personal reasons.

contradictory conclusions signal error. Assertions that are inconsistent with the set of assertions already effectively confirmed as being empirically adequate also signal error, but this error may lie in the already confirmed assertions, which must always remain open to revision and rejection. A belief stands on a rationally firm foundation, then, if it seems to approximate truth and avoid error, i.e. if it is self-consistent and empirically adequate. An assertion's consistency with the set of assertions already effectively confirmed as empirically adequate may also function as part of a rational foundation for belief in both the new and old assertions.

In order to approximate the truth (whether this is conceived of in the strong sense as truth about the really real or simply in the sense of truth about the observable phenomena) and to avoid error, scientific thinkers commonly adopt the position of what Merton calls "organized skepticism," maintaining that all beliefs should be called into question. From this position, beliefs and assertions that are falsifiable are more acceptable than those that are not, for falsifiable assertions can be tested and so remain open to criticism and revision. Further, as the position of organized skepticism requires that all assertions remain open to criticism and revision, it follows that the scientific method can falsify assertions or confirm them to a greater or lesser degree but can never verify them as absolutely certain. No matter how closely scientific activity may approximate the truth, the assertions of its practitioners must always remain open to further testing and revision.

Broadly speaking, scientific activity aims at the approximation of truth and avoidance of error, but more specifically, scientific activity seeks to provide approximately true explanations, particularly in terms of efficient causality. Accordingly,

such activity treats its objects of investigation as belonging to a nexus of causal connections. However not all types of causal explanation have the same amount of explanatory power, and, because scientific activity seeks explanations with maximum explanatory power, not all types of causes are to be included in this nexus of causal connections. This claim is best illustrated by example:

Newtonian science meets one of its greatest critics in the person of G.W.F. Leibniz, who accuses the Newtonians of being unscientific in their explanations of the phenomenon of planetary gravitation. He writes,

> [T]hose who have shown that the astronomical laws can be explained by assuming the mutual gravitation of the planets have done something very worthwhile, even if they may not have given the reason for this gravitation. But if certain people, abusing this beautiful discovery, think that the explanation given is so satisfactory that there is nothing left to explain, and if they think that gravity is a thing essential to matter, then they slip back into *barbarism in physics* and into the *occult qualities of the Scholastics*. ("Against Barbaric Physics" 314)

It is clear from this quotation that Leibniz thinks occult qualities must be excluded as possible causal explanations and thus that they are to be excluded from the nexus of physical, causal connections, or the order of causes that affects physical phenomena.[49] The reason that he so excludes occult qualities from the causal nexus is that explanation in terms of occult qualities prevents scientific progress. To give a causal explanation in terms of an occult quality is to explain a physical phenomenon through a "certain incorporeal and inexplicable power" ("Planetary Theory" 309) that lies hidden in bodies

[49] Leibniz does not use the language of 'a nexus of causal connections.' However, in his *Correspondence* with Clarke, he does use the similar phrasing "order of causes" as in "order of efficient causes" (64).

and is the primitive cause for a manifest effect. If such inexplicable powers were included in the causal nexus, then an occult quality could be given as the most primitive explanation for every physical phenomenon, precluding any further attempt to search for the physical, efficient cause of a phenomenon. The result of admitting occult qualities into the causal nexus would be a science that could explain everything without explaining anything.

As the example of Leibniz's critique of the Newtonians illustrates, scientific rationality calls for explanation in terms of a *particular* nexus of causal connections—a nexus that excludes mysterious, inexplicable causes, which, if included, could be exploited to explain every phenomenon without really explaining the cause of anything.[50] Accordingly, scientific activity can provide a rational ground for only certain types of beliefs. Scientific activity cannot ground beliefs about objects, beings, or powers that are excluded from this causal nexus, because science treats its objects of inquiry as belonging to this nexus. For instance, scientific activity could not ground a belief in miracles, because scientific rationality requires that the "miraculous" phenomenon be explained in terms of a nexus of causal connections that excludes miracles as a causal power.[51] The scientific method, then, seeks approximately true causal explanations for observable phenomena in terms of a specific nexus of causal connections.

The position of organized skepticism, when combined with the location of all objects of inquiry in a nexus of causal connections, gives rise to the experimental method,

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[50] But what about the notion of causality itself, which seems, to Hume at least, mysterious and inexplicable? Perhaps Hume is correct to assert that our belief in cause and effect is not based on reason. Nonetheless, the honest and rigorous thinker must be committed to the notion of causality, or necessary connection, if he is to continue his pursuit of scientific explanation.

[51] Causal explanations of observable phenomena in terms of miracles suffer from the same defect as causal explanations in terms of occult qualities: Both can explain every physical phenomenon without providing any insight into its relation to the nexus of causal connections; both types of explanations, if incorporated into science, would yield a science that could explain everything without explaining anything.

which provides a means for testing falsifiable assertions. According to the experimental method, assertions become hypotheses that predict specific results of an experiment. If the results predicted by the hypothesis fail to occur, then the hypothesis is falsified and calls for revision or replacement. If the hypothesis successfully predicts the results of the experiment, then it is confirmed to some degree, but not verified. The hypothesis that has been confirmed can then be subjected to even more exacting tests. The more a scientific thinker attempts to falsify a hypothesis by testing it with increasingly demanding experiments, the more the hypothesis is confirmed, provided it continues to successfully predict the results of each experiment. By confirming, but not verifying, assertions, the experimental method provides a means for rationally grounding belief.

According to this sketch[52] of the rationality underlying scientific method, scientific activity provides a way to rationally ground beliefs that are falsifiable and that concern objects or occurrences[53] locatable in a particular causal nexus. My characterization of scientific rationality thus far would seem to indicate that there is but one method adopted by all of the various scientific disciplines. In one sense the idea that there is only one scientific method is completely incorrect, yet in another sense it is correct.

The idea that there is only one scientific method is not correct if by scientific method I mean only experimental method, for scientific thinking spans a broad spectrum, from physics to the academic discipline of history, with a dividing line drawn roughly

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[52] Once again, this has, of necessity, been just the barest sketch of scientific method and rationality. Missing here is the significant question of how creativity is involved in scientific thought, when raising questions, deriving hypothesis, and designing experiments or other test conditions.

[53] Here I am using the words ‘object’ and ‘occurrence’ in a very broad sense to refer to anything that science might investigate: colliding billiard balls, stress, microscopic bacteria, earthquakes, stem cells, electrochemical reactions, the Crusades, psychic ability, sun spots, the water cycle and so on.

between the natural and social or human sciences. Much of the success of the natural sciences results from their reliance on the experimental method. On the other hand, the social sciences cannot rely so heavily on experimental method. While some of the social sciences, notably neuropsychology, may implement the experimental method in a manner similar to the natural sciences, the social sciences must also rely to a great extent upon other types of evidence, such as first person testimony on written surveys or relics left from past civilizations.

However, even those scientific disciplines that do not, in any way, rely upon the experimental method, disciplines such as history or archeology, share certain methodological principles with the natural sciences. The scientific disciplines value falsifiable hypotheses and use evidence to falsify or confirm them, though what counts as evidence and the proper means for evaluating evidence differ according to discipline. Further, the scientific disciplines locate their objects of investigation in a causal nexus, though in the case of the social sciences this causal nexus is messier and more complicated than the nexus of physical, efficient causes. For, while including all physical causes, the causal nexus of the social sciences must also include human needs, desires, motivations (conscious and unconscious), intentions, emotions, and beliefs as well as social and cultural systems of values, norms, etc., which may remain largely inaccessible to the scientific observer. Nonetheless, by locating their objects of inquiry in a causal nexus, the social sciences too can seek to falsify their assertions on the basis of whether or not each assertion successfully predicts a correlative state of affairs.

For instance, in *The Causes of War*, Blainey observes that Russia and Turkey fought ten wars within the span of two hundred years (1678-1878) and that none of these

wars had a decisive conclusion. He asserts that Russia and Turkey fought so often because both nations miscalculated their military potential: "Russia and Turkey fought because each believed that she was stronger and could gain more by fighting than by negotiating" (182). If his explanation were true, then it would be reasonable to predict that the two nations would have continued to fight indefinitely or until there was some event that definitively determined which military had the greatest potential. Such an event did occur in 1878, when Russia soundly beat Turkey, leaving no doubt that Russia had the greater military potential. After Turkey's defeat, the situation stabilized and the two nations never again engaged one another in solo military conflict.[54] Because Blainey's assertion about the cause of the Turkish-Russian wars leads to a successful prediction about a correlative state of affairs—that a definitive victory on either side would yield a more stable situation between the two countries—his assertion is confirmed to some degree but not verified as certain.

As this example illustrates, though the various disciplines do not share a single methodology, they do share certain methodological principles. Even when the experimental method does not serve as the means for testing assertions, the theoretical principles underlying that method still provide a basis for testing assertions. Though, certainly, when applied to different types of inquiry these principles result in different methods for gathering and evaluating this evidence.

As the individual disciplines have emerged, progressed, and come into their own, the determination of whether or not there are rational grounds for the acceptance of, or belief in, a particular assertion has increasingly become the task of a specific discipline or possibly of a few interrelated disciplines. For instance, historical science is best suited to

[54]However, in World War I, Russia and Turkey were allied in opposite directions.

treat the claim, "Henry VIII's love for Anne Boleyn was the primary cause of the development of the Anglican Church," whereas the medical sciences are best suited to treat the claim, "Smoking cigarettes is causally related to the development of lung cancer." What counts as evidence for or against any particular claim and the appropriate measures for evaluating and interpreting that evidence depend upon the specific discipline. Historians, at one end of the spectrum, rely upon "artifacts that have been left by the past" (Howell and Prevenier 17)[55] for evidence and upon "sophisticated techniques for judging a source's authenticity, its representativeness, its relevance" (Howell and Prevenier 1) as the means for evaluating and interpreting the evidence. Physicists, at the other end of the spectrum, test theoretical, mathematical models of matter in motion by means of experiment, basing acceptance of a model or theory on its ability to predict the results of experiments. Accordingly, the quality and quantity of evidence necessary to affirm a particular assertion on rational grounds is to some extent discipline specific. Thus the answer to the question, "on what basis does reason ground an assertion or belief?" is that it depends on the type of assertion and on which discipline (or perhaps disciplines) is best suited to evaluate the assertion. Therefore, *part of honest and rigorous thinking is the recognition that the method of inquiry should be appropriate to the object of inquiry*. In order for an honest and rigorous thinker to affirm an assertion, or rationally ground a belief, that thinker must first determine which discipline (or perhaps more than one), if any, is best suited to determine the rational grounds or lack thereof for that assertion.[56]

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[55] The authors note that artifacts are either relics, remains, or oral or written testimonies of witnesses.

[56] In many cases this step is not as simple and straightforward as in the cases of my two examples above (Henry VIII and smoking). For instance, what about the claim: "God exists"? At first glance, perhaps, it may seem that theology is the discipline best suited to determining whether there is a rational basis for such

If the method of inquiry must be appropriate to the object of inquiry and if scientific inquiry can treat only those hypotheses that are falsifiable and that concern objects locatable in the appropriate causal nexus, then scientific rationality will not be able to ground many metaphysical assertions concerning the nature of reality. For example, science cannot provide a rational ground for the belief that humans have free will, for, free will cannot be included in the causal nexus of the social sciences, at least not if the term 'free will' refers to a will that is not in any way causally determined by the conditions of a situation. Likewise, science cannot provide a rational ground for the belief in an unmoved mover, for, this belief is not falsifiable; no conceivable state of affairs could refute the assertion that there exists some immovable being or power that set in motion all that is now and ever was in motion. In most cases, unless there are rational grounds outside of scientific activity upon which to base metaphysical beliefs, the honest and rigorous thinker situated in our current scientific milieu will have to remain metaphysically agnostic.

I say that *in most cases* metaphysical beliefs, if acceptable, will have to be based on rational grounds that stand outside of scientific activity. However, the principles of scientific methodology can provide some basis for accepting certain metaphysical assertions. Metaphysical assertions that form the core of a scientific program, for example the belief in atomism that forms the core of much theory in physics, are not

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a claim or perhaps a dialogue between theology and the physical and biological sciences would seem best. However, if part of being an honest and rigorous thinker is inquiring into the meanings of the concepts, then such a thinker cannot assign this claim to any discipline without first inquiring into the meaning of the concept of God. As Galloway notes in his commentary on Pannenburg's theology, "we can no longer presuppose that the term 'God' is understood" (13). In this case, we cannot determine which method of inquiry is appropriate to the object of inquiry until the term 'God' is understood. No easy task I assume, and, as it stands, I am at a loss even to make sense of the question of the existence of 'God.' The point is, however, that no discipline can provide rational ground for accepting or rejecting an assertion until the concepts contained in the assertion are accounted for. Perhaps one of the tasks of philosophy in our current intellectual milieu is to remind and to help the disciplines to investigate their concepts.

directly falsifiable; Zahar notes that atomism began as a solution to a metaphysical problem, namely the problem of the supposed immutability of Being and the indubitable existence phenomenal change, and accordingly that the belief in atomism is not falsifiable, "for any observable state-of-affairs could be claimed to have arisen from the movement of some system of atoms" (208). Nonetheless, he indicates that a belief in atomism has yielded much fruit; this belief has led physicists to develop theories or models that have been confirmed by experimental method and that have great explanatory and predictive power. In this sense, the belief in atomism can, to some extent, be rationally grounded by scientific activity. The metaphysical core of a scientific program can be, in Zahar's words, "*indirectly* either undermined by the experimental failures or else supported by the successes of the theories belonging to its program" (212). Therefore, those metaphysical assertions that form the core of a scientific program can, to some extent, be grounded by scientific rationality if they fruitfully generate consistent theories that have explanatory power and are confirmed by the relevant scientific evidence. Thus some metaphysical assertions remain within the domain of scientific rationality.

While the inclusion of scientific rationality in my sketch of honest and rigorous thought does not alter the most fundamental characteristics of such thought—an honest, rigorous, and scientifically minded thinker must have the courage to call convictions into question, be open to reasonable criticism and revision, persevere in a worthwhile course of inquiry when progress becomes difficult, ground beliefs in reason, and abide by Socrates' humble adage, "When I do not know I do not think I know"—scientific rationality does provide powerful methodological principles and specific methodologies

for rationally grounding beliefs. Though to claim that only scientific rationality could adequately ground belief would be to overstate the case, there is no denying the advantages of using scientific method for this purpose. If the honest and rigorous thinker wishes to avoid false beliefs, scientific methodology repeatedly seeks to falsify assertions by seeking out any evidence that could refute them. If the thinker wishes to affirm only true beliefs, scientific reasoning affirms only those assertions that both agree with all empirical evidence gathered by objective, careful science practitioners and lead to successful predictions for novel scenarios.

The fruit of scientific activity heralds its success in approximating, at the very least, truth about many observable phenomena—past, present, and future. Medawar's claim that "Science, broadly considered, is incomparably the most successful enterprise human beings have ever engaged upon" (12) is perhaps exaggerated. Nevertheless, there can be no denying that progress in science has allowed us a great amount predictive and technological power that we would not have otherwise; such progress indicates science's exceptional ability to approximate the truth, at least in the sense of empirical adequacy. By engaging with scientific thinking and deliberating over the results of scientific enterprise, the honest and rigorous thinker makes use of a powerful tool that can be employed to rationally ground or refute a great number of assertions. Though it is unlikely that scientists will ever construct "the final theory of everything" (Nola and Sankey 3), it may yet be correct to say that scientific rationality, of all the types of activity humans have yet devised, is best suited to providing a substantive rational ground on which to base a belief in a particular assertion or set of assertions.[57] When the honest

[57] I do not here intend to demean the work of philosophy, for it is the work of philosophers and their philosophical values that give rise to the principles of scientific method (certainly Descartes' systematic

and rigorous thinker seeks to affirm a belief in metaphysical assertions that lie beyond the reach of scientific activity, that thinker, it seems to me, will be hard pressed to find an equally reliable rational foundation.[58]

III. The honest and rigorous thinker and the limits of reason and science

My description of an honest and rigorous thinker seems, thus far, to be a description of a rational thinker. I seem to have equated honest and rigorous thinking with what Kierkegaard calls objective reflection and the honest and rigorous thinker to a person whose "attitude toward reality is that of someone who is not involved in it, but who judges it his duty to draw up its minutes as exactly as possible" (Marcel "Ontological Mystery" 97). However, as I noted in the previous chapter, *objective reason, including scientific reason, can only go so far*. Neither can give meaning to the senseless but inescapable suffering of this spiteful, friendless, drunk old woman long abandoned by her children or of this worry worn husband and father of three young boys who has just been laid off from his job at the automobile factory. Neither science nor reason comes to my aid when by chance I encounter this wretch of a woman or this world-weary man in all of their inevitable, pointless misery, from whom I can turn away in resignation, despair, contempt, or indifference or to whom I can turn in availability and

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doubt is the progenitor of Merton's organized skepticism). Nor do I intend to suggest that science can replace philosophy. When I say scientific inquiry, I do not simply refer to the activity of scientific practitioners who work in labs, archives, archeological digs, etc, gathering evidence and running experiments. I am also including that philosophical work that belongs to and makes possible such scientific activity, e.g., the investigation of the logic of concepts and the examination of the presuppositions underlying a particular scientific program. On the other hand, I am suggesting that scientific rationality and methodology can also serve to ground more concrete assertions than those usually put forth by theoretical science. That is, scientific rationality can be applied to the activity of an investigative reporter, who is genuinely seeking the truth (and not just a story that will sell), of an auto mechanic in determining the cause of a breakdown, or of a jury deciding whether or not to acquit the defendant.

[58] At this point I may be open to the criticism of being overly positivistic. Regardless, I leave it to the critic to point to a rational foundation that is as reliable as scientific activity so described.

care. Likewise reason and science must indeed be rendered dumb if the contingent, fleeting, and finite character of my existence presses upon me the sense that, in the words of Shakespeare's Macbeth,

> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more: it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing. (1247; 5. 5. 24-29)

Because science and reason treat objects or entities, they can neither grasp nor respond to this sense of *being* a subject *existing* in a world.[59] Consequently, neither reason nor science can give significance to the "sound and fury" of life when life unfolds before me as "a tale told by an idiot" and the inanity of suffering, the vertigo-inducing evanescence of happiness, the absurdity of my accidental location in this particular historical situation, the precarious fragility of what I hold most dear, in general, the overall arbitrary contingency and finitude of my being an existing subject situated in this world make it seem that "one life is as good as another" (Camus Stranger 41), and all are, in the end, equally futile and empty. Accordingly, while being committed to the principles of reason, the honest, rigorous thinker must also face its limitations—a sentiment Bultmann expresses admirably: "Indeed it is impossible to think highly enough of reason. Precisely when reason has followed its road to the end, the point of crisis is reached and man is brought to the great question mark over his own existence" (Faith and

[59] Even the social sciences treat objects, for they consider human beings as objects of investigation. Just as for the physicist a hammer is a body that takes up space and has weight, so for the social scientist a person is an agglomeration of social and biological operations.

Understanding 46). When my very own existence is at issue, there reason and science end.

My own existence, as such, becomes an issue when existential concern breaks through the surface of my everyday existence and forces itself upon me. Perhaps this break with the familiar and everyday results from the necessity of making a personal choice of utmost significance—shall I go to war and fight for the security of my country or remain at home to care for my ailing mother—[60]and the vertigo that arises from the realization that neither reason, nor information and facts, nor anything else can provide an objectively firm foundation upon which to base such a momentous and grave decision. Then again, this break in the surface of the quotidian may come upon me unexpectedly and seemingly from out of nowhere, as when, in the midst of grading papers or folding laundry, I am suddenly gripped by dread and, in an uncanny moment, experience my existence as a walk through "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4), in which the inevitable impossibility of my existing makes all of my concrete, yet ephemeral possibilities appear before me as no more meaningful than the dust from which I came and to which I will return. In whatever manner existential concern breaks through the stability of the everyday, it contains within itself and thrusts upon me the disquieting question of my own existence: Who am I, *I* who walk through this valley shadowed by death? What is the meaning of *this particular* existence—*this one here,* which is my very own but which might never have been at all and will inevitably cease to be? What is the purpose for *my* being here at all?

[60] Sartre's account of a real choice faced by a real person provides an insightful gesture towards the experience of the end of reason and the question of existence (33).

Though the question of my own existence seems to call for an answer in the same way that the question, “who was Martin Luther King Jr.?” or the question, “what is the purpose of a catalytic convertor?” calls for an answer, the manner in which I must address the question of my existence is entirely different from the manner in which I may address questions concerning historical figures or parts of cars. The latter type of question can be answered from the perspective of an outside observer. However, it is impossible to answer the question of my own existence from the standpoint of an objective observer, for, as Marcel aptly remarks, “it would be a paralogism to suppose that I can pursue such an inquiry as though my own life were not at issue” (“Ontological Mystery” 97). For this reason the question of my own existence cannot be answered with reference to scientific theories or metaphysical systems, which, no matter how profound in their bearing, can only answer the question of who I am in terms of what “humankind” is.

If, however, science and reason provide an honest and rigorous means for addressing the question of what “man” is or the question of “man’s” highest good and purpose, then must I, as an honest and rigorous thinker, expend much effort in addressing the question in terms of my own particularity and subjectivity? Is it not somehow adolescent to continue to agonize over the meaninglessness and contingency of my own life when I could instead get over it, move on, and dedicate my intellectual energies to seeking objectively valid truth? There is a certain amount of good sense in this objection—surely it would not do to allow honest and rigorous thought to languish and, caught up in paralyzing despair, benumbed apathy, or nihilistic solipsism before the question of existence, eventually vanish altogether.

However, caution on the part of the honest and rigorous thinker is required in the face of such good sense. Neuroscientists define man: parallel distributive process computation machine. Evolutionary psychologist defines man: product of millions of years of genetic mutation and natural selection, sharing a common ancestry with chimps. Aristotle defines man: rational animal. Plato defines man: featherless biped. Diogenes of Sinope plucks a chicken. Whatever the objective truth of these rational, scientific definitions, such truth is not adequate for the *existing subject* who asked about the truth in the first place, for such truth is abstracted from subjective existence—it is the truth of an objective observer. As such, it cannot capture the whole truth of the existing subject, who, perhaps in spite of his best efforts, could never fully abstract himself from existing. Camus observes that the great astronomer, "Galileo, who held a scientific truth of great importance, abjured it with the greatest ease as soon as it endangered his life" ("Sisyphus" 3), illustrating the limits of scientific truth. He further remarks "That truth was not worth the stake" ("Sisyphus" 3); the truth of an objective observer is not the whole truth for the existing subject. The existing subject cannot stake his life on an objective truth, not even on an objective truth concerning the nature of "man."

The thinker who would wholly exclude from thoughtful inquiry the question of his own existence, directing all earnest and painstaking thought solely toward the external, abstract truth about humankind has become "absentminded enough to forget that it was an existing spirit who asked about the truth" (Kierkegaard 194). Likewise, to deny utterly my own subjectivity by seeking truth entirely in the abstract truths of an objective observer is to be untruthful: to refuse to address the question of my existence, seeking instead only a rational formulation, Aristotle's "rational animal" or Plato's "featherless

biped," about "man" in general is to refuse to acknowledge that being which is *my very own*—hence Diogenes' ironically naked chicken. Insofar as the honest and rigorous thinker is still an existing subject, that thinker eschews altogether the question of his own existence in favor of the question of "man" at the expense of both honesty and rigor.

As an honest and rigorous thinker, I must face the end of reason and the question of my own existence, and such thought must take place in some manner other than that of evaluating assertions and rationally grounding beliefs. To address the question of existence, then, propositional language—the language of assertions—must give way, but to what? When reason ends, must the honest and rigorous thinker simply stand wordless before that great question mark?

Though I acknowledge reason's silence in the face of the question of existence, I do not here hasten to confine the honest and rigorous thinker to some sort of mystical stillness, wherein thought as well as word may dissipate. There are other languages than the language of the proposition. Poetic language has ever been the specter of philosophy. Socrates frequently spoke a dialect of irony, and the Zen Master, Tanzan, who, on the last day of his life, sent out sixty postal cards that read, "I am departing this world. This is my last announcement. Tanzan. July 27, 1892" (Reps 10-11) spoke another. The call for a language of decision and authenticity resonates from the writings of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. Nietzsche cries out for the man who can speak "Yea!" to life in the gay language of a self-affirming Zarathustra or Napoleon. If propositional language must give way before the question of existence, there are several languages, or modes of speaking, that might take its place.[61]

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[61] As a point of clarification, I should emphasize that the various "languages," as I have called these modes of speech, are differentiated not so much by *what* is said but more importantly by *the attitude from which*

Perhaps a true response to the question of existence might be spoken in all or any of the languages just mentioned; indeed various individual thinkers, particularly those who belong to the existentialist school of thought broadly conceived, have proffered such modes of speech as possible responses to the question of existence. Following these thinkers, I suggest two additional possibilities for giving voice to honest and rigorous thought in the face of the question of existence: the language of confession and the language of availability.

In order to show how the honest and rigorous thinker may address the question of existence in a language other than the language of science and reason, it will be necessary for me both to describe how these languages respond to the question of existence and to articulate the manner in which that response belongs to honest and rigorous thought. In a gesture toward brevity, I will forgo giving detailed descriptions of all of the languages mentioned above. Instead, I will focus the remainder of my sketch of honest and rigorous thought on the manner in which the languages of confession and availability allow the honest and rigorous thinker to address the question of existence. I choose to highlight these not only because I understand them to be forms of honest and rigorous thought capable of responding the question of existence but also because I suspect that these two modes of speech are very much at work in the New Testament account of redemption and in its expression of the meaning of Christian love.

I turn first to the language of confession. Confessional language frequently surfaces in a most compelling manner in the context of religious language. Consider as

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what is said is spoken. As such, a mode of speech or language in this sense is as much a manner of being as of speaking. A scientist speaking propositional language addresses herself to the world in a manner that is quite different from the manner in which the Zen monk, Tanzan, speaking the language of irony, addressed himself to the world on the day of his death.

an illustration Matthew 5:45 “He [God] makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” While this statement takes the form of an objective proposition concerning God’s actions, it may be understood, in an altogether different sense, as disclosing a particular sense of subjectivity—an acknowledgement of the finitude of the existing subject: It is not within my power to choose when and where the rain will fall and when and where the sun will shine. It is not my privilege to determine whose crops should fail and whose should prosper, who should be rewarded and who punished. It is God’s right alone to judge these things, and I myself am fully dependent upon his determination even for my sustenance. To be sure, the author of Matthew 5:45 quite likely believed his statement to be an objective truth about some being called “God” and his power over the world, yet to treat this passage exclusively as such would be to ignore *the attitude* in which the words were uttered and, accordingly, what they disclose about the meaning of being a subject situated in this world.

According to Nietmann’s characterization of confessional language, “The utterance of ‘God’ frames one’s finitude” (169). When interpreted in the sense of confession, the God-talk in Matthew 5:45 “illuminates a consummate human dependence” (169). In and of myself, I am unable to ground my existence; I can provide no reason for my being here. In this sense, confessional language is “indifferent to objective truth about the nature of reality” (169) because such language expresses instead the subjective reality of finitude, the sense of being thrown into a world over which I am fundamentally powerless and in which my existence is ultimately meaningless, for however much I may value my life, nothing of great importance really hangs on my being

here. To speak the language of confession then is not merely to assert that my behavior in a given situation was criminal or otherwise reprehensible. To confess genuinely is to *take up an attitude* wherein I hide nothing of the finitude and senselessness of my existence, not even from myself.

To speak the language of confession therefore is to abide in an attitude of disclosure; by confessing, I disclose my existing as I am—not as I desire to be or think I ought to be. To adopt this attitude of total self-disclosure is to stand unveiled. To confess is to remove the garments of "self-generated importance" (Nietmann 185). If I speak the language of confession, I do not disguise my insignificance and frailty nor do I cover over that inevitable eventuality of my own death, which diminishes even my most earnest strivings to "a chasing after the wind." (Ecclesiastes 1:14). Nietmann's account of his walk through a cemetery in Santa Rosa, California gives expression to the attitude of confession that I am trying to portray: "I came to one weather-beaten headstone, its crown almost hidden by tall weeds which had thrived there. Pulling back the growth to reveal the inscription of the man's name and the nineteenth century dates, I read 'That so and so may never be forgotten'—and I released the weeds, once again to obscure the epitaph" (185). To speak the language of confession is to abide in this truth of my existence: Naked I came into this world not of my own choosing and in death the earth will swallow up not only my body but my every deed until all that remains of me is an illegible inscription on crumbling stone, which itself, overtaken by weeds, weather, and time, will eventually return to dust. In the face of the question of my existence, to confess my finitude and consummate dependence—my inability to give reason for or lasting significance to that very existence in question—is to stand in an attitude of truth,

to be true. To appropriate this truth into my being, to be so true, is no easy undertaking. Standing naked and undisguised in this truth, I may seek neither to shield myself from its terrible penetration nor attempt to soften its ruthless finality. For this reason, I suggest that, when confronted with the question of my own existence, the language of confession falls well within the scope of honest and rigorous thought.

In addition to confessional language, I recommend the language of availability involved when I genuinely speak, "you" (*"du"*)[62] as a possibility for honest and rigorous thought in the face of that great question mark over my own existence. To speak "you" is to partake in shared subjectivity. Thinkers such as Buber and Marcel, who give serious consideration to this mode of speech, characterize participation in it as taking a stand in relation "in which the miserable barriers that separate incarnate beings vanish" (Marcel Presence and Immortality 279). Due to the nature of this participation, it is somewhat difficult to describe what is entailed in this relational stance and how such a stance could be a response to the question of existence without in some sense altering in description what is being described.[63] For this reason, I will try to make participation in this mode of speech more concrete with an example from literature in which the character denies this stance of relation in response to the question of existence. Like negative theologians

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[62] Neither the English 'you' nor the English 'thou' seems quite appropriate here, for 'you' includes both the plural sense of 'you all' and the general sense of 'one' as well as the specific sense indicated by the singular, second person pronoun, whereas 'thou,' the original, singular, informal, second person pronoun, has lost its original sense and carries with it the very formal connotation of a holy or revered 'Thou.' The 'you' that I speak when I speak "you" in this relational language can only be singular and informal. However, 'you' seems to express the sense of this relational language better than 'thou,' for, as Kaufman notes in his translation of Buber's *I and Thou*, "German lovers say *Du* to one another, and so do friends. *Du* is spontaneous and unpretentious, remote from formality, pomp, and dignity. What lovers or friends say Thou to one another? Thou is scarcely ever said spontaneously" (14).

[63] A colleague of mine once commented that she would seem to glimpse what Buber was trying to get at out of the corner of her eye, but as soon as she tried to focus her gaze directly upon it, she immediately lost sight of it. Her characterization reflects not a deficiency of understanding on her part so much as the nature of that relational stance itself, which, when it becomes an object to be considered rather than subjective participation in a manner of being, is necessarily altered. So it is important to keep in mind that the description is not the being (or manner of being) but only gestures toward that being.

describing what God is not, I hope that providing a description of what speaking "you" is not will bring into relief the shape of that manner of being which it is.

In his novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera raises the question of existence in terms of weight. He writes "only necessity is heavy, and only what is heavy has value" (35), suggesting to his reader that what is contingent has no weight and hence no value. Following this line of thought, Tomas, one of the novel's central characters, concludes that his love for his wife, Tereza, and hers for him have no necessity and so no value. Tomas gives up a prestigious and secure position in order to go to his wife, Tereza, who, unable to deal with his infidelity, has left him. Tormented by compassion for her, he cannot bear to think of her suffering the utter abandonment of living on her own. Upon returning to her, however, Tomas despairs, for he begins to regard his love for Tereza as arising from nothing more than six insignificant coincidences. He has made a most fateful decision to leave his secure position in Switzerland in order to return to his wife in Russian occupied Prague, but "now he realized it was only a matter of chance that Tereza loved him," and he "came to the conclusion that the love story of his life exemplified not "*Es muss sein!"* (It must be so), but rather *"Es könnte auch anders sein"* (It could just as well be otherwise)" (35). Tomas is unable to affirm the value of his love for or life with Tereza—"All he felt was the pressure in his stomach and the despair of having returned" (35)—because their relationship appears before him as nothing more than an incoherent tangle of coincidence, an accident. He sees no necessity in his love for her, and indeed, as Tomas lies twisting and turning in bed next to his wife, the story of their love is surely an idiot's tale. He returns to her as the committed husband should yet finds no meaning or value in his presence next to her or hers next to him. Tomas

dutifully offers Tereza his physical presence, but merely residing in the same flat with her cannot grant necessity to their love nor make it appear to him as anything other than an accident. Even while once again sharing her bed, he consigns their love to the dominion of capricious chance, cutting off the possibility of meaningful relation.

In the scene describing Tereza's and Tomas' reunion, it is clear that the barriers between them are as solid as ever. Despite Tomas' sacrifice and return to his wife, he has yet to take up any true stance of relation toward her. Instead, upon returning to Tereza, he takes up an attitude of external scrutiny; Tomas, standing outside of his relationship, seeking to glimpse anything of value lying therein, is like a collector peering through the window of an antique shop deciding whether to go in or walk past. He seeks and does not find the significance of their love in the grand nexus of causality, in which it seems both he and Tereza are just so much flotsam tossed about and brought together by the vagaries of wind and current.

This attitude of assessing value from the outside provides an illuminating contrast to the attitude involved in speaking "you." If I take up the relational stance involved in this mode of speaking, I do not attempt to stand outside of my situation directing my attention to this or that person-entity standing over and against me, assessing its value, and determining my relation to it on the basis of its worth. Rather, if I speak "you," I involve myself completely in relation to another who "is no longer He or She limited by other Hes and Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time, nor a condition that can be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities" (Buber 59) but is instead "you" with whom I exist in shared subjectivity. So long as I take up this relational

stance, my existence is cast in the light of shared subjectivity, and thus, as long as I abide in this attitude of relation, I can confront the question of my existence in a new light.

It might be tempting, at this point, to conclude that speaking "you" provides a response to the question of existence by revealing the ultimate significance of existence, which can be discovered only when I stop observing my life and fully immerse myself in it as a participating subject involved in shared subjectivity. Perhaps, had Tomas spoken "you" to Tereza, he would have been able to discover the true value of his relationship with her—value which had been there all along had he only taken up the proper perspective toward his wife. However a closer look at the "you" in the I-You relation and at the manner of being involved in speaking "you" shows that this conclusion would not only be premature but overly simplistic.

When I address my "you," the "you" to whom I speak is specifically *you*, as distinct from anyone at all, or what is the same, no one in particular. While my "you" is not just any one at all, neither is my "you" *this one* among others—not even the greatest one among them. Rather my "you" is simply *you* and no one else—you, whose hand I grab and into whose ear I whisper "I love you" in a spontaneous gesture of intimacy, you dear friend who, though living eighteen hundred miles away, are yet here with me even as I wait in anticipation for the grace of your smile. Had Tomas spoken "you" to Tereza upon crossing the threshold of their flat in Prague, she would in that moment have become something other than merely "that woman, that personification of absolute fortuity" (35), whom he chanced to encounter seven years ago; she would have become for Tomas quite simply "you, whom I love."

When "you" is spoken in this manner (a manner beyond the reach of a Tomas looking in as if from outside) what matters most is not *what* is heard or spoken, but the hearing and the speaking. O'Malley clarifies this point excellently, writing, "The other person only appears as *thou* [*you*] . . . when stress is placed not upon the information sought—about himself or anyone or anything else—but upon the idea of answering, which implies communion or 'us-ness'" (47). What matters is the being together, not in the sense of being next to or in proximity, but in the sense of being with you in such a way that you are "not only before me, [but] also within me" (Marcel Existentialism 38) in such a way that "us-ness" is created, and the barriers that separate us cease to exist. What matters is that we exist together in communion and fellowship.[64]

This mode of being with another involves great risk. I can genuinely speak "you" only if I risk giving myself over to you in unconditioned openness, only if I abide unreservedly in that attitude of relation in which I make myself wholly available to you, neither refusing nor closing off any part of myself. As Buber writes, "whoever commits himself [in an I-you (*ich-du*) relation] may not hold back part of himself" (61). This risk is infinitely great in consideration of the possibility that the "you" to whom I speak will refuse me—that the gift of myself will be lost on my "you." This openness, this unreserved giving of oneself to another is the risk that Tomas refuses to take. When he gives Tereza the gift of his physical presence by returning to their flat in Prague, he does not thereby open himself to her unreservedly. He does not give his existence over to that shared subjectivity which could exist between them if only he opened himself completely to the relation. Instead, he holds himself back and despairs of the unbearable lightness of

[64] This fellowship is not to be confused with the "fellow feeling" of modern philosophers such as Spinoza. For this fellow feeling does not require that involvement in the relational stance which gives rise to fellowship and can result instead from the rather objective observation that "he is like me."

his love for his wife. Without the risk of openness, which Tomas is unwilling to take, there can be no participation in the language of availability; without giving myself unreservedly, I cannot speak "you."

In addition to the risk of utter openness, speaking "you" involves still another, equally great, peril: my "you" will once again become for me "he" or "she." Every "you" is destined to become "it." There is no avoiding this menacing destiny. No amount of care can prevent its occurrence, and so Buber dubs it "the sublime melancholy of our lot" (68). To be with you is to risk losing you *qua* you. If I fear losing my "you" too greatly, I will never risk speaking "you." Conversely, if I take my stance in relation, I do not turn away from this danger. So it is that speaking "you" involves not only the risk of giving myself unreservedly but also the danger surrendering my "you" to the realm of person-entities.

To speak "you," therefore, is to risk all. Yet by involving myself in the perilous I-You relation, the possibility of addressing the question of existence from the ground of shared subjectivity arises. Had Tomas spoken "you" to Tereza, a new light would have been cast on the question of his existence. This new light, however, would not have illuminated some highly valuable but previously overlooked aspect of his relationship with his wife. It would not, for example, have revealed that, though their meeting seven years previously seemed merely to be the result of a chain of coincidences, it was really the result of some underlying necessity or providence, which could give it weight and thus value. Rather, the fellowship that arises in the dialogue between *us* imbues existence with a new meaning. The communion that emerges from an I-You relation *creates* meaning where none before existed. This creation of meaning in the face of inane

suffering, absurd contingency, unbearable lightness, and inexorable finitude is itself a response to (but not an answer or solution to) the question of existence.

Further, I suggest that the creation of meaning through fellowship or communion is a *true* response to the question of existence. Saying "you," I open up my being to *our* being. In such openness there can be no deception, no covering over. For, if I either deny any part of you or hide from you any part of myself, I do not speak "you." To speak "you," just as to confess, is to stand unveiled, to be true. If I address the question of my own existence by speaking "you," by disclosing my whole self in shared subjectivity, then I do so by being true to you—by standing with you in an attitude of truth. Whoever responds to that question mark yawning over his existence by speaking "you" in truth stands on the ground honest and rigorous thought, for such an utterance, spoken with the entire being, involves an attitude in which there can be nothing false or facile.

Perhaps it seems strange to characterize the languages of confession and availability as forms of honest and rigorous thought. After all, even if they provide some sort of response to the question of existence, they yield no new knowledge or information that could provide this question with an answer. Even if I respond to the question of existence by confessing my consummate dependence or by speaking "you," the question remains a yawning void before me. However, I do not say that these are possibilities for honest and rigorous thought simply because they are possibilities for responding to the question of existence. Their relation to honest and rigorous thought depends upon their relation to truth in the face of this question. There is no objectively true answer to the question of my own existence, for no amount of information can make the utterly contingent necessary, no reason can outstrip death; there is no proposition or assertion

that can fill the gaping abyss that presents itself in the question of existence, but there is response, even true response to this question. A true response to the question of existence is a truth that is *a manner of being involved* in the concrete situation that neither ignores the absurdity of existence as it is experienced in existential concern nor denies that existence in question by giving in to suicide, despair, apathy, or nihilism. To confess or to speak as *I* to *you* is not to assert a truth but to be true. By standing naked and unveiled, by risking the unconditioned openness of shared subjectivity in the face of despair and the presence of profound absurdity, I can respond to the question existence with a truth that I am in the whole of my being, and this response allows me to stand balanced on the edge of the precipice without plummeting into nothingness.

IV. Implications of the first examination of the pre-understanding

According to my characterization, then, honest and rigorous thought stands in relation to truth. When the question to which the honest and rigorous thinker addresses himself calls for an answer in the form of a proposition—an assertion or rationally grounded belief—then the honest and rigorous thinker must pursue rational inquiry in order to arrive upon an approximately true answer. When, however, existential concern breaks through the surface of everyday existence and the honest and rigorous thinker encounters the question of existence contained therein, he must seek truth in a language other than that of propositions; if he is to respond truthfully to the question of his very own existence, he must speak a language in which he can respond with a truth that he *is* in his very manner of being. Therefore, the question of whether or not an honest and

rigorous thinker can take Christianity seriously depends on what Christianity is taken to be.

If Christianity is taken to be a doctrine composed of objective truth claims that are accessible to scientific rationality (i.e. that are falsifiable and can be explained in terms of the appropriate casual nexus), then an honest and rigorous thinker may take Christian doctrine seriously by rationally grounding belief in its assertions, that is, by showing that these claims, after close inquiry into the logic of their concepts, stand up to demanding attempts to falsify them. Similarly, if Christianity is taken to be a metaphysical doctrine that makes objective truth claims that are either unfalsifiable or that cannot be explained in terms of the appropriate causal nexus, then, in order to take Christianity seriously, the thinker must provide a sufficiently rational ground on which to base belief in its claims to truth. Notably, human ignorance or the limitations of human reason are not sufficiently rational grounds on which to base a belief, but are rather reasons for suspending judgment. If an honest and rigorous thinker does ground belief in the objective truth of Christian doctrine in reason, this thinker must still remain open to the possibility that these beliefs may, at some future time, be falsified. Thus, if an honest, rigorous thinker holds a rational belief in Christianity's claims to objective truth, that thinker must also accept the possibility of revising or rejecting that belief altogether if future inquiry falsifies Christianity's claims to truth.

Alternatively the honest and rigorous thinker may find that Christianity can be taken seriously, not because it makes assertions that can be rationally grounded, but rather because it expresses a true response to the question of existence, or to existential concern, which contains this question within itself. The thinker may find that

Christianity can be taken seriously because the Christian story expresses a true response to the question of existence in a language entirely different from the propositional language of reason and science, thus revealing an attitude from out of which an honest and rigorous thinker can acknowledge the question of existence and stand before this question without either or turning away from it or denying in despair, apathy, nihilism, or suicide that existence (his own) that is called into question. However to find that Christianity can be taken seriously in this sense is not yet to take it seriously. To take Christianity seriously as an expression of a true response to existential concern is indeed to be the truth that is expressed therein.

Chapter Four

Second Examination of the Pre-understanding: The New Testament Redemption Story as an Expression of Existential Concern

> *"Can the ideas ever make sense unless we discover the story behind them?"*
>
> *"For as these people heard the story of Jesus, they became participants in it, creating in turn a larger story that included their own lives."*
>
> —David Barr

I have conjectured that interpreting the Christian redemption story as an expression of existential concern in which love operates as a response to such concern will make it possible to affirm that Christianity is something an honest and rigorous thinker could take seriously. In order to confirm or deny this conjecture, it is necessary to ask not only what an honest and rigorous thinker can take seriously but also whether or not the Christian story of redemption can be appropriately interpreted as an expression of existential concern. In this second examination of my pre-understanding, I will investigate the meaning of the latter question by asking what it means to interpret the Christian redemption story as an expression of existential concern: What is existential concern? What does it mean to be an *expression* of this kind of concern? Why focus on the Christian story of redemption rather than on Christianity as such? The answers to these questions will point the way toward the development of a hermeneutic framework by means of which it will be possible to address the question of whether or not the New Testament account of redemption is an expression of existential concern without presuming that it is.

I. Characterization of existential concern

I have already, in various places throughout the previous chapters, considered at some length the nature of existential concern. However, for the purpose of this second examination of my pre-understanding, I will here present a brief characterization of existential concern that ties together and fleshes out my previous considerations. Though this examination of my pre-understanding certainly calls for systematic presentation, it is well to keep in mind that all any writer can hope to do when describing the nature of existential concern is to evoke in the reader a certain sensibility that points the way back to a personal experience of such concern. There can be no complete, comprehensive presentation of the nature of existential concern, for genuine insight into the nature of existential concern always requires an excursion of thought back to each individual's own particular, situated existence.[65]

In the experience of existential concern, my existence (that one that is particularly *mine*) becomes an issue. In my everyday existence, I am so caught up in the busy-ness of living — getting from here to there, working, acquiring and preparing food, caring for children, participating in family life, tending the home, maintaining personal property, seeking material comfort, recreating and pursuing leisure, attending community gatherings, keeping up with the news, chatting with friends, giving to good causes, managing finances, negotiating interpersonal relationships, striving for personal achievement and success—that my existence is simply taken for granted, just as the floor beneath me is taken for granted when I step out of bed each morning. However, when existential concern breaks through the surface of everyday existence, I am struck by the

[65] It is perhaps for this reason that the dramatic and literary works of a Sartre or Dostoyevsky, for instance, are able to illuminate the nature of existential concern with a penetrating and poignant urgency that no systematic, discursive treatise could elicit.

absurd and futile character of my being here at all. My existence appears before me as something gratuitous or as one damn thing after another to no end, and I perceive even my most earnest strivings as nothing more than a "chasing after the wind." When existential concern breaks in upon me, my very existence loses its sense.

Although, in the experience of existential concern, my familiar, everyday existence loses its sense, such concern yet arises from within my concrete situation. The seemingly endless repetition of the day to day and the tedium of striving that leads not to fulfillment but to more striving give way to ennui and even disgust with life, which seems nothing more than a vain, incessant trudge on a treadmill. The intensity of joy in the wedding celebration is heightened and brought to a dizzying peak by its own precarious fragility, for such joy may shatter in an instant. In this moment, we two can pledge each other our lives, but nothing can ensure our lasting happiness or safeguard us from pain, and so we speak the marriage vow, "for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do we part" that reflects our powerlessness in the face of life's contingencies and our utter dependence upon some fate whence we know naught. Whether it is ennui or vertigo, despair over meaningless suffering, nausea at the realization that there is no firm ground on which to base a most grave decision, or dread as all of my projects are eclipsed by the inevitable possibility of my own death, in each case existential concern emerges from life itself and from my concrete situation in the world.

Existential concern becomes manifest in my situated existence as an affective state, or mood: nausea, dread, despair, ennui, and the like. However, to understand any such mood as a mere psychological state is to miss the sense in which, to speak

Heidegger's language, mood attunes me to the world in a particular manner. Metaphors depicting an individual standing on the rim of an abyss or cast out in a life raft over unfathomable depths of ocean can serve to illustrate the particular manner of attunement characteristic of existential moods. Such moods disclose the subjective reality of the senselessness of my existence as an abyss on whose brink I stand and, rather than relieving me of this subjective reality by taking me out of the world, leave me inextricably in the position of an existing subject who must confront the inscrutable, yet inescapable limits of my existence. In such moods, I become attuned to the uncanny, which I experience in the form of an incomprehensible limit, such as death or inexplicable, unyielding fate, in the face of which that existence which is my very own loses its everyday familiarity and coherence.

Therefore, existential concern, made manifest in mood, positions me before the question of my own existence. This question, in its most pressing and radical form is Hamlet's question: "To be or not to be . . ." (1094; 3.1.57). Yet it may take less radical forms. Consider, for instance the plight of Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov who, wandering the streets of St. Petersburg, encounters a fifteen or sixteen year old girl who has, "been made drunk and abused" (45). Unable to relieve her of even the smallest portion of her senseless suffering, Raskolnikov, dreadfully aware of his own insufficiency, asks "Why did I take it on myself to interfere? Was it for me to try to help? Have I any right to help?" (47). In the face of another's ineradicable and utterly pointless suffering, Raskolnikov is brought before his own inadequacy, and in this encounter with the incomprehensible limits of his existence, that existence comes into question. Likewise the experience of ennui, places me before the question of my existence: To what

purpose, to what end, the monotonous tedium of living and striving? In a similar manner, any existential concern, made manifest in a mood in which I experience my existence as something unfamiliar and lacking sense, puts that existence into question.

Because existential concern belongs only to the existing subject, *qua* existing, the question of existence, which it contains, cannot be answered by reason or science. Though I have argued for this in previous chapters, it bears repeating. Science and reason seek to produce objective, universal knowledge. In order to do so, they must abstract from individual, subjective existence. Furthermore, because reason cannot ground itself, it certainly cannot ground my existence, from which it must always abstract. Therefore, there is no solution or answer that could resolve the question of my existence contained in the experience of existential concern; the question of existence is not the type of question that can be cleared up and done away with, the question receding once the solution is present.

If the question of existence does not call for a rational solution, then for what does it call when it presents itself to me in my experience of existential concern? The question of existence calls for a response in my manner of existing. If I am to address this question in a meaningful way, then I must adopt a manner of existing that neither covers over nor turns away from that subjective reality which places me before the question of my existence. Further, if my manner of existing is to be a true response to the question of existence, then it must not languish in the face of the absurdity and futility, which, in the experience of existential concern, threaten to swallow up my existence all together; I can neither refuse nor deny this strange and incomprehensible existence by giving in to suicide, the most extreme form of denial, to prolonged and paralyzing despair, to

nihilism, to apathy, or to any other such denial of my existence. To recall the metaphor, a true response to the question of my existence is a manner of existing that allows me to live on the edge of the precipice without plummeting into the abyss.

In summary, existential concern arises from my concrete situation and is experienced in the form of a mood, which intrudes upon familiar, everyday existence, attuning me, the existing subject, to the subjective reality of the senseless and futile character of my existence. In so doing, the experience of existential concern as mood, places me before the question of my existence. However, this question does not have an answer which might lead to its resolution, thus doing away with the question. Rather, though the question may be ignored in the busy-ness of the everyday or covered over or in the abstractions of scientific and metaphysical speculation, the question remains ever before me in the experience of existential concern. And so, the experience of existential concern calls for a response to the question of existence—a response that does not deny my existence in despair, apathy, nihilism or suicide even when faced with the subjective reality of the absurd futility of that existence.

II. *Expression* of existential concerns

I have conjectured that interpreting the New Testament account of redemption as an expression of existential concern, may reveal a way in which the honest and rigorous thinker could take Christianity seriously, yet if existential concern is, in each case, concern about that existence which is *my very own*, then what sense is there in suggesting that the New Testament redemption story is an expression of such concern? How could such an exoteric story, passed down from community to community, generation to

generation, express the kind of concern that is, in each case, my own? To clarify what is involved in my pre-understanding when I suggest that the Christian redemption story is just such an expression, it will be helpful to consider Dilthey's conception of manifestations of life, as he presents it in his essay, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life." For, this conception stands behind my conjecture.

According to Dilthey, manifestations of life[66] "appear in the world of the senses, but express something spiritual, which they make it possible for us to cognize" (226). So, for example, the physical actions of a mother who holds her index finger in front of her lips, making shushing sounds would be a manifestation of life; the desire and expectation that her child refrain from making noise would be the spiritual, or human, content reflected in the external manifestation. Such manifestations of life, Dilthey goes on to say, need not necessarily be intended to express any spiritual content, but do so nonetheless. If, for instance, a painter picks up his brush, his action reveals what he means to do, though he did not pick up his brush with the intention of communicating any such meaning. Those manifestations of life that *intentionally* express a spiritual content can be distinguished as "*expressions* of life," and, for the purposes of this examination, it is necessary to consider only those types of manifestations of life that intentionally communicate spiritual content and so are classified as expressions of life. Dilthey describes different types of expressions of life, and in order to clarify what I

[66] That is, manifestations of subjectivity, or spirit. Here spirit refers not to some sort of metaphysical soul, but to the quality of being an existing subject, whose consciousness, psychic states, moods, reasoning, valuing, intending, etc. locate him in a world of meaning. At times, Dilthey seems to reify life as though it were something standing over and against the existing subject, yet I seriously doubt it is his intention to do so. In order to avoid this possible misunderstanding, I sometimes use the terms 'subjectivity,' 'subjective existence,' or 'subjective existing' where Dilthey would use the term 'life.' As I see it, my use of the former phrases is basically equivalent to Dithey's use of the latter term.

mean when I suggest that the Christian redemption story is an expression of existential concern, it will be helpful to contrast two of them.

The first type of expression of life Dilthey describes is "concepts, judgments, and larger thought-formations" (226). These types of expressions have been "adapted to logical norms" (226), and so are the constituents of science. As such, their spiritual content is abstract, detached from the particularities of subjective experience; the validity of the thought or idea expressed is independent of any particular subjective existence. In other words, understanding Newton's formulation, masses attract in inverse proportion to the square of their distance from each other, requires no reference to Newton's or any other person's subjective existence. Likewise understanding moral imperatives, e.g. thou shall not commit murder, requires no reference to any individual's subjective existence. The formulation remains identical in every context. Therefore, concepts, judgments and larger thought-formations can be "transported unchanged" (227) from the person who formulated the thought to the one who would understand it. For this reason, little or no interpretation is required for understanding such expressions of life.

It is quite different with the second type of expression of life Dilthey describes. Expressions of lived experience not only arise from subjective experience but also remain connected to it. Dilthey writes, "A special relation exists between [an expression of lived experience], the life from which it stems, and the understanding that it brings about" (227). Though Dilthey does not explicitly say as much, it is reasonable to infer, based on his assertion of this "special relation," that expressions of lived experience disclose a sense of life—a sense of the subjective reality of and possibilities for the existing

individual, concretely situated in the world—as the spiritual content of the external manifestation.

Since, therefore, expressions of lived experience are not formulations whose validity is independent of any particular subjective existence, as are concepts and judgments, but rather remain connected to subjective existence, the former cannot be understood as completely as the latter. "[I]t is characteristic of the expression of lived experience," Dilthey observes, "that its relation to the spiritual or human content expressed in it can only be made available to understanding within limits" (227). The spiritual content of an expression of lived experience cannot be transported unchanged from person to person, so understanding expressions of lived experience, to the extent that they can be understood, requires interpretation. Further, since an expression of lived experience does not communicate an independently valid formulation but rather a sense of life, or subjectivity, such expressions are not to be evaluated as true or false but as truthful or untruthful expressions of the spiritual content.

Based on this rudimentary description of manifestations of life, I can now explain something about the meaning of my conjecture that the Christian story of redemption is an *expression* of existential concern. First, I suggest that this story is what Dilthey calls a manifestation of life, which makes available in external form, in this case in written form, some spiritual i.e. human meaning. Second, because existential concern arises from within my concrete situation and cannot in any way be detached from subjective experience, an expression of existential concern would have to take the form of an expression of lived experience. Thus, when I suggest that the redemption story is an expression of existential concern, I mean that just as expressions of lived experience

disclose a sense of life, so too must this story of redemption disclose something of the subjective reality of an individual *qua* existing. Additionally, since the spiritual content expressed in expressions of lived experience can only be made available to understanding through interpretation, the Christian story of redemption must be interpreted in such a way as to disclose that spiritual content and evaluated, not on the basis of its truth or falsity, but on the basis of its truthfulness.

Dilthey articulates several methodological considerations for interpreting expressions of lived experience, and I draw on these in my development of a hermeneutic framework through which to interpret this New Testament theme. Though an expression of lived experience could be something as simple as a smile, I will focus primarily on what Dilthey has to say about interpreting one kind of expression of lived experience in particular: an expression in which "a spiritual content is liberated from its creator" (228), such as a great work of art, literature, or, I propose, a religious theme[67] drawn from tradition, ritual, or Scripture.

Liberated expressions of lived experience, as it were,[68] differ from the majority of expressions of lived experience—meaningful glances, shrugs, spoken utterances, etc.—which stem from concerns about the practical interests of daily life. Interpretation of the latter type is always tenuous, according to Dilthey, because the expression emerges in relation to the moment and "constantly falls into oblivion" (227) and because, in the interest of achieving practical goals, it is frequently expedient to deceive or dissimulate.

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[67] Here a religious theme must be differentiated from a religious doctrine or dogma, which would more likely fall under the classification of concepts, judgments, and larger thought formations. As distinct from a doctrine, a religious theme is not a generalized formulation that has been adapted to a logical norm.

[68] Dilthey does not use the phrase 'liberated expression of lived experience.' I will use this phrase as shorthand for the lengthier phrase 'expression of lived experience whose spiritual content has been liberated from its creator.'

Thus, Dilthey writes, "There is something frightful in the realization that in the struggle of practical interests, every expression can deceive and that its interpretation can alter with a change in our standpoint" (227-8). For these reasons, the relation between the expression and what is expressed therein is complicated; when practical interests are involved, deception is always possible, and so interpretation must refer to the productive agency of the expression's originator.

In contrast, when the spiritual content of an expression of lived experience has been liberated from its creator and from the practical interests of its creator, as with a great work of art or literature, the relation between expression and what is expressed is more straightforward.[69] When the spiritual content is liberated from its creator, the expediency of dissembling is no longer an issue. No great novel, for instance, attempts to misrepresent its author or, for that matter, to represent its author at all.[70] Consequently, because the spiritual content of any such human creation has been detached from the quotidian, practical concerns of its creator, a liberated expression may more truthfully give voice to the profound and rich, if perhaps enigmatic, undercurrents eddying below the surface of everyday life lived in the busy pursuit of practical interests.[71] Further, as

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[69] The creator's productivity can, but need not come into play when interpreting such expressions. However, the creator's productivity should never be the only or primary factor considered in interpretation: Only when the spectator's understanding is "directed toward the nexus of the plot, the characters, and the interweaving of those moments that determine the turn of fate" will he "enjoy the full reality of the extract of life that is presented . . . . Only when the spectator notices that what he has just absorbed as a fragment of reality arose as an artistically planned creation in the mind of the poet does his understanding, initially governed by this relation between a complex of manifestations of life and what is expressed in them, pass over into an understanding dominated by the relation between creation and creator" (232-233).

[70] A novel, play, poem, etc. attempts to express something about the characters, narrator, or speaker and not about the author; Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, for instance, is not about Dostoyevsky's subjective existence but about Raskolnikov's.

[71] Liberated expressions thus fill a space between the logically normative concepts, judgments, and larger thought formations that constitute theoretical knowing and the practical doings and expressions of persons caught up in everyday business. Hence from out of such liberated expressions, there arises "in the confines between knowing and doing a sphere in which life discloses itself at a depth inaccessible to observation, reflection, and theory" (228).

the spiritual content in such expressions stands divorced from the moment the expression emerged, the content does not fall constantly into oblivion. Rather, "Truthful in itself, it stands—fixed, visible, and abiding" (228). An expression of lived experience, whose spiritual content has been liberated from its creator, therefore, can reveal more of life's depths and can be interpreted more reliably than an expression of lived experience whose spiritual content remains inextricably connected to the practical interests and daily life of its originator.

Nonetheless, when interpreting such expressions, it is important to bear in mind that, however the spiritual content may be liberated from its creator, that content is not thus detached from subjective experience, as are concepts, judgments, and larger thought formations. Rather than abstracting from subjective experience and generalizing in terms of logical norms, a liberated expression of lived experience presents an "extract of life" in its "full reality" (232). In other words, such an expression depicts a slice of life as belonging to the whole of some subjective existence[72] constituted by concrete particularities. Therefore, the human content expressed in such an expression must be interpreted with reference to subjective experience. Although that subjective existence depicted in the play or the novel is not the one the interpreter herself experiences, she must yet refer to her own subjective experience if she is to gain access to the human content expressed in any particular expression of lived experience; she must be able to relate Hamlet's subjective experience, for instance, to her own if she is to grasp the human meaning expressed in a performance of Shakespeare's tragedy. Because the spiritual content of an expression of lived experience is so closely connected to subjective

[72] i.e. the subjective existence of the characters, narrator, or speaker

experience, there is a circular relationship between the understanding of the expression, the expression, and the interpreter's own lived experience.

The human content of any expression of lived experience initially becomes available to the interpreter because, as Dilthey notes, we live in a world of shared meanings: "Every square planted with trees, every room in which chairs are arranged, is understandable to us from childhood because human tendencies to set goals, produce order, and define values in common have assigned a place to every square and every object in the room" (229). Each individual's subjective experience is oriented in this world of commonality. Thus, as Dilthey notes, "even the work of a genius will reflect a common stock of ideas, attitudes, and ideals characteristic of an age and a region" (229). For this reason, it is possible for the interpreter to gain a preliminary understanding of liberated expressions of lived experience by referring to her experience of this world of commonality.

However, reference to the world of commonality alone is unlikely to provide the interpreter with an adequate interpretation of the content of any liberated expression of lived experience. While reference to the sphere of commonality can preliminarily disclose the meaning of a sentence[73] or of the arrangement of props on a set, it cannot grant access to the full depths of life presented in the expression—to "the full reality of the extract of the life that is presented" (232). In order to gain access to the full reality of the extract of life, the interpreter must also direct her understanding "at the nexus in which the successively apprehended parts of a work form a whole" (232); unless she so directs her understanding, any liberated expression of lived experience would seem no

[73] "A sentence is intelligible by virtue of the commonality that exists within a linguistic community about the meaning of words and of forms of inflection and about the sense of syntactical structure" (230).

more than a succession of unconnected appearances. In other words, to understand the depths of the spiritual content expressed in a performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, it is necessary to interpret the events enacted on stage as parts of a vitally connected whole: it is not possible to understand the full meaning of Claudius' elaborate scheme to kill Hamlet in the fencing match with Laeretes unless Claudius' machinations are understood as being vitally connected to the previous events of the play (Hamlet's conversations with his father's ghost and his ruse to test Claudius' innocence, Polonius' murder, Ophelia's suicide, and so forth); to the recurring themes and motifs that arise throughout the course of the performance; to the overall setting, or concrete situation, in which the characters of the play are presented; to the relationships that exist between the various characters; to each characters' entire subjective reality, as implicated in the fragments of life the author selected to portray; and so on.

To understand a work as a whole, i.e., to discover the connectedness of a liberated expression of lived experience, the interpreter must have recourse to the vital connectedness of her own subjective experience. Thus, Dilthey argues that is only possible to move beyond the rudimentary understanding achieved by referring to the sphere of commonality "if the connectedness that exists in one's own lived experience and has been experienced in innumerable cases is always available to accompany the possibilities inherent in the [expression of lived experience]" (234). By employing what Dilthey calls the higher forms of understanding—transposition, re-creation, and re-experiencing—the interpreter relies on her subjective experience of the connectedness of lived experience in order *to retrieve* the full reality and depths of meaning expressed in the extract of life depicted in a liberated expression of lived experience:

By transposing her own experience of the connectedness of her life into her interpretation of a poem, for example, the interpreter brings the poem to life, thus disclosing more fully the depths of its spiritual content: "Then every line of a poem is transformed back into life through the inner nexus of the lived experience from which the poem arose" (235).[74] The more the liberated expression reveals about the concrete situation in which it locates its speaker or its characters, the more the interpreter is transposed into that concrete situation, and the more the interpreter transfers her own lived experience into the liberated expression, the more she brings to life the fullness of its spiritual content.[75] Dilthey maintains that, when the interpreter's lived experience is transposed into the concrete situation vividly presented in a poem, novel, play, etc., she can use her imagination to extrapolate from her subjective experience and re-create the lived experience of the speaker of a poem or the characters in a play. He writes, "the imagination can increase or diminish the intensity of the attitudes, powers, feelings, strivings, and thought-tendencies that characterize [the interpreter's] own life-nexus" (236), making it possible for her to re-create the speaker's or characters' experience of their lives, or subjective existences, in such a way that the fragments of life presented in a text or on a stage come to life and seem to possess the continuity of lived experience. In other words, this process, by which the interpreter re-creates the characters' lived experience, is one that allows her to re-experience the fragments of life presented in a text or on a stage as though they possessed the fullness and connectedness of an existing

[74] When Dilthey writes of "the nexus of lived experience from which the poem arose," he is referring not to the nexus of lived experience of the poet *per se* but to the nexus of lived experience that "the poet places in the mouth of an ideal person" (235).

[75] Here, is an instantiation of the reciprocal relation between an interpreter and the expression: while the sensitive, participating interpreter, or spectator, transfers herself and her lived experience into the fragment of life depicted in an expression of lived experience, so also the expression that vividly presents a concrete situation transposes the interpreter into that situation. Hence, "The fantastic forest in *As You Like It* transposes us into a mood that allows us to re-create all its eccentricities" (236).

individual's subjective reality. When the curtain goes up and the interpreter is transposed into a cold winter's night outside Elsinore (the Danish castle in which Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is set), she is also transposed into the haunted, apprehensive mood of the sentinels who have just seen the ghost of Hamlet's father and later into the rage, melancholy, and uncertainty that arise from Hamlet's encounter with this same specter. Through the process of re-experiencing, the interpreter is able to grasp the presented slice of life in its full reality and so to retrieve the depths of its spiritual meaning, or human content.

The higher forms of understanding thus deepen the circular relationship of the understanding of the expression, the expression, and the interpreter's own lived experience in such a way that they can reveal more of life's depths than the interpreter could have experienced had she not gone through the processes of transposition and re-creation, re-experiencing those possibilities for the existing subject that are intimated in an expression of lived experience. Indeed, Dilthey asserts that a liberated expression of lived experience may reveal more of the depths of life than even the author had in mind. He writes, "expressions of lived experience may contain more than the poet or artist is conscious of and therefore may recall more" (235). One of the greatest triumphs of the higher forms of understanding, then, is that, as they deepen this circular relationship they disclose more of life's depths, more of its fullness, and more of the possibilities for subjective existence than does either introspection or scientific-theoretical knowing.

Though it be acknowledged that the higher forms of understanding may grant access to the depths of life expressed in a liberated expression of lived experience, it is yet difficult to conceive of the New Testament writings—which have been handed down from generation to generation for nearly two thousand years—as an expression of

existential concern that could be understood and re-experienced by a thinker living in our contemporary, scientific world. In order to clarify how these writings could possibly be conceived as such, I will need to address two further issues: the pastness of the past, which makes reference to the sphere of commonality problematic, and the highly individual and personal nature of existential concern, which is always, in each case, concern about *my own* subjective existence. The former makes interpretation of any expression of lived experience that is temporally or culturally distant from the interpreter problematic, whereas the latter seems to indicate that the very conception of an expression of existential concern precludes altogether the possibility of appropriate interpretation. However, while both issues serve as reminders of Dilthey's observation that "it is characteristic of the expression of lived experience that its relation to the spiritual or human content expressed in it can only be made available to understanding within limits" (227), neither, upon closer consideration, bars the possibility of understanding an expression of lived experience, even an expression of existential concern, within those limits.

Dilthey acknowledges that interpretation of an expression of lived experience from a distant past is problematic. However, while acknowledging the peculiarities of an existing individual's subjective reality, Dilthey notes that there is a "connection between the universally human and individuation" (233). He goes on to write, "On the basis of what is universal, we can see individuation extended to the manifoldness of human existence" (233). In other words, though temporal distance may make reference to the sphere of commonality somewhat untenable, we nonetheless share with individuals from the past certain universally human structures, for instance, the previously mentioned

"human tendencies to set goals, produce order, and define values in common" (229), that make it possible for the present day interpreter to understand something about individuals whose experience and subjective realities are far different from her own; these universal human structures make it possible for the interpreter who is "confined by circumstances" and "bound and limited by the reality of life" to "experience many other kinds of existence through the imagination" (237). Thus, the spiritual content expressed in expressions of lived experience from the distant past is never entirely inaccessible to the thoughtful interpreter in the present day.

Moreover, Dilthey observes that the past is not merely the past. Rather, "the past is a continuously enduring present for us" (229). Indeed the sphere of commonality in our current world did not arise *ex nihilo*, but was handed down to us from the past, for instance, in "custom, law, state, religion, art, the sciences, and philosophy" (229). Therefore, the contemporary interpreter does have access, to a certain extent, to the past world of commonality, because this past world has become part of the present one.

Though the past enters into the present, it is not transported unchanged. The past becomes the present by passing through successive generations of interpretation. Thus, when interpreting the New Testament as an expression of lived experience that has been handed down from the distant past, it is well to remember that, in those generations of interpretation, the spiritual content of the expression has come to be understood in a variety of different, even incompatible, ways. The meaning of this expression has not then been fixed by past interpretations. Nonetheless, because, in the New Testament writings, the past has indeed entered into the present and because the interpreter has recourse to universal human structures, on the basis of which individuation is established;

to the sphere of commonality, which cannot be divorced from the commonality of the past; and to the higher forms of understanding, which give a vital connectedness to the fragments of life presented in a liberated expression of lived experience, it is yet possible for her to engage with the succession of interpretations and to retrieve from the text a redemption story that is not completely disjointed but instead possesses the continuity of a whole.

Though, by applying the higher forms of understanding, she may retrieve a whole story from this expression which has been handed down from generation to generation, how is it possible that the interpreter could understand the New Testament story of redemption as an expression of *existential concern*? If existential concern is concern about that being which is my very own, how is it possible that any liberated expression of lived experience could express that concern in such a way that the interpreter could re-experience it in her interpretation? The answer to this question lies in the fact that expressions of lived experience disclose possibilities for subjective existence and in the notion that there is a circular relation between the understanding of the expression, the expression, and lived experience, such that the interpreter must always refer to her own subjective experience if she is to understand *any* expression of lived experience. Only to the extent that the interpreter has never had any experience whatsoever of existential concern, i.e., to the extent that such concern is not even a possibility for her existence, would the spiritual content of an expression of existential concern be entirely inaccessible to her.

However, I suggest that, though existential concern does not arise independently of the concrete situation in which the existing individual is historically located, concern

about the finitude and contingency of that existence which is my own is not restricted to a particular view of the world or a particular type of historical setting. While certain historical situations or worldviews may more easily evoke existential concern,[76] other historical contexts may suppress sensitivity to that sense of subjectivity in which existential concern emerges. Nonetheless, unless a historical situation or worldview could exclude suicide (i.e. the question of existence in its most pressing form) altogether as a possibility for the existing subject, no historical context or view of the world could suppress this sensitivity to existential concern entirely.[77] Thus, no historical context could utterly eliminate recourse to the subjective experience of existential concern, and so the possibility of understanding an expression of existential concern *as such* is always available to the interpreter within the limits of her imaginative ability to recreate those moods in which existential concern becomes manifest.

At this point, I can now state in full the meaning of my question as to whether or not the New Testament account of redemption can be appropriately interpreted as an expression of existential concern. The New Testament account of redemption is, I suggest, an expression of lived experience whose spiritual content has been liberated from its creators. Like any other expression of lived experience, then, the New Testament account of redemption expresses as its spiritual content some sense of subjective reality, i.e., something about the significance of or possibilities for subjective existing. Additionally, because the New Testament's spiritual content has been liberated

[76] War torn Europe in the first half of the twentieth century is but one example, and I surmise that the confused and sometimes violent clash of cultures in Roman empire during the first century CE is another. As, the Elder Pliny (CE 23-79) laments in his Natural History, "We are so much at the mercy of chance that Chance herself, by whom God is proved uncertain, takes the place of God" (2.5.22)

[77] To experience suicide as a possibility for my own existence is to experience that existence as utterly contingent—I could just as easily not be here at all.

from the daily affairs and practical interests of its creators yet remains inextricably connected to the concrete particularities of lived experience, it can, I suggest, grant the interpreter access to the depths of life that eddy below the surface of everyday existence. Accordingly, when I ask whether or not the New Testament account of redemption is an expression of existential concern, I am (1) asking, "is the spiritual content, the depths of life expressed therein, existential concern and a response to this concern in the form of redemptive love?" and (2) suggesting that Dilthey's methodological considerations point the way to an answer to this question. Though the New Testament writings are from the distant past and have been handed down through a succession of (sometimes incompatible) interpretations and though existential concern is in each case my own, Dilthey's methodological considerations about the sphere of commonality and the higher forms of understanding indicate that an interpreter might, by re-experiencing it as a participating spectator, retrieve from this text a story that seems to possess the continuity of a whole and further that, if this story indeed expresses existential concern, the interpreter will be able to achieve access to them. [78]

Caveat: Attenuating Faith

Some theologians and New Testament scholars, for instance Galloway, would object to my conjecture that the New Testament account of redemption is an expression of existential concern on the grounds that interpreting the New Testament in such terms drastically reduces the content of Christianity merely in order to make it more palatable for thinkers in the modern world. Galloway writes that "Christianity will never come to terms with the modern world until it can defend its historical components on historical

[78]For, these higher forms of understanding, as previously explained, require that the interpreter have recourse to her own subjective experience and its vital connectedness.

grounds (rather than distilling them into existential or other non-historical doctrines). It will not be credible as Christianity unless it retains the traditional substance of the faith" (47). Galloway's statement seems to indicate that my conjecture—interpreting the Christian story of redemption as an expression of existential concern in which love serves as a response to that concern will disclose a way for the honest and rigorous thinker to take Christianity seriously—is an intellectual move that sidesteps one of the most important factors for taking Christianity seriously, namely the rational grounding of its historical truth. Interpreting Christianity in terms of existential concepts rather than in terms of historical matters of fact, according to Galloway, is an attempt to distill the contents of Christianity, making it easier for the modern thinker to swallow.

To this objection, I must respond first by suggesting that the opposite is rather the case; instead of distilling Christianity to make it more defensible to contemporary thinkers, I wish to disclose more of its depths and richness by discerning the meaning of redemptive love. The question of whether or not Christianity's historical components can be defended on historical grounds belongs to the question of faith and reason, which has ever eclipsed the question of the meaning of love, despite the emphasis given to love throughout the New Testament—an emphasis which finds its ultimate expression in I Corinthians 13:13 when Paul writes, "and now these three remain faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love." By exploring the question of the meaning of love, I hope not to distill the contents of Christianity but to retrieve from the sedimentation of the question of faith and reason the peculiar and dynamic power of love that invigorates the New Testament message. And so, I ask whether or not the New Testament account of redemption is an expression of existential concern not simply to make Christianity

defensible on non-historical grounds but rather in order to indicate a possible starting point from which to gain access to the dynamic and peculiar meaning of Christian love. That is, my consideration of the New Testament account of redemption in terms of Dilthey's conception of an expression of lived experience is an attempt to get at the meaning of Christian love expressed therein, which seems to be distorted or covered over whenever its interpretation is based on some attempt to substantiate or debunk faith on rational grounds.

Against commentators such as Galloway, I argue that focusing so intently on issues pertaining to the question of faith and reason is a form of tunnel vision that itself attenuates the New Testament's message by subordinating the question of the meaning of love to the question of faith and reason. Requiring Jesus and the redemption asserted in his name to be defended on historical grounds may indeed distill Christianity far more than does treating the New Testament account of redemption as an expression of lived experience. For, as Thistelton notes, "If Jesus is a historical fact, he is, like all historical facts, inescapably subject to the methods of historical research, and faith waits upon the results of historical science" (70). Similarly, Crossan, one of the leading scholars in studies of the historical Jesus writes, "any analysis of a historical Jesus must be open to the disciplined historical methods of its contemporary world and must be able to stand up to its judgments without any special pleading" (200). The observations of these two scholars indicate that if the contents of Christianity must be defended on historical grounds, then the Christian faith must be reduced to those ideas and tenets that historical science would deem probable, or in agreement with all other known historical facts.

However, what historians deem probable is a far cry from what Galloway calls, "the traditional substance of the faith" (46). According to Crossan, the most the historical method gives us is that "The historical Jesus was a *peasant Jewish Cynic*"[79] (198) but certainly no God incarnate, born of a virgin. Crossan's historical Jesus is at most an itinerant teacher who sought to break down barriers between Jew and Gentile, free and slave, male and female, by means of "free compassion and open commensality" (199). Messiah, savior, son of God, God incarnate are all, in Crossan's view as a historian, interpretations retrojected onto the man Jesus by those who followed and were touched by his teaching. Mack is even less optimistic about what historical methods can reveal of the historical Jesus, but for all intents and purposes concords with Crossan in conceiving of the historical Jesus as a Jewish cynic teacher and in concluding that Jesus "did not create . . . a religion that invited others to seem his as a god" (39). Mack suggests that basically all historical research reveals about Jesus is that he taught his followers to imagine the Kingdom of God "as an alternative to the way in which the world was working under the Romans" and that he "was driven by a desire to think that there must be a better way to live together than under the present state of affairs" (40). Accordingly, the contents of a Christianity that could defend its historical components on historical grounds would be no Christianity, for historical research discloses not the figure of Jesus the Christ but rather the figure of Jesus the wandering teacher who challenged the social structure of his society by uttering pithy cynic-like sayings and adopting an unconventional manner of living.

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[79] For more on the Cynic Jesus hypothesis cf. Crossan. The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant. San Francisco: Harper Collins.

Both Crossan and Mack, in concurrence with most contemporary New Testament scholars, agree that the New Testament cannot appropriately be interpreted as relaying historical facts, because the New Testament writings are rather stories that Jesus' followers have told about the significance of his life, teachings, and death.[80] Crossan, for example, writes, "I understand the virginal conception of Jesus to be a confessional statement about Jesus' status and not a biological statement about Mary's body. [This virginal conception] is later faith in Jesus as an adult retrojected mythologically onto Jesus as an infant" (23). Moreover, Mack's historical study of the creation of New Testament writings convincingly establishes that these writings "stem from different groups of people with their own histories, views, [and] attitudes" (5) who "were not interested in preserving accurate memories of the historical [Jesus]" (46); what mattered to the early Jesus people was the message, and so "the 'voice' and 'image' of Jesus changed to match the shifts in the content of his teachings" (46) as this content was understood by the various branches of the Jesus movement. Accordingly, Mack's historical analysis indicates that writing the Gospel stories "was a communal process in which stories were told, polished, changed, and rearranged many times in the course of several generations" (153). Likewise was the creation and canonization of the New Testament a continuation of this communal storytelling process. Those who selected the New Testament writings from the large body of literature produced by first century Jesus movements and arranged these writings into what we now know as the New Testament chose the particular writings they did and ordered them as they did for the purpose of telling that story which had evolved from the first through the fourth centuries to become

[80] Duling and Perrin go so far as to assert, "Today New Testament scholarship in general recognizes that the nineteenth-century emphasis on factual historicity is inappropriate to interpreting a first-century text in the twentieth century" (49). See also Barr. An Introduction to the New Testament Story.

the "centrist" account (Mack 6) of the significance of Jesus' birth, life, and death. Historical studies of the creation of the New Testament thus indicate that the Christian story is one that the followers of Jesus told and continue to tell about themselves, but not one that is true as a matter of historical fact.

It is noteworthy, however, that neither Mack nor Crossan seems to discount the content of the New Testament writings simply because that content cannot be defended on historical grounds. Both show appreciation for what the New Testament writings reveal about the spirit of those who created them. And neither suggests that the stories these early Jesus people and Christ congregations told about themselves, via their interpretation of the significance of Jesus' life, teachings, and death, are any less valuable to us now simply because these stories are not grounded in a scientific rationality.[81] As Dilthey suggests of liberated expressions of lived experience, these stories may be all the more valuable because they provide access to the profound depths of human existence in a way that theoretical, historical knowing never can. Accordingly, rather than distilling Christianity to what can be accepted based on historical grounds, by treating the New Testament story of redemption as a liberated expression of lived experience I hope to disclose the vital depths of Christianity, which I conjecture are to be discovered in the peculiar meaning of redemptive love.

[81] Nor are Mack and Crossan the only scholars to arrive upon such a conclusion. Barton, for instance, makes a similar point when he writes, "what is important is, not bringing the world (in the form of historical criticism) to the gospels, but bringing the gospels (in the form of scriptural witness to God's love revealed in Christ) to the world" (4).

III. The New Testament story of redemption

Historical research concerning the creation of the New Testament makes somewhat problematic my suggestion that it is possible to retrieve from the New Testament a cohesive story. Such research recalls the plurality of views that has been incorporated into the New Testament. Mack takes great care to point out that the New Testament itself seems to contain writings that reflect conflicting viewpoints. For instance, he notes that the epistle of James "sounds like a treatise written against the Pauline notion that the Christian faith opposed the 'works of the law'" (214). Indeed, Mack's logic, when followed through to its conclusion, apparently indicates that there is no such thing as *Christianity* but rather that there are Christianities, and, to a large degree, this conclusion is correct.

However, as Mack himself calls to our attention, all Christians have in common the Bible.[82] Still, given what we know about the plurality of the New Testament writings, this one common denominator does not provide much basis for addressing any question about Christianity as such. As Mack writes, "The Bible may, in fact, be the only feature of the Christian religion that all Christians have in common" (276). It is, at this point, worthwhile to bear in mind that, though the individual writings were by no means written with one central idea of the meaning Jesus' life, teachings, and death in mind, the New Testament that has been handed down to the present from the past was compiled and arranged in order to depict a centrist view. Though the canonization process did not succeed entirely in removing all discontinuity,[83] it does, at least, make it likely that there

[82] Though even here it should be noted that the Catholic Bible includes more books in its Old Testament than does the Protestant.

[83] Indeed, though the creators of the canon selected and ordered the books of the New Testament according to a centrist view, they yet decided, to a certain extent, in favor of maintaining the plurality of voices in the

is a theme or story held in common by all Christianities, such that the mere physical text alone is not precisely the only feature all Christians have in common.

To find a theme that all Christians hold in common, i.e., to find a central or essential component of Christianity—according to which it is therefore possible to speak of Christianity as such and thus to ask and answer the question of whether or not the honest and rigorous thinker can take Christianity seriously—I suggest following Schleiermacher's reasoning when he asks whether there is not one particular feature that any religious faith must possess if it is to retain its character as Christian. Schleiermacher answers that there is just such a feature. That content without which a religion would not possess any Christian character is the consciousness of redemption through Jesus the Christ. Any religion, according to Schleiermacher, "in which all reference to redemption is absent, and the image of the redeemer [Jesus the Christ] is not introduced at all" (56) is no Christianity. Following Schleiermacher, then, I address my question of whether or not an honest and rigorous thinker can take Christianity seriously to the New Testament story of redemption: I conjecture that interpreting this story as an expression of existential concern in which love serves as a response to that concern will disclose a means for taking Christianity seriously, and so I ask whether or not such an interpretation of the redemption story is appropriate to its presentation in the New Testament writings.

Though I have identified a theme without which a religious faith could not be considered Christian, the character of the New Testament writings yet requires the interpreter to piece together a story of redemption that seems to possess the continuity of a whole. Accordingly, interpreting this story requires gathering the pieces together and

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canon. By rejecting Titian's *Diatessaron* as well as any other attempt to create a harmonization of the four gospels that would iron out the contradictions among them, the creators of the canon made "a decision in favour of a plurality within limits" (Barton 3).

giving them the structure of a whole. Thus it is necessary that the interpreter employ the higher forms of understanding to bring together as many layers of the text as possible. While it may be inevitable that some viewpoints represented in the New Testament are incompatible with the retrieved story's integrity as a whole, the interpreter's re-creation of the New Testament story of redemption should be nuanced enough to include as many of these viewpoints as possible without destroying the story's vital connectedness.

By proposing this method of interpretation, I may seem to be suggesting that the New Testament story of redemption is only different from other expressions of lived experience that take a literary form because it is a collection of texts written by different authors. In other words, I seem to be suggesting that the only difference between the New Testament story of redemption and *Beowulf,* for instance, is the number of authors involved in composing them. And, in a sense, this is what I am suggesting. However, when I ask not just for the spiritual content of this particular liberated expression of lived experience but also whether or not, in light of this content, an honest and rigorous thinker may take Christianity seriously, there emerges a distinction between the story as literature and the story as Christian.[84] To take literature seriously, it is enough to re-experience the expression *as an involved spectator* and to become imaginatively aware of the possibilities of subjectivity that it presents. Taking literature seriously can, then, take the form of aesthetic appreciation. However, to appreciate aesthetically the New Testament story of redemption is precisely not to take it seriously as Christian. Christianity, insofar as it is not just a story (or from another perspective, say Galloway's, insofar as it is not

[84] Here I am strongly inclined to say "the story *as religion*." However, I would stand on tenuous ground were I to suggest that every cultural phenomenon referred to by the term 'religion' shares one particular quality, particularly were to I make that claim prior to immersing myself in the history and practice of every so-called religion. Consequently, I resort to the unfortunate expression 'taking the New Testament story seriously *as Christian*,' by which I mean taking it seriously as a particular form of religiousity.

just a historical account like any other), i.e., insofar as it is Christian, is characterized by "personal involvement" (Nygren Meaning and Method 344). No one could be considered Christian who simply believes the New Testament is grounded in historical fact or who merely grasps the spiritual content of the New Testament story unless that person also seeks to orient his life around those facts or within that meaning.

Therefore, in order to account for how the New Testament story, interpreted as a liberated expression of lived experience, could be taken seriously *as Christian* and not just as literature, it will be necessary to develop a hermeneutic framework that augments Dilthey's conception of re-experiencing. According to Dilthey's conception, the interpreter is a sort of participant spectator who, by re-experiencing the liberated expression of lived experience, retrieves from that expression a spiritual content with the vital connectedness of a whole. If, however, she is actually to take seriously the New Testament account of redemption as what is essential to Christianity, then the interpreter must not be just a participant spectator; rather she must become a full participant who is no longer a spectator—she must appropriate the attitude of the sinner who is redeemed. Accordingly, to find that Christianity can be taken seriously in light of the New Testament story of redemption is to find than an honest and rigorous thinker could re-experience this story *by appropriating* it into his own existing. Hence, if interpreting the New Testament story of redemption as an expression of lived experience is to provide a means by which the honest and rigorous thinker can take Christianity seriously, then the hermeneutic framework by means of which this story is interpreted must include a version of Dilthey's re-experiencing that indicates not only how the interpreter can retrieve the story but also how she can appropriate that story into her very existence. In

other words, to account for how an individual can take the New Testament story of redemption seriously *as Christian* and not simply as literature, Dilthey's conception of re-experiencing—retrieving from the liberated expression of lived experience a spiritual content with the integrity of a vitally connected whole—must be augmented with a conception of appropriative re-experiencing. Accordingly, the hermeneutic framework, by means of which the New Testament story is interpreted as a liberated expression of lived experience, must account for *both* that form of re-experiencing which allows the interpreter to retrieve a vitally connected story from the expression *and also* for that appropriative re-experiencing by means of which the interpreter takes the story seriously *as Christian*.

IV. Concluding remarks in the direction of a suitable hermeneutic framework

In this examination, I have investigated the meaning of the question contained in my initial conjecture, namely, can the New Testament account of redemption be appropriately interpreted as an expression of existential concern. With reference to Dilthey's essay, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life," I have clarified the meaning of that question: Can the New Testament account of redemption be appropriately interpreted as a liberated expression of lived experience whose spiritual content—the depths of life expressed therein—is existential concern and a response to that concern in the form of redemptive love? I have sought the meaning of this question in order to develop a hermeneutic framework that will allow me to address my question without pre-supposing its answer, and this second examination of the pre-understanding has pointed the way to such a hermeneutic framework: Expressions of

lived experience call for interpretation by the higher forms of understanding and interpretation of such an expression *as Christian* requires that the higher forms of understanding shed light on the appropriative re-experiencing of the expression. These higher forms of understanding, as Dilthey's account of them implies, are capable of disclosing existential concern as the spiritual content of an expression of lived experience, yet employing them does not presuppose that the spiritual content they do reveal will be existential concern, and so, by employing them, I can ask and respond to my question without predetermining its answer.

Nonetheless, it may seem that my question predetermines at least part of its answer. For, though I am not presupposing that the spiritual content of the New Testament account of redemption is existential concern, my hermeneutic framework will be determined by Dilthey's conception of an expression of lived experience whose spiritual content has been liberated from its creator. Consequently, it may seem that I am presupposing that the New Testament account of redemption is an expression of lived experience just as Augustine presupposed that Christianity was a metaphysical doctrine. In some respect, this type of presupposition cannot be helped; to interpret Christianity at all is to interpret it *as* something.

Since interpreting Christianity *as* something is unavoidable, part of the task of this examination of the pre-understanding has been to bring to awareness the "as what" of the forthcoming interpretation. For, with such awareness,[85] comes the possibility of what I will call, *conjectural interpreting as*, which leaves open the question of whether or not the "as what" is appropriate to what has been interpreted. Conjectural interpreting as

[85] No such awareness seems to be present in Augustine's interpretation of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine.

recognizes itself as such, acknowledging that there are other "as what's" (e.g. a metaphysical doctrine), and so allows for the comparison of interpretations with the criterion that the more appropriate the "as what" the less the interpreted material will have to be forced to fit. As Nygren notes, that which is interpreted "does not permit itself to be interpreted without resistance in any manner the interpreter pleases" (Meaning and Method 377). If the interpreter recognizes that interpretation always presupposes an "as what" and she notices resistance of the text to fit her "as what," she can allow the text to modify that starting point to fit better the themes in the text.

There are then two ways to prevent my interpretation of the New Testament account of redemption as an expression of lived experience from presupposing altogether any part of the answer to my question: (1) to involve myself with the text in such a way that my "as what" may be modified if the text resists my interpretation; and (2) allowing that my interpretation is one among others, to resolve to accept a different interpretation should it become apparent that an altogether different "as what" seems to fit more easily with the material at hand.

Chapter Five

Articulation of the Hermeneutic Framework

> *"True 'objectivity,' if this is the right word at all, depends on the appropriateness of the methods of inquiry to the object of inquiry."*
>
> —Anthony Thiselton

I carried out the previous two examinations of the pre-understanding in order to recognize my starting place, my way of raising questions, as a starting place. By doing so I hoped to establish what is at stake in my questions. I further sought to develop a hermeneutical framework that would allow me *genuinely* to ask my questions—a framework that could provide the answer to my questions without presupposing what that answer would be.

In my examination of what it means to be an honest and rigorous thinker, I determine that part of honest and rigorous thought is the recognition that the method of inquiry should be appropriate to the object of inquiry. Accordingly, in articulating the methodological procedure for my interpretation, it is necessary for me to stipulate the nature of the object of inquiry, namely the New Testament story of redemption. In the second examination of the pre-understanding, I explain that I am interpreting this story as an expression of lived experience, *chez* Dilthey, whose spiritual content has been liberated from the practical concerns and daily lives of its creators (noting along the way that my interpretation of it as such is conjectural). Therefore, my method of interpretation should be appropriate to a liberated expression of lived experience.

In order to interpret the New Testament story of redemption as a liberated expression of lived experience, I will need to employ the higher forms of understanding—transposition, re-creation, and re-experiencing. Employing these should

allow me to retrieve from the New Testament texts a redemption story with the integrity of a vitally connected whole. However, if I am to retrieve a story that is appropriate to the text, I cannot apply these forms of understanding however I please; rather my use of them must be rule-guided.

I further noted, in the second examination, that if the interpreter takes the New Testament story of redemption to be a liberated expression of lived experience, then she takes it seriously in its character *as Christian* only when she further re-experiences the story by moving beyond retrieval to appropriation. I thus distinguished between re-experiencing that retrieves a vitally connected whole from a liberated expression of lived experience and appropriative re-experiencing. Accordingly, I established that, in order to determine whether or not an honest and rigorous thinker can take the retrieved whole of the New Testament story of redemption seriously as Christian, my interpretation will need to furnish an approximately accurate description[86] of the appropriative re-experiencing of an individual who takes this story seriously.

One implication of the first examination was that there were two ways the honest and rigorous thinker may find that Christianity can be taken seriously: (1) find that there are sufficiently rational grounds for asserting its objective truth or (2) find that it expresses a true response to the question of existence. Given that my interpretation treats the New Testament story of redemption as a liberated expression of lived experience, the first possibility is ruled out, for expressions of lived experience are not to be evaluated on the basis their objective truth status. In the second examination, I observed that, according to Dilthey, expressions of lived experience were to be evaluated based on their

[86] I here say approximately accurate, because any description of lived experience, in some sense, must alter what it describes. A description of lived experience is somewhat analogous to a painting or photograph; it makes recognizable what it portrays.

truthfulness, or lack of deception. This observation seems to imply a third option by means of which the honest and rigorous thinker could take the New Testament story of redemption seriously: by finding it to express truthfully some facet of the depths of life, which the interpreter might not otherwise have experienced. While I acknowledge that this third option is a way of taking the New Testament story seriously aesthetically, it is not a way of taking it seriously *as Christian*. To find that Christianity is something the honest and rigorous thinker can take seriously, then, is to find that appropriatively re-experiencing the retrieved New Testament story of redemption yields a true response to the question of existence.

Consequently, if the method of inquiry is to be appropriate to the object of inquiry, and if the hermeneutical framework is to answer the questions of whether or not the New Testament story of redemption is an expression of existential concern and whether or not the honest and rigorous thinker can take this story seriously, then the method of interpretation must involve (a) a ruled-guided employment of the higher forms of understanding that retrieves a story with the integrity of a vitally connected whole and (b) a rule-guided employment of these forms of understanding that portrays the appropriative re-experiencing of an individual subject who takes seriously the story of redemption. Toward the end of retrieving a story with the integrity of a vitally connected whole, I propose that the employment of the higher forms of understanding be guided by a modified version of Nygren's method of motif research. Toward the end of achieving an approximately accurate description of the appropriative re-experiencing of the story of redemption, I propose that the higher forms of understanding be guided by the method of phenomenological description

I. The Method of motif research

Though it is not specifically what Dilthey had in mind when he called for a rule-guided application of the higher forms of understanding to liberated expressions of lived experience, motif research nonetheless provides a means for conducting just such an employment of these forms of understanding. According to Nygren, the purpose of motif research is to disclose the meaning of a historically given manifestation of spirit by allowing it "to be seen in its own inner organic coherence" (Meaning and Method 371). He writes, "In order to grasp the meaning of a spiritual phenomenon, it is obviously not enough to know the elements of which it is composed, but we must also know the connection between them" (Agape and Eros 36). Motif research seeks to disclose this connection—this inner organic coherence—in relation to the concrete experience of historically situated individuals, which itself has been interpreted in the texts, i.e. the historically given manifestation of spirit. Erling speaks to this point in his analysis of Nygren's method, noting that "On the one hand, it is a method for the interpretation of the concreteness of man's historical existence. On the other hand it is a method for the interpretation of the texts by which man's historical existence has been interpreted" (23). Such a method requires the application of the higher forms of understanding,[87] for without recourse to her own experience of the vital connectedness of lived experience, the interpreter will not be able to retrieve an organically structured whole that captures the concreteness of historical existence. Motif research, then, provides guidelines for the application of the higher forms of understanding by means of which it is possible to grasp the meaning of a spiritual phenomenon, or manifestation of life, in its organic coherence.

[87] Though Nygren does not use Dilthey's terminology, his description of his method indicates that applying such terms to it does it no violence.

Utilizing the method of motif research will help to make manageable the fragmented layers of the New Testament texts. Given Mack's observation that "When these writings were first written . . . none of them fully agreed with the others with respect to their views of Jesus, God, the state of the world, or the reason for the Jesus movements" (6), retrieving from these texts a story that has the integrity of a vitally connected whole is a problematic task. Though problematic, attempting to retrieve a coherent story from the New Testament is not an unreasonable task, for the New Testament writings are the source from which an understanding of redemption through Jesus Christ originates—an understanding without which any spiritual phenomenon could not be considered Christian. The guidelines that motif research provides for retrieving organically structured wholes from historically given materials, are well-suited to treat such an intricate complex of given materials as are the New Testament writings. Therefore, by applying the guidelines of motif research to these texts, it should be possible to retrieve a vitally connected story that is nuanced enough to include the plurality of New Testament voices without destroying that story's integrity as an organically structured unity.

In order to clarify the method by which motif research proceeds, Nygren distinguishes it from historical-genetic research. Historical-genetic research seeks to establish the "historical connections and origins" (Agape and Eros 35) of motifs in historically given materials. It is related, in some respects, to what Dilthey describes as interpretation in terms of the productivity of the creator of an expression of lived experience. Motif research, alternatively, explores what it is that gives a historically given spiritual phenomenon "its character as whole and communicates to all its parts their

special content and colour" (Agape and Eros 35). In other words, motif research is the attempt to gather together all of the disparate elements of a historically given spiritual phenomenon by considering their meaning in relation to a central, fundamental motif. Consideration of the elements in terms of their relation to this fundamental motif sheds light on the meaning of each element in the context of the whole, and as the individual elements come together into an organically structured whole, they illuminate the meaning of the fundamental motif.[88]

A fundamental motif is that without which a spiritual phenomenon "would lose all coherence and meaning" (Nygren Agape and Eros 37). In the New Testament story of redemption, the fundamental motif is redeeming love, for as I mentioned previously, love is what ties together the sinner, the redeemer, and redemption: God's love for sinners is the motivation for the incarnation; Jesus' life and death are the embodiment of this love, and only because of these is the sinner redeemed; and the redeemed is given a new life, which is the life of love. Without some conception of love, the story would lose all coherence.

Motif research, then, should disclose the meaning of redemptive love as it structures all of the otherwise disparate pieces of the New Testament story of redemption into an organic unity. To apply motif research to the New Testament account of redemption, I will first extract the elements of the New Testament writings concerning redemption and, by relating them to the fundamental motif, namely redeeming love, arrange them in such a way as to re-create (with recourse to my lived experience of vital connectedness) the redemption story in its integrity as an organically structured whole. The meaning of redeeming love will emerge as the story of redemption is so retrieved.

[88] Here motif research has the character of a hermeneutic circle.

At this point, it is worth noting that the methodological procedure described in the previous paragraph is a modification of Nygren's method of motif research. According to Nygren, the reason a fundamental motif gives organic coherence to a spiritual, historically given phenomenon is that the fundamental motif answers a categorical question. Thus, for Nygren, motif research proceeds by investigating how the fundamental motif answers the categorical question.

While Nygren is likely correct that the reason a fundamental motif can give organic unity to disparate elements is that it answers some "ultimate question" (Agape and Eros 43) and so places the elements in the context of that question, I do not think, as does Nygren, that the question a particular religious motif answers can be determined by an *a priori* analysis of the category of religion. Nygren argues that each category, or context of meaning[89] (i.e. scientific, ethical, aesthetic, religious, etc.), is governed by a categorical question, so the ethical context of meaning, for instance, is governed by the question concerning the nature of the good. According to Nygren, the religious context of meaning is governed by the question of man's relation to the Eternal, and so he determines that the fundamental motif of any religious phenomenon must be interpreted as an answer to the question of how the Eternal is encountered in concrete existence. However, while I concur the that ethical context of meaning presupposes the category of the good and thus asks "what is good," I do not presume to assert that there is only one religious context of meaning such that all of the historically given phenomena we call religion can be interpreted as providing different answers to the same question. That is, while I agree that there is an ethical category, I would argue that those spiritual

[89] What Nygren means by a context of meaning is quite similar to what Cassirer means by a symbolic form or perhaps to what Wittgenstein means by a language game.

phenomena that we call religion only share, in Wittgenstein's terms, certain family resemblances but no one basic presupposition. To assert that there is one religious category is to delimit what qualifies as religion in such a way as to risk forcing Western, philosophical conceptions of religion onto all the wide variety of religious phenomena.

Therefore, in my adaptation of the method of motif research, I will not concern myself with how the fundamental motif of the New Testament story of redemption answers the religious question. I agree that Nygren's conception of a fundamental motif as an answer to an ultimate question is helpful. However, I will allow the question to which love responds to emerge from my investigation of the texts, noting with Nygren that this answer "need by no means take the form of a theoretical proposition" but may instead involve "a certain attitude toward" the question (Agape and Eros 43).

II. Phenomenological description

In addition to retrieving from the texts a story with the integrity of a whole by the method of motif research, I will describe, in phenomenological terms, the appropriative re-experiencing of an individual who takes seriously this story of redemption. Again, phenomenology is not specifically what Dilthey had in mind by a rule-guided application of the higher forms of understanding. Nonetheless, his description of the higher forms of understanding points in the direction of phenomenological research: Such research indeed requires a rule-guided application of the higher forms of understanding, for phenomenological research, broadly construed, seeks to describe some facet(s) of lived experience.

When using phenomenological research to describe the appropriative re-experiencing of the New Testament story of redemption, it is important that the description not be systematically structured in terms of an already developed analysis of lived experience. It would not do, for instance, to make Heidegger's analysis of Dasein the skeleton to which the description of appropriative re-experiencing is summarily attached by claiming, for example, that inauthentic Dasein is sinful man who is redeemed when he becomes authentic. Such a procedure could provide only an external structure to the story and would mostly likely distort its inner organic coherence. As an alternative to structuring the interpretation around one particular phenomenological description of lived experience, I will use some of the basic phenomenological categories, shared by most, if not all, phenomenologists, as tools to describe the New Testament story of redemption as it is appropriatively re-experienced by someone who takes it seriously. In what follows, I will layout these basic phenomenological categories.

Phenomenological research describes the lived experience of the existing subject, or subjective experience. The phenomenological category of *experience* is twofold: It includes the activity of experiencing (approximately equivalent to what I've been calling subjective, or individual, existing) along with that which is experienced (approximately equivalent to what I've been calling subjective reality). These two aspects of experience are inextricably connected. Hence the one word for both indicates that there is no clear separation between the experiencing (existing) and the experienced (subjective reality).

The experiencing and the experienced, the existing and the subjective reality, belong to the individual, who, in his existing, experiences his subjective reality. Phenomenological research describes this individual—the existing subject—in his

transcendence. Despite the fact that human individuals may be treated as objects and indeed are often described merely as the agglomeration of biological, psychological, and social functions, the existing subject, in his existing, transcends the status of an object. He does not exist as a rock or a house, whose existence, as Heidegger puts it, "can be neither a matter of indifference to them, nor the opposite" (Being and Time 68). The existing subject is more than his objective presence, for, among other things,[90] he can reflect upon his existence, and that existence can become for him an issue. Hence, the existing subject's existence is characterized by specificity and mineness. It is not any existence whatsoever or humankind's existence in general that comes to be an issue for the existing subject but that existence which is his very own. Accordingly, phenomenological research treats the existing subject not as an agglomeration of functions but, in his transcendence, as this specific individual, who extends beyond his objective presence as a psychosomatic, social organism; phenomenological research describes the experience of an "I" who can never be merely an "it" or just anyone at all.

Inasmuch as the existing subject is transcendent, so also is his existence characterized by incomprehensible limits, or *finitude*. The existing subject is inextricably bound to his concrete situation, about which he had no choice, over which he may exert but small and, frequently, inconsequential influence, and which determines, in advance, the scope of possibilities for his existing. So phenomenological research describes the existing subject as he who extends beyond his objective presence but can escape the limits of his concrete situation only in death—which is itself the most inscrutable, inevitable limit placed upon him by his concrete situation.

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[90]Though they do not all describe his transcendence in terms of his concern for his own existence, phenomenologists nevertheless treat the existing subject in his transcendence, i.e. as extending beyond his objective presence, as more than the sum of his biological, psychological, and sociological elements.

To portray the transcendent yet finite character of the existing subject, phenomenological research frequently employs the category of *world*. The existing subject does not exist in his concrete situation as a rock exists in its surrounding environment; rather, his existence is characterized by involvement in his world. His world is not simply his surrounding environment nor is it the surrounding environment plus the objects with which it is filled. Though it is also these, his world is more than the container of his existence and the things contained therein: It is that in which he is fully and unreflectively immersed as he carries out his projects; it is the concrete context of meaning in which he participates and lives, responds and acts; and so, it most often appears to him as that which is familiar and understood.[91] In this familiar world, he encounters not sensations of sound or light, the significance of which he must infer, but traffic signals or the blaring of car horns, immediately understood as such. Likewise, this concrete context of meaning includes not merely physical objects but sources of danger or amusement, tools or obstacles that help or hinder him as he carries out his tasks, and even ideal objects such as scientific theories, the economy, or art. Phenomenological research, then, seeks to describe subjective experience in relation to the world—or concrete context of meaning—in which the existing subject lives in thoroughgoing involvement.

The significance of the world is altered according to the *attitude* or *mode of comportment* that orients the subject in and attunes him to his world. To the physicist who adopts the attitude of an objective observer, the world is a mathematical construction of masses, extensions, accelerations, velocities, etc; the hammer is an extended mass, with a specific, measurable quality of hardness, that is capable of receiving or

[91] Though it does not always appear to him thus.

transmitting a certain amount of force. In contrast, the person caught up in an attitude of practical concern (by far the most prevalent attitude) grabs the hammer from its usual place in the toolbox alongside the nails, bangs a nail into the wall, and finally hangs that painting his wife has been after him about for the last two months. Though attitude, or mode of comportment, alters the significance of the world, in his existing, the subject is generally aware only of the way in which the world is given. Phenomenological research, however, seeks to describe the manner in which a particular mode of comportment attunes the existing subject to his world.

Because his world is always an intersubjective world, phenomenological research seeks also to describe the manner in which his attitude orients the existing subject in the world *with others.* Here again, the scientific attitude of the biologist attunes him to a world with specimens of the species *Homo sapiens*, whereas the attitude of practical concern attunes the police detective to a world with victims, suspects, witnesses, medical examiners, assistant district attorneys, etc. Unfortunately, traditional Husserlian or Heideggerian approaches to phenomenological research do not seem to capture, in all its depth and richness, what Sadler describes as "the relational reality of the being of human beings" (98). Though Husserlian phenomenology attempts to describe how the existing subject could be conscious[92] of another as an existing subject and though Heideggerian phenomenology describes Dasein as being-with others, such traditional phenomenological approaches have generally not attended closely to those attitudes that allow for the experience of genuine intimacy with or unreserved openness to others. Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel provide far more dynamic and profound descriptions of those attitudes in which others are given not merely as agents fulfilling roles (checkout

[92] Or, rather, how consciousness constitutes the other as an existing subject

clerk, relative, teacher, colleague, etc.) in a communal world but as participants in "the deeply interpersonal sphere of reality" (Sadler 95). Accordingly, in my description of the appropriative re-experiencing of the New Testament story of redemption, I will include in the phenomenological category, *with others*, insights from thinkers, such as Buber and Marcel, who are not typically classified as phenomenologists, but whose methodological approach is nonetheless phenomenological.

The foregoing outline of basic phenomenological categories indicates the manner in which a phenomenological description of the appropriative re-experiencing of the New Testament story of redemption is to proceed. When I say that someone who takes seriously the New Testament story of redemption appropriatively re-experiences it, I had better not mean that that person lives as if she were, in all actuality, walking around in first century Galilee, wearing leather-thong sandals and carrying a wineskin, trailing after Jesus, conversing with Peter, and breaking bread with Mary Magdalene. What I must mean, then, is that *she appropriates into her existing those attitudes or modes of comportment* that belong to the sinner who is redeemed by Jesus the Christ in and through love. Hence, phenomenological research will proceed by describing those attitudes through the appropriation of which the story is taken seriously. Phenomenological research will describe these attitudes insofar as they are the attitudes of a transcendent yet finitely existing subject, who is involved in the world with others and whose attitudes or modes of involvement in the world give to the world and to his relations with others now this and now that significance. Inevitably, since they are inextricably connected, the description of the attitude or mode of comportment will also be a description of the significance of the self and the world with others as it is given in

that attitude. Thus the phenomenological description of the appropriative re-experiencing of the New Testament story of redemption should capture the twofold meaning of experience by describing the activity of re-experiencing—involvement in the world as it is oriented by the appropriated attitudes—in its relation to that which is experienced—the world and the entirety of subjective reality (which will include, in addition to the world, the sense of self) as given in those attitudes appropriated from the New Testament story of redemption.

In the previous chapters, I have made much of the distinction between the objective attitude of a scientist or metaphysician, who observes the world as if from the outside, and the attitude from which emerges existential concern. Further, I have conjectured that Christianity should be interpreted as an expression of the latter type of attitude. At the same time, I have emphasized that I wish to approximate both an appropriate interpretation of the New Testament story of redemption, as it is presented in the texts, and an accurate description of the attitude of the individual who takes that story seriously. Both endeavors require a certain amount of objectivity. Consequently, my attempt to provide an accurate description of the attitude that gives rise to existential concern, as it is expressed in the New Testament story of redemption may give rise to some questions: In order to describe *accurately* that attitude from which existential concern emerges, is it necessary to take on the attitude of the metaphysician or scientist, who abstracts from existence in order to achieve objective validity? And if so, how, by abstracting from existence, can I describe that which can never be understood in the abstract?

Phenomenology, insofar as it abstracts from existence, in order to describe it, yet seeks to point back to the concretely existing individual whose existence is characterized by mineness. Science and metaphysics, on the other hand, do not attempt to point back to that concrete existence which is my very own. In this sense, phenomenological objectivity is different from scientific or metaphysical objectivity. Notwithstanding, in striving for an accurate phenomenological description of the subjective experience of existential concern, any hermeneutic method treads on tenuous ground. To describe, from the attitude of an observer, that which is precisely not an object to be described is necessarily to alter in description that which is described. Similarly, phenomenology must describe that which has the character of mineness without describing any specific individual's actual experience. Perhaps the way to remain balanced on such tenuous ground is to recognize that the phenomenologist, like the poet, who succeeds in evoking in the reader that sense of subjective reality which was to be described has not failed to provide an "objectively" accurate description. Accordingly, an objectively accurate description of the appropriative re-experiencing of the New Testament story of redemption is one that evokes in its reader the sense of subjective reality expressed in that story.

III. Incorporation of phenomenological description into motif research

It would, perhaps, be more straightforward were I to conduct the motif research entirely separately from and prior to any phenomenological description. Such a manner of proceeding would allow me to delineate clearly between that re-experiencing through which I hope to retrieve from the New Testament texts a story with the integrity of a

vitally connected whole and my description of that re-experiencing through which the person who takes Christianity seriously appropriates the story of redemption. By and large, this is the methodological procedure I will adopt. However, in the early stages of the motif research, specifically in the stage where I collect and provide an initial discussion of the various elements of the redemptions story, I occasionally describe these elements in phenomenological terms.

I propose to use some phenomenological description to supplement the early stages of motif research for two interrelated reasons:

The first concerns Dilthey's claim that from expressions of lived experience there arises "in the confines between knowing and doing a sphere in which life discloses itself at a depth inaccessible to observation, reflection, and theory" (228). If (though both employ a common stock of nouns, verbs, modifiers, grammar, and syntax) liberated expressions of lived experience reveal more of the depths of life than do theoretical expressions, then it is reasonable to expect that expressions of lived experience and theoretical expressions speak different languages, or involve different modes of speaking. Theoretical expressions speak the language of the proposition. Recall, however, my observation from chapter three that there are other languages than the objective language of the proposition and that these different modes of speaking are characterized and differentiated not so much by *what* is said as by *the attitude from which* it is spoken.[93] Accordingly, some limited description of the attitude that characterizes the expressions of certain elements in the story will likely prove fruitful even as I begin to flesh out the rudimentary meaning of each element of the story, before relating it to the whole.

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[93] page 86.

The second reason, which is an extension of the first, concerns the New Testament texts themselves. Given that liberated expressions of lived experience speak a language different from the language of propositions, when interpreting the New Testament story of redemption as such, it makes good sense to pay particular attention to the way narrative, parable, symbol, myth, metaphor, paradox, verse, etc. use the common stock of words to express a spiritual content inaccessible from the attitude that characterizes theoretical expressions. It is unlikely, for instance, that the interpreter will correctly grasp the spiritual content of a paradox, e.g. God on the cross, by attempting to de-paradox it—to understand it in logically normative terms. Equally futile would be an attempt to demythologize mythical language, for it is precisely the mythical language that expresses the spiritual content, nor is that content merely contained in the expression "like the gin is in the bottle in such a way that you can get it out, unadulterated" (Jay 8).[94] Far more than the discursive exegesis of the meanings of the parables, symbols, paradoxes, and myth, will a description of the attitude expressed in such language grant access to the spiritual content of this peculiar love story, whose internal logic can be expressed only in such non-propositional, even mythical modes of speech.

When taken together, these two points indicate the advantages of using some phenomenological description to supplement the motif research. While carrying out the method of motif research, occasional, limited description in phenomenological terms of the attitude that characterizes the expressions of certain elements will provide greater access to the depths and richness of their spiritual content than will an exegesis in which I

[94] Though Jay's comment refers to religious rituals, her insight is nonetheless applicable to textual expressions of lived experience. Just as the meaning of a ritual cannot be extracted from the ritual and still retain its substance, neither can the meaning of a myth, a poem, a play, and so on be extracted from its textual expression and still retain its substance.

attempt to de-paradox, demythologize, or otherwise "pour out" and separate the spiritual content from its "container" i.e. its expression in its textual context. By appending some phenomenological description to the motif research, I hope to aid the reader both in following my retrieval of the story as a whole and in grasping its spiritual content, i.e., the sense of subjective reality expressed in its metaphors, paradoxes, and mythical language.

Though I here indicate a significant difference between my methodological procedure and the program of demythologization, I hesitate even to bring up the subject of myth, for there is no scholarly consensus as to what myth is. There are many, some compatible others mutually exclusive, conceptions of myth. Perrin and Duling present four different conceptions of myth: They indicate that Strauss, in his two-volume *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, understands myth as "a narrative embodiment of an idea" (48). According to these authors, Strauss' understanding of myth is taken over by Bultmann when he speaks of myth as "a story about the 'other side' [*Jenseits*] told in terms of 'this side' [*Dieseits*]" (49). Perrin and Duling compare the Straussian conception of myth with Eliade's conception of myth as both the narration of a sacred history that took place in a primordial time and a renewal and return to the beginning through the recollection and reenactment of the sacred history. Perrin and Duling also discusses Ricouer's conception of myth presented in *The Symbolism of Evil*. According to them, Ricouer accepts Eliade's view but appends to it the idea that, in the modern world, myth has a symbolic function. Finally, Perrin and Duling present their own understanding of myth: "Myths are narratives that express in symbolically rich language human experiences that resist expression in any objective, descriptive language" (51).

Barr adds at least two further conceptions of myth to the list: He writes that certain scholars of religion understand the term 'myth' to refer to "a story so true that it determines the truth of other stories and events. It is a world-making story" (413). He adds to this conception his own understanding of myth as that which allows "the believer to experience the world as it ought to be and to reshape the lived world so that it makes sense in terms of the mythic world" (413). With respect to the Straussian conception of myth taken up by Bultmann, it is easy to understand how a project of demythologizing could get off the ground; for according to that conception, the idea embedded within the narration is the substance of the myth. On the other hand, this Straussian conception of myth does not necessarily legitimate such a project, for if Perrin and Duling's understanding of myth is at all correct, then the idea embodied by the myth is not expressible except as myth.

There is good reason to adopt Perrin and Duling's view that mythical language expresses human experiences that resist expression in objective language. As Henderson points out, a commentary on a masterpiece of literature "can never substitute for the original" (31). Analogously, a demythologized exegesis of the good news of the Gospel cannot substitute for the rich, mythical language in which that good news is expressed; the spiritual content of mythical language cannot be separated from the mythical language without substantially altering that content. Funk provides the basic reasoning for these types of claims when he writes that the mood induced by poetry, narrative, or parable may convey "a vision of that which cannot be conveyed by prosaic or discursive speech" (136). Funk's reasoning coupled with my analyses of modes of speaking and liberated expressions of lived experience suggests that mere exegetical commentary does

not speak to the depths and richness of lived experience expressed in such liberated expressions.

In order not to cover over the spiritual content with too much exegesis, I incorporate some phenomenological description in my motif research, proceeding according to the following steps: (1) identification of the elements of the story; (2) identification of the texts pertinent to each element; (3) preliminary discussion of the meaning of each element with respect to the relevant texts and occasionally to the attitudes that characterize the expression of the spiritual content in those texts; (4) narration of the redemption story in terms the fundamental motif as this motif joins all of the elements into a vitally connected whole; (5) phenomenological description of the story as whole in terms of the attitudes, modes of comportment, and subjective reality of someone who appropriates that story into his existence. Steps one through four present that re-experiencing through which I retrieve from the New Testament texts a redemption story with the continuity of a whole. Step five provides the description of the appropriative re-experiencing of someone who takes this story seriously. Though step five contains the phenomenological research proper, step three will also contain some phenomenological description of the attitudes that characterize the expression of the various elements of the redemption story.

IV. Concluding remarks on methodology

The hermeneutic framework established in this chapter should yield an interpretation of the New Testament story of redemption in light of which it will be possible to determine whether or not the honest and rigorous thinker can take Christianity

seriously. More precisely, it will be possible to determine, based on this hermeneutic framework, whether or not the New Testament story of redemption is an expression of existential concern that offers to the question of existence a response which could be considered a form of honest and rigorous thought. As implied in the first examination of the pre-understanding, a response to the question of existence belongs to honest and rigorous thought when it is a manner of involvement in the concrete situation that (a) neither ignores, by retreating into the familiar attitude of practical concern, nor covers over, through recourse to metaphysical or scientific abstraction, the subjective reality of the contingency and senselessness of existence, as it is given in the experience of existential concern; (b) does not deny the existence in question (the one that is my very own) by giving in to suicide, prolonged despair, overriding apathy, nihilism, and so on; and (c) is a truth that I am with my entire being—not a truth asserted in the language of propositions, but a truth uttered in a language[95] characterized by an attitude of unyielding self-disclosure and unreserved participation. Determining whether or not the New Testament story of redemption is something an honest and rigorous thinker can take seriously means determining whether or not the languages or modes of speaking expressed therein address the question of existence and are characterized by an attitude of self-disclosure and unconditioned involvement.

[95] Or mode of speaking, which, recall, is characterized not so much by *what* is said but more importantly by *the attitude from which* what is said is spoken, and so modes of speaking are as much manners of existing as of speaking.

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Part Three
Introduction

The purpose of this third and final part is twofold: To retrieve and narrate the New Testament story of redemption and to describe in phenomenological terms the lived experience of someone who takes this story seriously by appropriating those attitudes or modes of comportment that belong to the sinner who is redeemed by Jesus the Christ in and through love. Once I have achieved these two aims, it will be possible to decide whether or not this story is an expression of existential concern in which love serves as a true response to that concern, i.e., it will be possible to determine whether or not Christianity, understood in terms of the New Testament story of redemption, is something the honest and rigorous think can take seriously.

Chapter Six

The New Testament Story of Redemption and a Phenomenology of Redeeming Love

> *"Religious genius is not to be found in the dreams of sentimental souls about otherworldliness; rather, life itself experienced according to its true nature—full of hardship and a singular blend of suffering and happiness throughout—points to something strange and unfamiliar, as if it were coming from invisible sources, something pressing in on life from outside, yet coming from its own depths."*
>
> —Wilhelm Dilthey

In my development of my hermeneutic framework in chapter five, I laid out the steps through which I retrieve the New Testament story of redemption and describe the lived experience of someone who appropriates the attitudes of a sinner redeemed by love: (1) identification of the elements of the story; (2) identification of the texts that express these elements; (3) preliminary discussion of the meaning of each element with respect to the relevant texts, including some phenomenological description of the attitudes intimated in the expressions of each element; (4) narration of the redemption story in terms the fundamental motif that joins all of the elements into a vitally connected whole; and (5) phenomenological description of the whole story in terms of the lived experience of someone who appropriates that story into his existence.

In this chapter, following these five steps, I present the retrieved story and the description of the lived experience of the redeemed. Steps one through four concern the retrieval. Though these four steps constitute the motif research with which I will retrieve the New Testament story of redemption, the inclusion of some phenomenological description at step three results in a phenomenological variety of motif research. Step

five, the phenomenological research proper, provides the full description of the appropriative re-experiencing of this story.

I. Step one: Identification of the story's elements

The elements of the New Testament story of redemption can be identified by unpacking the idea of a redemption story. Two of the most basic aspects of any story are its characters and its plot, which is generally structured around a conflict and its resolution. So, to unpack the idea of a redemption story is to ask about the characters, the conflict, and the resolution: With respect to the characters, who is redeemed and who redeems him? With respect to the conflict, from what is he redeemed and in what manner? With respect to the resolution, what is the end result of redemption and how do the characters finally stand in relation to each other?

Answering these questions will provide the elements of the New Testament story of redemption. As to the characters, the sinner is redeemed by Jesus the Christ, or Messiah, who is the Son of God and Emmanuel—God with us. As to the conflict, the sinner is redeemed from sin, which holds him captive and consigns him to death, and this redemption is effected by God's freely given love, embodied in the person of Jesus—in his life, ministry, and teaching as well as in his death and resurrection; through grace the redeemer offers himself up as the incarnation of God's redeeming love, and through grace the redeemed accepts the gift of redeeming love, entering into faith. As to the resolution, the sinner, freed from captivity to sin, is transformed—he is a new creation, following Jesus in the life of love; he thus becomes an adopted child of God and heir to the kingdom of God. Frequently, throughout the New Testament, certain elements of the

redemption story are presented in metaphors, for example, the restoration of the sick to health or the finding of something that was lost. Attending, on occasion, to these metaphorical counterparts in the preliminary discussion of the individual elements is therefore not out of place. Accordingly, I here list the elements of the New Testament story of redemption, noting, when appropriate, a few of their symbolic counterparts:

1. The sinner, or depending on the metaphor, the lost, the sick, the fallen, and so on
2. Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, savior, Son of God, the way, the lamb of God, Son of Man, Emmanuel, bread of life, and so on
3. Sin, captivity, death, darkness, the world
4. God's love for the sinner
5. Jesus' life—his teaching and ministry
6. Jesus' death and resurrection
7. Grace and faith,
8. Transformation, new creation, child of God, life of love, eternal life, kingdom of God, and so on

Reducing this number of elements by combining some of them into related categories will make for a more efficient, and equally satisfactory, treatment of them. Elements associated with the sinner will all be treated under the same category. Rather than treating the Messiah separately, this element will be treated under the category of Jesus' life and ministry as well as under the category of Jesus' death and resurrection. Similarly, as Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection is the embodiment of God's love for the sinner, and as God's love for the sinner is given freely in grace, God's redeeming love will be treated under the categories of Jesus' life, his death and resurrection, and also grace and faith. Thus, in order to simplify the forthcoming discussion of the individual elements, the eight previously identified elements are organized into the following five categories:

1. The sinner
   a. Sin and symbolic counterparts

b. Captivity
c. Death, the wages of sin

2. Jesus' life
   a. Teaching and ministry (Though to be sure some of his teachings will be about sin, the kingdom of God, faith, etc., and so his teachings will be touched upon under those categories as well. When treated under the category of Jesus' life, I will present the general thrust of his teaching with respect to each New Testament voice that expresses it.)
   b. The Messiah and symbolic counterparts
   c. God's love for the sinner
3. Jesus' death and resurrection
   a. The Messiah and symbolic counterparts
   b. God's love for the sinner
4. Grace and faith,
   a. God's love for the sinner
5. A new creation, life of love, heir to the kingdom of God, and symbolic counterparts

II. Step two: Identification of the New Testament texts that express these elements

Of course, the whole of the New Testament is not dedicated to narrating or explicating the story of redemption. Indeed, many of the New Testament texts, especially the epistolary writings, deal with issues that arose as the Christian communities struggled with the practical concerns of living in light of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection and with the delay of the *Parousia*.[96] On the other hand, several of the epistles, without explicitly narrating a redemption story, clearly presuppose one, and so numerous passages therein implicitly communicate a redemption story. Other texts present the redemption story as part a wider narrative, i.e. a narrative of Jesus' life or of the formation of the early church. Accordingly, though I do not address every passage or

[96] The second coming, as it is referred to in New Testament scholarship

even every text in the New Testament, my selection is not a cafeteria-style, i.e., based solely on what looks appetizing. For the purposes of this project, I am concerned only with those texts that communicate, implicitly or explicitly, the redemption story. My decision to focus on particular passages within these texts reflects that concern as well, for the passages on which I focus are representative of a particular author's understanding of one of the elements of the redemption story.

In order to do justice to the plurality of the New Testament voices, I will proceed by discussing each of the elements as it is portrayed by each of the authors who give it expression. Before I move on to the preliminary discussion of the individual elements, then, I need to identify the various New Testament voices and discuss the relevance of each to the story of redemption.

The earliest New Testament texts are Paul's epistles, written, scholars speculate, from approximately 50 to 60 C.E. Seven of the twenty-seven New Testament texts are undisputedly attributed to Paul: 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, and Romans. Each letter, with the exception of Philemon, which is addressed to an individual, is written to a Gentile Christian community. With the exception of Romans, the communities to whom he addresses his letters are ones that he visited as teacher and missionary. Paul's voice stands out as one of the most prominent in the New Testament, and it is possible to retrieve from his epistles much of the redemption story they presuppose.

Though there is residual debate, most scholars now agree that six of the letters traditionally attributed to Paul, 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, are pseudonymous, likely written by Paul's followers after his death.

According to Barr, Colossians and Ephesians "represent one of the dominant directions in which the traditions of Paul were carried by many of his followers" (167). These two letters show a concern for household instruction and management, lacking in the undisputed letters, presuppose the existence of a universal church, and emphasize cultural accommodation and moral accomplishment in ways that are not entirely compatible with the views expressed in the undisputed letters. Likewise 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus represent another direction in which Paul's followers took his teaching. The emphasis in these letters is in providing pastoral advice for the care of the church, and so scholars refer to them as the pastoral letters. These two trajectories of Pauline thought can thus be considered as two additional New Testament voices.

Though the synoptic Gospels—Mark, Matthew, and Luke—have striking similarities, each presents a distinctive New Testament voice. Most scholars maintain that the Gospel of Mark is the earliest gospel, suggesting either that it was written just prior to or just after the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 C.E. This dating fits well with the cautious judgment, accepted by most scholars, that the authors of Matthew and Luke used the Gospel of Mark as source material, for there is reason to believe that both Matthew and Luke were written after the destruction of the temple. Although the authors of Matthew and Luke appear to share source material (the Gospel of Mark as well as a hypothetical sayings of Jesus source, known as Q),[97] each arranges and interprets this material in different ways, and each contributes his own material, likely handed down from the oral traditions of his own particular Christian community. Thus the voices of

[97] The Q source is postulated to account for the nearly verbatim overlaps present in Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark. Though it is possible that either Matthew or Luke used the other as a source, there is good reason to suppose that these two gospels were written independently of one another using the same source material. For more on the hypothetical Q source see Fleddermann's Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary or Mack's The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins.

Matthew and Luke differ from each other as well as from Mark. That this is the case is particularly clear with respect to the Gospel of Luke, which is only the first volume of a two volume story of early Christianity. In the second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, the author of Luke picks up his story with the resurrected Jesus ascending on a cloud and tells of the apostle's mission to spread the good news.

Though scholars agree that the Gospel of John has undergone several redactions, making claims about the original text impossible, for the purposes of this project, the Gospel of John presents us with a single New Testament voice. This gospel is widely regarded as the latest written gospel. It differs markedly from the synoptic gospels, most notably in that it presents a highly developed theology, sometimes more reminiscent of Gnosticism than of the theological perspectives presented by the other New Testament voices.

1, 2, and 3 John, however, share a similar theological perspective with the Gospel of John, and though most scholars do not hold that the gospel writer also composed these epistles, many suggest that 1, 2, and 3 John were produced by the same early Christian community that produced the Gospel of John but from later in its history. Though it is not certain, it is likely that these three letters were written by the same person, possibly an elder in the Johannine community. Thus these three can be taken together as forming an individual New Testament voice, the voice of the Johannine "school" of early Christian thought.[98]

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[98] The Revelation of John is considered by some scholars to have been authored by a member of the Johannine School of Christianity, but other scholars dispute this claim (Barr 412). Though the Revelation certainly speaks to the New Testament story of redemption, it has, throughout history of Christianity up to the present day, been neglected by a significant portion of Christian circles. Moreover, Barr notes that, "Even those [contemporary Christian circles] who are fascinated by this work rarely claim to understand it completely" (378). Due to its neglected status and largely impenetrable content, this book contributes little to the Christian understanding, broadly speaking, of the New Testament story of redemption. I have,

Several other New Testament letters, James, Jude, Hebrews, and 1 and 2 Peter, present additional diverse voices from early Christianity. Barr, noting that they stem from "that segment of the early church we designate Jewish Christianity" (420), refers to them as the Jewish Epistles. Accordingly, these books present us with the voices of early Jewish Christianity, and Hebrews stands out as the voice of a Hellenistic Jewish Christian community.

Several of these New Testament voices contribute significantly to the New Testament account of redemption, whereas others have almost nothing to say on the topic. The voices of Paul and the gospel writers express the majority of the content of the redemption story, and so these are most relevant to my project. The voice presented in Hebrews is relevant as well, for this epistle makes noteworthy contributions to the New Testament story of redemption. With the exception of Hebrews, most of the voices of Jewish Christianity express nothing or little about the redemption story,[99] and so they will not figure into the forthcoming discussion. The two trajectories of Pauline thought, noted above, either have little to say about the redemption story or share Paul's conception of it. I will, therefore, have little occasion to discuss these voices. The case is similar with the voice of the Johannine School in relation to the Gospel of John, and so this school's contribution to the redemption story will be discussed only briefly.

III. Step three: Preliminary discussion of the elements of the story

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therefore, not included Revelation in my presentation of the New Testament voices, nor have I included it in the motif research proper.

[99] For instance, Barr notes that James "is so completely in the Jewish tradition that some argue that it was originally a Jewish tract, now rewritten to insert a few Christian references" (426).

This section is divided according to the five categories previously listed: Sin and the sinner; Jesus' life and ministry; Jesus' death and resurrection; grace and faith; and finally the new creation and heir to the kingdom of God. I here present a synopsis of the way each relevant New Testament voice understands the elements contained in that category. The analysis in this section is, of necessity, rudimentary and fragmentary, lacking cohesion, for in this section, I am concerned only to extract the various elements of the story from each of the relevant voices. It is each element's relation to the story as a whole—a relation provided by the unifying work of the fundamental motif—that gives the story its "own inner organic coherence" (Meaning and Method 371), and as this relation will not be considered until step four, the story's inner coherence will become entirely visible only in that step.

A. Sin and the Sinner

Rarely does any New Testament author directly state his understanding of sin or of what it means to be a sinner. Nonetheless, the concept of sin is important for all of the New Testament voices previously identified as the most significant contributors to the redemption story: Paul, all four gospel writers, and the author of Hebrews. For the most part, each author simply presupposes a certain understanding of sin, presumably the one shared by his early Christian community, and so it is necessary to tease out the conception of sin underlying each author's presentation of the redemption story.

Paul's conception of sin is the most readily ascertainable. For Paul, sin is clearly *not* equivalent to the moral trespass of God's law,[100] and so for Paul, what it means to be a sinner is not simply to be a person who breaks God's decrees. Indeed, in Philippians

[100] Though he occasionally speaks of individual sins in this way.

3:6,[101] Paul declares that, "as to righteousness under the law," he is "blameless," yet throughout his letters he unequivocally identifies himself as a sinner. In Romans 7:19, for instance, he recounts a key consequence of his status as a sinner: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Though this verse may seem a mere admission that he cannot always fulfill the requirements of the law, in light of Philippians 3:6, Romans 7:19 requires a more thoughtful analysis. Toward this end, Jewett observes that "what 7:19 describes is not an inability to obey the law as Paul understood it, but rather the failure of zealous obedience to produce the good" (97). Paul, prior to his conversion, was a self-proclaimed zealot for the law. He put forth every effort into maintaining his status under the law and into preserving the law against those who would destroy it (i.e. the followers of Christ). Through obedience to the law, he sought to bring about good; by zealously defending the law he sought to help bring about God's kingdom. However, the good that he willed to do through his zealous obedience, he did not do. Rather, his zeal for the law caused him to persecute the heirs to God's kingdom—the followers of Christ. Because he was a sinner, his fervent striving and his righteousness under the law could neither make him good nor bring about the good he sought.

So if, for Paul, sin is not moral trespass and a sinner is not simply a person who breaks the law, then what is sin and what does it mean to be a sinner? Paul describes sin as spiritual power that entered the world through Adam and enslaved all of Adam's descendents; it is a power of destruction that holds Adam's progeny captive, spreading

[101] Philippians 3:4b-6: " If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless."

death to all.[102] Thus to be a sinner is to be held captive by this spiritual power. Though Paul describes the sinner, enslaved by the destructive power of sin, as being "of the flesh" (Romans 7:14), he does not mean that the body itself holds the sinner captive. The phrase "of the flesh" (*sarkikŏs*) refers neither to the sinner's embodied existence as such nor to the wickedness of the mortal body;[103] rather it indicates the particular destructive attitude in which the sinner is held captive. The sinner sets his mind on things of the flesh, and the mind so set belongs to death.[104]

The expressions, "to be of the flesh" and "to live according to the flesh," then, can be described in terms of a particular attitude, or mode of comportment that orients the sinner in his world. Despite Paul's emphasis on flesh, the mindset to which the sinner is bound is not only the attitude of a person given over to carnal passion for food, drink, sex, and the like but is as well the seemingly innocuous, everyday attitude of the individual, who, existing "according to human inclinations" (1 Corinthians 3:3),[105] seeks his own. The Pauline conception of the sinner thus echoes the words of Isaiah: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all *turned to our own way*" (Isaiah 53:6; emphasis mine). Whether he seeks his own bodily pleasure, as the glutton, his own happiness, achievement, and status, or even his own righteousness, as the zealot for the law, what

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[102] Romans 3:9: "What then? Are we [Jews] any better off [than the Gentiles]? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin." Romans 5:12: ". . . sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all . . . ." Romans 7:14 "For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin"

[103] Indeed Romans 8:11 makes clear that, God gives life even to the mortal bodies of those who are redeemed: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you."

[104] Romans 8:5-6: "For those who live according to the flesh, set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace."

[105] 1 Corinthians 3:3b-4: "For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, 'I belong to Paul,' and another, 'I belong to Apollos' are you not merely human?" Paul is here suggesting that when the Corinthians create divisions and rivalries in their church based on the status of individual members i.e. on whether the members were followers (possibly converts) of Paul or Apollos they are living according to the flesh.

characterizes the existence of the sinner is his orientation in his world. He endeavors, for his own sake and by his own power, to establish for himself a secure and satisfying existence. Accordingly, his orientation in the world is that of someone who is constantly looking inward, not in the sense that through introspection he turns away from the world, but in the sense that the world is for him the place in which he strives to secure his existence and is also the source of materials from which he seeks to construct for himself an edifice of self-worth and fulfillment. However, the world becomes as well that which jeopardizes the security of his existence, hinders his pursuits, prevents him from achieving his ambitions, and perennially threatens to raze his arduously constructed edifice to dust and ashes.

His orientation toward others is similarly inward looking. The people with whom he inhabits this world exist for him as sources of pleasure, providing him amusement, praise, good company, affection, and comfort; yet they exist for him also as sources of enmity, shame, and strife, competing with him for status, resources, and success, standing in his way, scorning or rejecting him, inciting him to anger, provoking in him envy or contempt, doing him harm, or causing him pain. Inasmuch as the world and the other people are sources of security and comfort to the sinner whose existence is characterized by this inward looking attitude, so also are they sources of peril, discord, and devastation. And so it is that the sinner, held captive in this common, everyday attitude, experiences an existence cast in the abiding shadow of strife and destruction—of death.

In the Gospel of John also sin is presented in terms of that which enslaves the sinner (8:31-34).[106] Specifically though, for the author of John, *the world* is what holds

[106] John 8:31-34, "Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' They answered him,

the sinner captive. Sin is the world that does not and cannot recognize Jesus for who he is, even as he dwells in it. John 1:10 announces that Jesus "was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him" (1:10). Similarly, at 8:43 Jesus asks those who reject him, "Why do you not understand what I say?" and he answers for them, "It is because you cannot accept my word." Because Jesus is identified as the Word (*logos*) incarnate,[107] their failure to accept his word implies their failure to accept him as the Word that brings life to the world. This failure is the sin of the world; it is what gives rise to the world of sin. So at 15:22, Jesus declares, "If I had not come and spoken to them,[108] they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin." Jesus came to the world, and the world rejected him, revealing itself as sin.

John's concepts of sin and the world are further expressed in terms of spatial and symbolic dualisms. There are two levels of existence: a below, the ordinary, human world, and an above, whence Jesus descends into the world. Jesus is the light of the world shining into its darkness. Sin is death, while belief in Jesus is eternal life. John's conception of the world in which the sinner is enslaved is, then, a world of ordinary human existence, lost in darkness and refusing the light, perishing but rejecting the gift of life.

'We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying "You will be made free"?' Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.'"

[107] John 1:1: "In the beginning was the word (*logos*) and the word was with God and the word was God." John 1:14: "And the word became flesh and lived [lit. pitched a tent] among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

[108] In this passage, the third person plural is used in conjunction with 'the world,' to indicate those who belong to the world: "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember that word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin" (John 15:18-22).

The meaning of sin in the synoptic gospels is more difficult to trace. All three express the story of redemption in terms of being brought out of exile, relating it closely to God's redeeming activity in the history of the Israelites. To be a sinner is to be in exile; though there are subtle differences in the way each of the three expresses this state of exile.

For Mark, to be in exile is to be under the rule of a foreign power. Just as the Jews in exile were under the power the Egyptians, Babylonians, and now the Romans, so the sinner is ruled by a hostile power. Thus Hays writes, "When the curtain rises on Mark's drama . . . the people are in a state of powerlessness, confusion, and need; they are 'like sheep without a shepherd' (6,34 *sic*)" (55). The sinner in exile—the lost, the sick, the suffering—is powerless in the grasp of this despotic power.

In Matthew as well, Jesus is to bring his people out of exile by saving them from their sins. In the first chapter of Matthew, an angel assures Joseph that Mary's child "will save his people from their sins" (1:21) and in the following chapter, Mary and Joseph's flight to Egypt and subsequent return to Nazareth places this reference to salvation from sins in the context of Israel's exile in and rescue from Egypt. Accordingly, Matthew also describes sinners in their exile as lost, sick, powerless, and in need of mercy. So Jesus proclaims, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (9:12-13). Jesus has come to call the lost, the sick, the sinner out of exile under sin and to show the path of mercy leading to the Promised Land.

The scathing irony in the proclamation at 9:12-13,[109] delivered to the Pharisees after they challenge Jesus' practice of eating with tax collectors and "sinners," further reveals something of Matthew's conception of sin. It is not only the tax collectors and prostitutes who are lost but the Pharisees—scrupulous followers of the law—have gone astray as well. For, as Hays points out, the expression, "I desire mercy not sacrifice" is taken from Hosea 6:6, and "If the Pharisees go to learn what Hos 6.6 means, they will have to read more than one verse. If they read the whole chapter, they will find there . . . a portrayal of a merciful, healing God who wants his people to show mercy, not contempt, to those who have gone astray" (66). The Pharisees, forgetful of God's mercy, are no less lost than the "sinners." Indeed, they are probably even more lost, as they do not recognize that they have gone astray. So this passage leads Matthew's audience to understand that, in and of itself, strict adherence to the law cannot keep anyone free from sin's rule; without God's mercy all are lost and sick, in need of a physician.

The Luke-Acts understanding of sin is similarly expressed in terms of exile in a foreign land. In Acts 7, the early Christian martyr, Steven, recounts how God, through his prophet Moses, reached out to gather his people to himself, bringing them out of Egypt and how, as they traveled through the wilderness, "in their hearts, they turned back to Egypt" (Acts 7:39) away from God's outstretched arms and "reveled in the works of their hands" (Acts 7:41)—the images they made to worship. And so God delivered them over to their worship; again they were exiled from God and lost in the wilderness. The sinner, as the Israelites, has turned back to Egypt in his heart and has been delivered over

[109] Matthew 9:10-13: "And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' But when he heard this, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'"

to the wilderness of his sins. Lost in "darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79), the sinner is made captive, blind, oppressed by the wickedness that reigns in the wilderness.[110]

Likewise, in Hebrews the meaning of sin is expounded upon through the story of the Israelites' rebellion from God in the wilderness.[111] Here, sin is described as turning away from God in disobedience. The sinner has transgressed against God and deserves to pay the penalty for his transgressions. Though the voice of Hebrews depicts sin primarily in terms of rebellion and transgressions, the understanding of the sinner as a captive is not entirely absent, for Christ has come to "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death" (2:15). Nor is the idea that sin is something capable of acting upon and within the mind of the sinner (and not simply an action committed by the sinner) entirely absent, as the author warns his audience not to become "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (3:13).

B. Jesus' life and ministry

While some of the New Testament epistles mention Jesus' life, i.e., his teaching and his works, they do so only in passing. For the most part, the redemption story underlying the epistolary writings attributes Jesus' redemptive work to his death on the cross and his resurrection. In the gospels, however, Jesus' teaching and his ministry play a significant role in the story of redemption. Accordingly, in my discussion of this

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[110] Luke 4:18-19. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"

[111] Hebrews 3:7-10: "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors put me to the test, though they had seen my works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, "They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways."'"

element, I need only treat the four gospels' accounts of the role of Jesus' life and ministry in the redemption story.

Concerning Jesus' ministry and teaching, the narrative in the Gospel of Mark introduces themes common to all three synoptic gospels. My discussion of Mark in this section will treat only two of these themes: The representation of Jesus as an anointed king in the line of David and the depiction of Jesus as a teacher who challenges the everyday human way of understanding. These two themes are particularly significant in all three synoptic versions of the redemption story.

In Mark, subtle allusions to Jewish scripture mark Jesus as the Messiah, or Christ—an anointed king in the line of David—who ushers in the kingdom of God. For example, as Hays observes, "The echo of Ps. 2 in Mk. 1.11 turns the baptism of Jesus into a disguised royal anointing, and Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom follows, implicitly, as the assertion of his own claim to royal sovereignty" (61).[112] Accordingly, the first half of Mark's narrative presents Jesus as a man of great authority and power. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus goes to the synagogue in Capernaum and teaches there. Those who hear him speak are "astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (1:21-22). He follows his authoritative teaching with powerful works. He casts out demons; "he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (1:27).[113] He heals the sick, even those the physicians are powerless to

[112] Mark 1:9-11: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Psalm 2:7-8: "I will tell of the decree of the Lord: he said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.'"

[113] Again in chapter 5 Jesus heals a demon possessed man, and in 9:14-29, he exorcises an unclean spirit from a young boy.

help.[114] He makes the lame to walk[115] and gives sight to the blind.[116] He feeds thousands of hungry people with only a few loaves of bread and some fish.[117] He has "the authority on earth to forgive sins" (2:10) and "even the wind and sea obey him" (4:40). "Who is this man with such power and authority?" Mark's characters continually wonder. Mark's audience, however, by paying close attention to the subtle allusions to Hebrew scripture, can recognize Jesus as the anointed king who will restore God's kingdom and who thus has the power and authority of God on earth.[118]

Not only is Jesus one who teaches with authority, but also he is one whose teachings challenge conventional attitudes. When the Pharisees question Jesus as to why his disciples have unlawfully plucked grain on the Sabbath, Jesus answers, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath" (2:23-28). Mark 7:1-23 relates a similar altercation. In this case, the Pharisees notice "that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them" (7:2). So they confront Jesus, asking, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" (7:5) Jesus answers by addressing the crowd: "Listen, to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile" (7:14-15). To grasp fully the significance of Jesus' challenge to the Pharisees' understanding of the law and traditions, it is necessary

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[114] For instance, Mark 5:25-29: "Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease."

[115] For instance, in 2:11-12 he heals a paralytic: "'I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.' And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'"

[116] Mark 8:22-26 and 10:43-52

[117] In Mark 6:30-44, Jesus feeds over 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. Again in Mark 8:1-9, he feeds over 4,000 with seven loaves and a few small fish. In both cases, all the people ate and were filled.

[118] For a more detailed discussion of the allusions to Hebrew scripture that mark Jesus as a Davidic king, see Hays 59-63

to disregard the modern view of Pharisees. As Thiselton observes, "Pharisaism is nowadays so nearly synonymous with self-righteousness and hypocrisy that, far from suffering a sense of shock at the verdict of Jesus, the modern audience expects it" (15). The crowd to whom Jesus directs his remarks, however, would consider the Pharisees to be holy, pious men—servants of the Most High who strive earnestly to keep his laws and do his will. For the mere son of a carpenter to gainsay such venerable religious men is scandalizing; rather than reinforcing (as it does for the modern reader) the customary notion that hypocrisy is loathsome, Jesus' opposition to the Pharisees shocks his listeners (at least those who have ears to hear) into radically questioning the meaning of living according to their established religious laws and traditions.

Nor does Jesus challenge only the Pharisees. His challenge extends even to his twelve disciples: The brothers, James and John, request that Jesus, in his future time of glory, grant them to sit one at his right hand and the other at his left (10:35-37). Upon hearing of this request, the other ten become angry; presumably each feels he deserves an equal share of Jesus' glory (10:41). In response to this conflict, Jesus calls the twelve together and teaches them, saying, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (10:42-43). If the disciples have heard him well, he will have provoked a profound reorientation in their thinking; to share in Jesus' glory is to become a slave. Jesus' teachings, as part of his redeeming activity, thusly reveal that the everyday human way of understanding somehow misses the mark.

The Gospel of Matthew continues the Markan challenge to ordinary human understanding. That Jesus can redeem sinners because he is the fulfillment or completion of all righteousness is a central theme expressed in Matthew's narrative of Jesus' life and ministry. However, in portraying Jesus as the completion of righteousness, Matthew's narrative reveals the way in which what is ordinarily considered righteousness—fastidious obedience to the law—misses the mark. Accordingly, a new conception of righteousness emerges to confront the everyday conception of it.

Righteousness is not to be attained by striving, as the Pharisees and priests do, to establish themselves as good and upright men, as men who deserve "to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces" (23:7). These religious leaders rely on their own efforts to become righteous, and they take much pride in their own righteous accomplishments. Yet, that very righteousness gives way to evil for in their striving, they have become like "whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth" (23:27). They care more for their own righteousness than for mercy or love. They place their trust in their own efforts, failing to see that Jesus alone is the fulfillment of all righteousness. And so, the prostitutes and tax collectors, who have not such a high regard for their own accomplishments, have come to believe in Jesus and are "going into the kingdom of God" ahead even of the chief priests (21:31).

Although Jesus teaches that, by striving to make themselves righteous, the Pharisees and priests fail to understand that only through the redemptive power of Jesus' mercy and love and not through their own efforts will they be able to enter into God's righteousness, Jesus also declares, "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes

and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). What then is this righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees, and how do sinners, prostitutes, and tax collectors come to have it when the holy men do not?

One clue is to be found in 22:40, where Jesus teaches that all the commandments of the law and the prophets hang on the two love commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This notion that love is the crux of the law underscores much of the Gospel of Matthew. For instance, Barton notes that in the Sermon on the Mount, "the 'law and the prophets' (5.17; 7.12) are expounded and elaborated also in terms of love" (129). The implication, then, is that righteousness without love is not righteous, nor is obedience to the law without love obedience.

However, by presenting Jesus as the completion of the law and of all righteousness, the Gospel of Matthew indicates that, to enter the kingdom of heaven, it is necessary to love beyond the requirements of the law. Just as God "makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (5:45), just as Emmanuel enters into fellowship[119] with sinners, so also a child of God loves not only his neighbor, as commanded by law, but his enemy as well. Yet the charge to love beyond the requirements of the law is not a moral imperative or legal decree, obedience to which makes the individual righteous before God, and noting the difference between this charge and a moral imperative or legal decree will provide an additional clue as to why the so-called sinners are entering the kingdom of heaven before the holy men.

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[119] Particularly table fellowship, as in Matthew 9:10-13. See Crossan 66-70 for an informative discussion of the implications of Jesus' open commensality.

Following moral imperatives or obeying legal decrees is a matter of directing the will toward a certain end—to make oneself righteous in the eyes of others or in one's own eyes, to justify oneself before the law or before God, or even, in the recognition of one's own insufficiency and God's mercy, simply to reciprocate, or return God's favor in some small way. In any case, following such commands depends on the self-determination of the individual who wills to follow them, and that self-determination is shaped by what the individual hopes to accomplish or gain. Whatever the specific aim, in obeying such commands, the individual seeks to secure for himself some firm ground, however small, on which to stand before others, before the law, or before God. Not so with the individual who genuinely loves the enemy. Genuine love for the enemy arises from the recognition that in and of himself the individual cannot create any firm ground on which to stand before God—he can neither make himself righteous before God nor even reciprocate God's generous mercy—and from the realization that God loves regardless. The struggle to attain honor comes to an end in the assurance of God's unmerited love. If the sinner trustingly accepts that love—knowing full well that it is not deserved and can never be repaid—and so humbles himself before God, then he cannot but love likewise. The love that the sinner receives freely from Jesus evokes a spontaneous i.e. unwilled response in the form of love that reaches out to call the enemy into fellowship, just as God's love calls the sinner.

The difference, then, between loving the enemy and obeying a moral imperative is the attitude involved in the former. Whereas it is possible to obey a moral imperative in order to earn honor and thus secure one's status before God, love for the enemy springs from the recognition of one's insufficiency, one's wretchedness before God. The

prostitutes and tax collectors, not trusting in their own efforts, have recognized that no amount of striving for righteousness can make them worthy of the kingdom of heaven. So these sinners have released their grip on striving for their own security. They do not attempt to establish their own righteousness nor do they even attempt to repay God for his mercy. Rather, confessing their sinful status, they offer themselves up utterly to God's mercy, relinquishing all striving for security, trusting in Jesus, and adopting the attitude from which they might, in good faith, pray, "Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from evil" (6:9-13). In so praying, the sinners not only confess their insufficiency before God but also their assurance of the Father's love and acceptance of them regardless of their worthiness to receive it. The righteousness that surpasses the righteousness of the Pharisees, the new conception of righteousness that replaces the old, consists in the confession of the vanity of striving to establish for oneself a secure ground upon which to stand before God; the trusting, humble acceptance of God's unmerited love incarnated in the person of Jesus; and the spontaneous response to this love which loves even those one has no reason to love, expecting nothing in return.

In Luke, as well, Jesus' teaching and ministry betray the way in which the ordinary, human orientation to life in the world misses its mark. Luke's narrative progresses as Jesus journeys to Jerusalem, and in this narrative context, the audience learns the cost of walking with Jesus. Jesus' followers must leave everything to follow

him.[120] They must abandon the refuge of their homes and possessions, leaving behind their families and all that ties them to their lives and their pasts.[121] In exchange for all that secures them in this world, they follow Jesus down the road to Jerusalem—a road fraught with conflict, as Jesus and his followers are opposed, ridiculed, and finally betrayed, strewn with suffering, and inclining inexorably toward death. So the narrative of Luke presents the paradoxical lesson of the journey to Jerusalem: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. *For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it*" (9:23; emphasis added). The road to Jerusalem, winding through suffering and veering toward death, is yet the road to salvation and life.

As Nygren reminds Luke's interpreters, however, Jesus' teaching that those who lose their life for his sake shall keep it must not be understood "as if it were merely a prudential rule for the man who wants to be sure of winning out in the end." Jesus' teaching does not imply that "Whereas the world only reckons with outward resources of power, Jesus is supposed to have discovered another and surer way to success, the way of love, of self-denial, of sacrifice." This interpretation of Jesus' paradoxical expression cancels out its radical meaning. For, "what is to be said of a 'sacrifice' so motivated? It is in fact the very opposite of sacrifice. It is simply a refined form of self-assertion, all the more subtle because disguised as self-sacrifice and love" (Essence 125). No, Jesus

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[120] Luke 5:1-11 narrates the calling of Jesus first disciples, the fishermen, Simon, James, and John. 5:11 states, "When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. Similarly, 5:27-28 recounts the calling of Levi, stating, at 5:28, that Levi "got up, left everything, and followed him."

[121] Luke 9:57-62: "As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.' Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

is not here offering his followers a mere lesson in prudence. "Jesus is speaking of really losing, really sacrificing" (Essence 126). The paradox cannot be tempered.

In keeping with this startling conclusion, the Gospel of Luke further intimates the way in which the ordinary human orientation in the world misses its mark. In his everyday existing, the individual seeks to minimize all risk to himself by striving to secure for himself those worldly goods, material or otherwise, which he can use to safeguard his existence against the perils that at any moment threaten his well-being. So the fool in the parable of the rich fool strives to make his life secure, storing up material goods that will keep him well-fed and comfortable for many years,[122] and the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector stores up righteous deeds securing his status against the future judgment.[123] However, the prudent fool's life is demanded of him even as he says to himself, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years," and it is the tax collector, who has delivered himself utterly into God's mercy, not the Pharisee who goes home justified.[124] As Via' analysis demonstrates, these parables illustrate that "existence is gained or lost in the midst of ordinary life, that the

[122] Luke 12:16-20: "Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"'"

[123] Luke 18:9-13: "He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other . . . .'"

[124] It is again well to recall, that Jesus' audience, unlike the present day interpreter, would have expected exactly the opposite, that the pious, zealous keeper of the law would be justified before God rather than the self-proclaimed sinner. Jesus' verdict is shocking and even scandalous; it reverses the established understanding of righteousness and justification before God.

eschatological occurs within the everyday"[125] (106). In the ordinary mode of existing—caught up as it is in securing life—existence is lost. "Such seeking for security is death," Via comments "for in it one becomes the slave of the very realities which he hopes will give him security" (120). Existence is truly gained only when the individual risks his life and all that he is to follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. "Such risking," Via writes, "is life, for in it one is free from the anxious effort to provide one's own security through the world" (120). Via's commentary echoes Jesus' words in Luke 12:25-26: "And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?" In the ordinary human orientation, existence becomes lost in the world; in his endeavor to save his life, he loses it.

In all three synoptic gospels, Jesus' teachings reveal that the ordinary human orientation to the world misses its mark: those who seek, by their own noble efforts and self-reliance, to establish themselves as righteous before God will never be justified; those who seek to save their lives by securing the goods for their well being will lose their lives. All three synoptic authors, however, recount the parable of the sower, [126]

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[125] Via argues that when the parables combine the extraordinary or unexpected with the every day, they express an existential understanding of eschatology: "last things are the existential crises of everyday life" (107).

[126] Mark 4:3-9 presents the parable: "He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundred fold.' And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'"
Mark 4:14-20 interprets the parable allegorically: "The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes ways the world that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the world, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are these sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth and the desire for

acknowledging that Jesus' words of life are lost on most: For as the sower scatters his seed not only on the good soil but also on the path, on the rocky ground, and among the thorns, so Jesus' disseminates his word. Yet, for those few who have ears to hear, Jesus' words elicit a shift in attitude. They reorient the listener in his world, altering the way that the existing subject experiences his subjective reality. What once seemed a meaningful, even estimable, way of living now strikes the listener as futile, perhaps even absurd.

The narrative of Jesus' life and ministry in the Gospel of John differs markedly from the narratives of the synoptic gospels in both plot structure and thematic emphasis. Barr remarks that the Gospel of John in particular stimulates the reader "to reflect on the identity of Jesus, an identity already presented in chapter 1" (340).[127] Throughout the narrative, Jesus' teachings and miraculous signs reveal his identity. To the crowd following Jesus, however, these signs both reveal and hide the true glory and identity of Jesus. The crowd sees the miracle but does not see the sign. For instance, in John 6, the crowd witnesses as Jesus feeds all five thousand of them by breaking five loaves of bread and two fish,[128] but they do not understand that Jesus is "the true bread from heaven . . . which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (6:32-33).[129] Though the crowd fails to see the sign, the narrative may yet reveal to John's readers, if they have

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other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

[127] John 1:1: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God."

[128] The feeding of the five thousand is narrated in John 6:1-14.

[129] John 6:30-36 "So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." ' Then Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.' Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.' "

ears to hear and eyes to see, Jesus' true identity—"the way, the truth, and the life (14:6).[130]

Throughout this gospel, Jesus' identity is described in metaphors. He is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). He is "living water" (4:11), a "spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (4:14). He is "the light of the world," and whoever follows him "will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (8:12). He is "the gate," and whoever enters through him "will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (10:9). He is "the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (10:11). The symbolic representations of Jesus' identity, when contrasted with their literal meanings indicate that Jesus is from above and has descended because of God's love for the world. By focusing on Jesus' identity as the one from above, the author of this gospel indicates that, by descending into the world, the divine Word gathers to himself those whom his Father has given him, showing them that he is way to redemption from sin—the way to eternal life.

C. Jesus' death and resurrection

In all of the relevant New Testament voices, Jesus' death and resurrection serve an important redemptive purpose. While all the voices agree that Jesus gave up his life to save sinners from sin, each communicates the redemptive role of Jesus' death and resurrection in a distinctive manner. Accordingly, in my initial discussion of this element, I discuss its treatment by Paul, all four gospel writers, and the author of Hebrews.

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[130] In John 14:5-7, Jesus teaches his disciples to see his true identity: "Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

For Paul, it is specifically Jesus' death and resurrection that effect redemption from sin. Adam sought to be like God, and his progeny have perpetuated this selfish ambition and vain conceit; each, subjugated to the inexorable power of sin, continues Adam's endeavor to seek after his own. Jesus, however, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave," (Philippians 2:6-7). And in this, as Morna puts it, "obvious contrast between Adam's disobedience and attempt to become like God and Christ's self-emptying" (112) lies the key to Jesus' redemptive power. For Christ's self-emptying did not end when he became a slave in human form. Jesus suffered as well the humiliating death of a slave: "And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7b-8). In emptying himself and dying as a slave—in accepting and bearing the consequences and full weight of sin—"The death he died, he died to sin" (Romans 6:10). In dying to sin, death no longer has dominion over him, and so he is raised to live in God. His death and resurrection are the hope of all the sons and daughters of Adam, held captive by the power of sin and wasting away in the prison of the mind set on the flesh; though by his own efforts, the sinner will never set himself free, he may yet, according to Paul, participate in Jesus' self-emptying death. So Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). By means of this participation in the cross of Christ, the sinner is redeemed from captivity—the spirit of the crucified and risen Christ lives in the redeemed, freeing him from the mind set on the flesh.

Paul's emphasizes that this redeeming self-sacrifice is motivated solely by God's love for sinners. "Paul not only believed that Jesus' death was redemptive," writes Hurtado, "but he was also gripped by it as an act of love for him and for all the redeemed . . . (e.g. Gal 2:19-20, 2 Cor. 5:14-15)" (193).[131] Shaken in the very depths of his being, overcome by the enormity of God's unmerited love for him, he gives himself utterly to the crucified and risen Christ. Those redeemed through this terrible act of love are thus moved to make their lives self-giving acts of love.

Just as Jesus' teachings in the synoptic Gospels disclose the way in which the ordinary human orientation in the world misses its mark, so Jesus' death and resurrection challenge the expectations of the Messiah and the redemption his presence would initiate. Though the different sects of Judaism (the Zealots, Pharisees, Sadducees, etc.) conceptualized the Messiah and his redemptive role differently, "none imagined a Messiah who would suffer" (Barr 269). In its presentation of the passion narrative, therefore, each of the synoptic gospels, in its own way, re-conceptualizes the redemption of God's people.

Whereas the first half of Mark presents Jesus as a powerful teacher and Davidic king with all the authority of God on earth, the second half portrays him as a forlorn and suffering servant. For all his power to still the winds and calm the sea, he cannot compel belief. Only the blind man, Bartimaeous, sees that Jesus is David's heir—the anointed

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[131] Galatians 2:19-20: For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: "For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who died and was raised for them." Also Romans 5:6-8: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

savior of the people.[132] So, the Son of God is rejected and betrayed. He grieves for the suffering and death he must undergo, pleading with God "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (8:36). Hanging on his cross, he is mocked by the chief priests and scribes, derided by passersby, and taunted by those crucified next to him (15:25-32).[133] All but a few women abandon him to his death. Even God forsakes him.[134] Finally, he dies an ignominious death, "to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45).

The charge against him reads, "King of the Jews" (15:26), evoking Mark's central question: Why if he is the savior can he not save himself. Mark's audience is left to wonder how Jesus can be both David's heir with all the authority and power of God on earth and the rejected, suffering servant who cannot so much as compel belief from the people nor save himself from a cruel and humiliating death on a cross. Green provides an appropriately perplexing response, "The key to Mark's narrative is to take it as a narrative, and this narrative *both* affirms that these two presumably competing portrayals are true *and* insists that Jesus' true identity cannot be grasped apart from the correlation of these two. Jesus not only demonstrates power but also experiences the powerlessness of rejection, suffering and death" (150). In Mark's narrative Jesus' identity as the redeemer, requires him to be both equally.

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[132] Mark 10:46-52: "They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'"

[133] Mark 15:29-32: "It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!' In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with him also taunted him."

[134] Mark 15: 34: "At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi lema sachbachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

It is in his death that the two competing portrayals of Jesus' identity are fully united. Hays, explains, "He is the King of Israel, but he will demonstrate his kingship not by coming down from the cross but by enduring it. Jesus' death redefines his kingship but does not renounce it" (64). Nor does this redefinition leave Mark's audience with a comfortable or reassuring conception of Jesus' kingship. As Barr stresses, "Mark does nothing to relieve the stark realism of the crucifixion. . . . It is an awful death" (235). Yet it is the very way that Jesus dies that transforms the significance of his kingship, correlating it with his status as the suffering servant, and revealing him at last as the Son of God:

> At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Despite his powerful works and authoritative teaching, he is recognized as the Son of God only when he neglects to save himself, is abandoned by all, and dies a humiliating and cruel death.

In Matthew, the redemptive nature of Jesus' death is less enigmatic. Insofar as the Gospel of Matthew portrays Jesus as the completion of the law and the prophets, it depicts his death as the ultimate sacrifice, bringing to fulfillment the covenant between

God and his people. Whereas the Israelites had to make repeated animal sacrifices to atone for trespassing against the law, Jesus' sacrificial death atones for all sin. So Jesus intimates at the last supper, saying, "Drink from [this cup], all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:27b-28). Thus, by his sacrifice Jesus fulfills God's covenant, forgiving the people's sins, calling them back from exile, and restoring them to the kingdom of heaven.

Though Jesus' death is the fulfillment and completion of the law, Jesus' resurrection is not the end but is rather a new beginning. After his resurrection, Jesus returns to Galilee, where his ministry began. There he speaks to his followers proclaiming: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:18-20). Not only does Jesus have the power and authority of God on earth but now all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to him. Accordingly, not only is his death the ultimate sacrifice and fulfillment of the law, restoring God's people to the kingdom of heaven, but also his resurrection is the beginning of a New Covenant through which all nations will be restored to God. Because of this New Covenant, the people may trust that Jesus' redeeming presence is with them always.

As the Gospel of Matthew emphasizes that Jesus' life and death are the completion of the law and the prophets, so Luke emphasizes the necessity of Jesus' death and resurrection according to Hebrew Scripture. For this reason, Luke stresses Jesus' innocence: At Luke 23:4 Pilate declares, "I find no basis for accusation against this

man;" again at 23:14-15 Pilate speaks to the Jewish leaders, saying, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he had done nothing to deserve death;" and at 23:22, "A third time he said to them, 'Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death.'" Finally, the centurion who watches as Jesus breathes his last pronounces, "Certainly this man was innocent" (23:47b). By calling attention to the apparent senselessness of the conviction and sentence of this innocent man, Luke's author brings into sharp relief the necessity of his death for the purpose of redemption. Though he is innocent, and indeed because he is innocent, he must suffer and die to redeem the people.

According to Luke, the reason for Jesus' death and also his resurrection is that the Hebrew Scriptures require the Messiah to suffer before being raised to glory in order that God's merciful promise to restore Israel might be fulfilled. But no one expected a Messiah who would suffer and die on a cross. Accordingly, the first time Jesus appears to his followers after his resurrection, they are astounded by his empty tomb and fail to recognize him. He rebukes them for failing to recognize his suffering and death as the fulfillment of Scripture: "Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (24:25-27). In this way, his followers came to understand what "All the prophets testify about him, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins

through his name" (Acts 10:43). The promise of God concerning the redemption of Israel cannot be fulfilled through the Law of Moses but only through the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, nor is this promise for Israel alone, for it belongs to all who trust in Jesus. So in the Acts of the Apostles, the character of Paul announces "that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses" (13:38-39).

The Gospel of John specifically addresses Jesus' death as an act which reveals the unfathomable depth of God's love for the world. Whereas the first two-thirds of this Gospel direct the audience's attention to Jesus' identity as the light and life of the world, the last third leading up to his death and resurrection emphasizes his love for his own who are in the world.[135] The world, as the first two-thirds of the Gospel indicate, has failed to recognize Jesus as the true light and life; more than that, it has rejected and despised him through whom "all things came into being" (1:3)—even as it perishes, it refuses the life-giving light. Yet even as the world rejects and despises God's Word become flesh, the depth of God's love is revealed: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end (*eis telos*)" (13:1). Thompson asserts that author of John is playing on the double meaning of '*telos*' to suggest "both that Jesus loved his [own who were in the world] to the very end of his life, as demonstrated on the cross, and that he loved them with the fullest, ultimate love one can love" (Thompson 190). In a similar manner, the Gospel of John has Jesus declare that there is no love greater than for

[135] Dodd counts that the terms light and life are used eighty-two times in chapters 1-12 but only six times thereafter, while love is mentioned thirty-one times in chapters 13-17 but only six times earlier (398).

a man to lay down his life for his friends[136] and then illustrate the meaning of this greatest love by laying down his life for his own, who were in the world that hated and rejected him.

In Hebrews, the animal sacrifices made by the high priests on behalf of the sins of their people provide the context for understanding the significance of Jesus' death. Just as all the other high priests before him, Jesus, the merciful and faithful high priest, offers a sacrifice to atone for the sins of his people. However, "unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day" (7:27). For whereas the other high priests "are subject to weakness" (7:28), Jesus is "holy, blameless, undefiled" (7:26), and moreover, he makes his sacrifice, "not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood" (9:12). And so, through his sacrifice, "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God" (9:14), obtains for sinners "eternal redemption" (9:12). His sacrifice ends the old covenant which required the shedding of blood to cleanse the people from their sins year after year, for his sacrifice has purified the people, taking away their sin once and for all. Thus, by his death, Jesus mediates a new covenant between God and his people—a covenant of eternal redemption from sin.[137]

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[136] John 15:12-17: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

[137] Hebrews 9:11-15: But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God! For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those

D. Grace and faith

Emphasis on the theme of grace and faith is almost entirely exclusive to the Pauline epistles (both his own and the pseudonymous ones). Nonetheless, this theme plays such a central role in the Pauline understanding of the redemption story and this Pauline understanding plays such a significant role in the New Testament account of redemption that the theme of grace and faith merits treatment as one of the central elements of the redemption story. Further, while the synoptic gospels rarely, if ever, explicitly address the theme of grace and faith, they do paint a picture of what it means to live by faith—a picture that complements the Pauline notion of being saved by grace through faith. Accordingly, in this section I will focus my discussion on the Pauline presentation of the theme of grace and faith, supplementing it with the gospel portrait of living by faith.

For Paul, grace is a free gift of God by which God justifies, or reckons as righteous,[138] the sinner. As such grace is consistently contrasted to human achievement and merit, particularly in terms of the law, and is most frequently associated with Christ's death.[139] For instance, as Jewett points out, Paul's claim in Romans 3:9 that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are under the power of sin "is followed by a series of scriptural citations that repeat no fewer than eight times that 'no one' can claim righteous status or

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who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant."

[138] The New Revised Standard Version notes that the Greek word (*dikaiŏō*) translated as 'justifies' could also be translated 'reckons as righteous.' Jewett notes that the word justification insofar as it "implies individual alibis and a primarily forensic context" is insufficient (94).

[139] Galatians 2:21 presents a representative expression of Paul's understanding of grace: "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing." Galatians 5:2-4 is similar: "Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law. *You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen way from grace*" (emphasis added).

performance" (94). Jewett further suggests that this denial of human righteousness "undercuts the superiority claims of every system of gaining honor through performance" (94). Human striving for righteousness will never attain it, for righteousness belongs to God alone. However, by means of Christ's death, which is an expression of God's freely given love, humans can be reconciled with God who gratuitously reckons them as righteous; "they are [reckoned righteous] by his grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

Paul couples this reckoning as righteous with the forgiveness of sin. Citing Psalm 32:1-2, Paul argues that righteousness is not to be procured through works but rather through the unmerited forgiveness of sin: "So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose / iniquities are forgiven / and whose sins are covered; / blessed is the one against whom / the Lord will not / reckon sin'" (Romans 4:6-8). Hence if man is reckoned righteous, it is only because, by his grace, God covers over and forgives sin—God has not reckoned his sin against him.

While grace is a freely given gift by which God covers sin and reckons the ungodly righteous, for righteousness to be reckoned, the sinner must also receive and accept this grace. This reception of grace is faith. Indeed, Paul claims that it is precisely Abraham's or David's faith, i.e., trusting acceptance of God's grace, that is reckoned to him as righteousness: "For what does scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to one who works wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the

ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Romans 4:3-5). Faith, then, consists of the reception of grace.

To understand what is meant by the assertion that faith is the reception of grace, it is important to keep in mind that, as Barr recalls, "In Greek the words *faith* (*pistis*) and *to believe* (*pisteuein*) both mean primarily trusting in someone" (138). Paul's use of these words reflects this primary meaning. For Paul, trusting in God, through Christ, to redeem the sinner from and cover over his sin is what counts as righteousness. Accordingly, to have faith is to give up striving for righteousness by means of human achievement and to live instead in the trusting acceptance of the freedom from sin and reconciliation with God, which is graciously given to the ungodly sinner through Christ's self-sacrifice.

Though, according to Paul, faith consists in giving up striving for righteousness under the law and trusting in Christ and in the redemptive power of his sacrifice, he by no means suggests that the life the redeemed lives in faith is a life of prodigality or wanton disobedience to the law.[140] Rather, faith accepts Christ's self-sacrifice by trustingly dying with Christ; in other words, the individual who lives in faith, who places his trust in God through Christ, gives himself up so that Christ may live in him. For this reason, Longenecker asserts that, according to Paul, "Christian life involves the dramatization of Christ, and a faithful enactment of Christ is expected of all of his followers" (67). Longenecker's assertion makes sense of Paul's testimony at Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul's crucifixion with Christ and his resultant life of faith is the reenactment of Christ's self-giving love. The life of faith thus involves "love, joy, peace, patience,

[140] Though, his letters indicate that some of his converts took him to be saying just this.

kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control," and, "against such things," Paul assures his converts, "there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

However, this "expectation" that the redeemed faithfully enact Christ should not be misconstrued. By communicating this expectation, Paul is not suggesting that the redeemed simply adopts a different mode of striving—a mode of striving for righteousness apart from fastidious obedience to the law. Rather, the dramatization of Christ is nothing other than the exchange of striving for trusting. To exchange striving for trusting, i.e., to live by faith, is to give up seeking after one's own. To give up seeking after one's own is to die with Christ, and just as Christ did not die for his own sake but gave himself up for others, so also the redeemed does not give up seeking after his own for his own sake but only for the sake of another.[141] Self-giving love for the sake of another, then, is the concrete manifestation of faith. So Paul writes, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision [i.e. conformity to the law] nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith made effective (*energoumene*)[142] through love" (Galatians 5:6). However, while this self-giving act of love, i.e., the enactment of Christ, is the concrete manifestation of trust in Christ, the redeemed does not achieve such faith by his own doing, for even faith is possible only by God's grace. As Paul's pseudonymous follower reminds the churches of Ephesus, "by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of

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[141] If anyone does give up seeking after his own for his own sake i.e. to gain some reward, to earn the status of an obedient follower of Christ, to earn some other form of merit, or even to free himself from futile toil, suffering, or anxiety, he has not in any way given up seeking after his own.

[142] The New Revised Standard Version translates the Greek *energoumene* as 'working' but offers 'made effective' as an alternative translation. I prefer the latter, as interpreting Paul accurately requires keeping in mind that grace and faith are set in opposition to human achievement. Lonecker's translation of *energoumene* as 'working practically' (67) is potentially better than 'made effective,' as 'working practically' insinuates the notion that love is the immediate, concrete manifestation of faith, but even that translation implies that faith is some sort of accomplishment on the part of the redeemed.

works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The redeemed is in no way responsible for his own redemption nor even for his own faith made effective in love. Far from offering his followers a different mode of striving, Paul portrays redemption through faith in Christ as, through and through, an act of God's grace motivated solely by his unmerited love for sinners.

As with Jesus' teaching in the synoptic gospels, so in the Pauline epistles God's unmerited love, expressed through his grace, serves to challenge the ordinary, everyday human orientation in the world and to alter profoundly, for those who have received grace, the experience of subjective reality. In the light of Christ's death and resurrection—the ultimate expression of God's gracious love—Paul's accomplishments no longer appear to him as indicators of his self-worth; rather they disclose his own insufficiency. He confesses,

> Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. (Philippians 3:7-9)

For Paul, God's grace has wrought a change in the attitude according to which he orients himself in his world. Putting aside the ordinary human attitude, from which the individual strives to secure for himself a satisfying, self-gratifying existence in this world,

Paul speaks the language of confession. In his confession, his inward looking existence is put to death.

Though the theme of faith and grace does not play such a central role in the synoptic story of redemption, these gospels do paint a picture of faith as the way to salvation—a picture that serves nicely to complement the Pauline understanding of redemption through faith by grace. The Gospel of Luke, for instance, depicts faith as a particular manner of being in the world that leaves off worrying about status, wealth, and the everyday business of living and trustingly risks all to set out on the way with Jesus. In Matthew as well as in Luke, Jesus instructs his followers, saying "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. . . . And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them" (Luke 12:22-23, 29-30; Matthew 6:25, 31-32).[143] According to their description, then, the person of faith is someone who releases his grasp on self-preservation, and trusting to God for his sustenance, follows Jesus on the path of self-giving.

Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4 present an exemplar of this faith in the image of a poor widow: As Jesus and his disciples watch "the crowd putting money into the treasury" (Mark 12:41),[144] they see rich people contributing large sums. They also see a

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[143] There are slight variations in the phrasing between Matthew's version and Luke's. I have quoted Luke. Matthew says, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? . . . Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' for it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

[144] The New Revised Standard Version notes that the treasury is "either a temple chamber that abutted the Women's Court or a receptacle for offerings located in the precinct" (1943). In either case, the location of the treasury in the temple indicates that the widow gave her offering in service to God.

poor widow "put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny" (Mark 12:42). After observing these offerings, Jesus remarks, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on" (Mark 12:44). The poor widow, by putting in all she had to live on, leaves the cares of the world into the hands of God. The Greek, translated as "everything she had to live on," translates literally as "her whole life." She has risked all, giving her very life to the service of another. None could contribute more. Thus, she is a concrete illustration of what it means to carry to completion Jesus' instructions from Luke 12 and Matthew 6—an illustration of what it means to live by faith.

All three synoptic gospels also present, in the story of the rich young man (Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23), an image of the lack of faith, which stands in stark contrast to the poor widow of Mark 12 and Luke 21. In this story, a rich young man asks Jesus what he must do "to inherit eternal life" (Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18).[145] After the young man tells Jesus that he has followed the commandments since his youth, Jesus tells him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor" (Mark 10:21). Upon hearing Jesus' answer, the rich young man is shocked and goes away grieving, "for he had many possessions" (Mark 10:22). Though he has obeyed God's laws all his life, he cannot risk his security and status. Lacking the widow's faith and ensnared by cares of the world, he cannot trust himself to God and so walks away from redemption and eternal life.

E. The new creation, heir to the kingdom of God, and eternal life

[145] Matthew 19:16 reads "to have eternal life."

All of the relevant New Testament voices present some form of resolution to the story of redemption. Accordingly, in this initial discussion of the elements related to the resolution of the story, I will again treat Paul and all four gospel writers. The author of Hebrews has little to say about this resolution besides what I mentioned already in my discussion of his treatment of the Messiah's death and resurrection,[146] so I will not treat Hebrews here. I will, however, for the first time, have occasion to discuss briefly the Johannine School, as 1 John expands upon the understanding of eternal life presented in the Gospel of John.

For Paul, the resolution to the story of redemption is that all the redeemed have been reconciled to God. More precisely, Paul teaches the Corinthians that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Through receiving Christ's sacrifice in faith, the redeemed has died to the power of sin, and God, forgiving the trespasses committed under the power of sin, does not condemn the redeemed[147] but gives to him "a spirit of adoption" (Romans 8:15). All the redeemed, who are reconciled to God through Christ, have now become children of God, "and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).[148] As co-heirs with Christ, the newly adopted children of God inherit the kingdom, glory, and righteousness of God as well as the guidance of the Spirit of God.[149]

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[146] Pages 187-188, and the discussion of the New Covenant of eternal redemption replacing the Old Covenant requiring repeated animal sacrifices

[147] Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

[148] Also Galatians 4:4-7: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba!'

Guided by the Spirit of God, the sinner becomes a new creation. "From now on," Paul writes to the Corinthians, "we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view [lit. according to the flesh], we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:16-17). By dying with Christ, who rose from the dead, the redeemed walks in the newness of life, as opposed to the living death of the mind set on the flesh. Paul expounds on this same point at Romans 6:4: "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Dying with Christ, the redeemed dies to the power of sin, to the mind set on the flesh. Once he has died to this inward looking existence—which contains more of death than life—his life is renewed, and his experience of the world is profoundly altered.

This alteration in the experience of the world is effected by a radical shift in the attitude of the redeemed. All who are redeemed have died to the inward looking orientation to the world, but further, as Paul encourages the faithful in Rome, "God's love has been poured into our [the adopted children of God] hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).

Freedom from the slavery to sin is, accordingly, the freedom for love. The mind set on the flesh is self-seeking and proud, that is, it seeks, by its own works, to secure itself in the world, and so the mind set on the flesh closes itself off from redeeming love.

[Aramaic for Father, NSRV 2188] Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God."

[149] Romans 8:14-16: For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Confident in his own self-sufficiency, the sinner cannot open himself to receive, in humble acceptance, the self-giving presence of another. Likewise, seeking after his own, the sinner can never make himself wholly available to another—can never give himself utterly to another as Christ gave himself up for sinners. In other words, by seeking to establish his own through his proud self-sufficiency, the sinner can neither receive nor offer that freely-given, unmerited, self-giving love, epitomized by Christ on the cross. He is, consequently, cut off from any form of genuine fellowship with another.[150] When, however, the sinner is redeemed by grace through faith, his inward looking orientation toward the world shifts. In humility before Christ's sacrifice, he is opened to the self-giving presence of another. In being opened to receive the gift of Christ's presence into the depths of his being, his inward looking existence is shattered. The doors to his prison hang loose on their hinges, and he is freed to make himself wholly available to another without expectation of return. In God's reconciliation of sinners to himself, through the redemption offered by Christ, a new life-giving fellowship is created. Thus the redeemed comes to experience his subjective reality through this novel possibility of life-giving fellowship. "See, everything has become new!"

When considering Paul's account of the resolution of the redemption story, it is important to resist the urge to systematize—to give the story the severe logic of a scientific, metaphysical system, in which all ambiguities are clarified and all lose ends tied up. Though, in his letters Paul's redemption story is implicit, rather than explicit, it still employs what Green refers to as "the genius of narrative" by holding "in tension seemingly antagonistic claims" (148). In other words, Paul's story is not resolved quite

[150] Being closed off from love is to stand already in condemnation. To remain outside of God's freely given love is the judgment of God.

as neatly as I have, perhaps, implied in the preceding paragraphs. For Paul seems to suggest that he is *at once* led by the flesh and by the Spirit. Similarly, he seems to hold both that he is already redeemed and that he is waiting in hope for the day of redemption—that the redeemed children of God have already received and have yet to receive their inheritance. For instance, to the Corinthians he writes, "See, *now* is the acceptable time; see, *now* is the day of salvation!" (2 Corinthians 6:2b; emphasis added);[151] but to the Thessalonians he writes, "For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord *will come* like a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:1; emphasis added); and to the Romans he writes, "we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly *while we wait* for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23; emphasis added). This assertion of both now and not yet cannot be attributed merely to a progression of Paul's thought throughout his lifetime, for Paul expresses a similar tension in a single passage.[152] In Romans 7:24-8:2, he writes, "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." Paul seems to be saying that he is concurrently a person who lives according to the flesh, that is, according to a human point of view, and a person

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[151] 2 Corinthians 6:1-2: "As we work together with me, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.' See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!" Paul here refers to Isaiah 49:8: "Thus says the Lord: / In a time of favor I have / answered you, on a day of salvation I have helped you . . . ."

[152] Another reason to reject the supposition that there was a progression of Paul's thought with respect to the present or future status of the day of salvation and adoption into the Kingdom of God is that the letters to the church at Corinth were likely written after 1 Thessalonians but before Romans. Most New Testament scholars hold that 1 Thessalonians was the first letter Paul wrote and Romans the last.

who has been set free from the flesh to live according to the Spirit. Redemption is both now and not yet.

This ambiguity reflects Paul's present experiences of suffering and conflict (both inner conflict and conflict with other people) and his future hope of sharing in Christ's glory. The tension between Paul's present experience and his hope for the future leads him to indicate that the follower of Christ must die every day[153] or similarly that the new creation is renewed daily. He writes of himself and his fellow evangelists, "So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for the eternal weight of glory beyond all measure" (2 Corinthians 4:16-17). Paul's redemption story is therefore no child's tale to be naively resolved with the assertion that the characters "lived happily ever after." Rather, his story expresses the complexity involved in living in the world while being gripped by the Spirit of God's love and led to live a life of love in Christ. The life of love in Christ cannot be brought to completion in a single moment of redemption. It can neither avoid suffering nor relinquish hope; to live the life of love is to suffer with Christ, hoping for the restoration of the children of God, and redemption entails the daily renewing of the mind in fellowship with the Spirit of God.

The Gospel of Mark intensifies the ambiguity of the resolution of the redemption story. For, as Hays notes, "Of all the evangelists, Mark is the most sensitive to the community's continued suffering and longing for a fulfillment that is not yet seen" (58). Mark's story of redemption is the story of the Messiah ushering in the kingdom of God.

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[153]In 2 Corinthians 4:8-11 Paul writes of his and his fellow evangelists' experiences: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh."

Yet, the kingdom of God does not come, as might be expected, at the hands of a mighty Davidic king, gloriously vanquishing his enemies, restoring his people to peace, prosperity, and power. In Mark, the coming of the kingdom of God is present: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near"[154] (1:15). Yet its presence is incomprehensible, for Jesus neither restores peace nor banishes suffering. Indeed, though he controls the wind and the waves, Jesus does not exert his power over the chief priests and elders in order to compel them to recognize him as the Son of God, nor does he exploit his power to bring himself down from the cross. Instead, this Messiah suffers and dies a most humiliating death, sacrificing himself as a ransom for many (10:45). The power of Jesus, that is, the power of God on earth, is demonstrated through suffering and death. The Gospel of Mark thus poses the question: How is it that through this suffering servant the kingdom of God has come near? Or as Barr phrases it: "The one who could compel demons never compels obedience. Jesus overpowers the forces of nature and disease but never overpowers a human character. How then can the rule of God come?" (238) The rule of comes, it seems, when God's people suffer for each other, even unto death. The rule of God comes when they follow Jesus in compassion and humility. In this way, the kingdom of God—initiated through the Messiah's suffering and humility rather than through his power—is as incomprehensible as the humiliating death of a Messiah who would not save himself. It is as incomprehensible as the absence of the risen Messiah, which evokes "terror and amazement" in the women who discover his empty tomb.[155]

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[154] Or, "the kingdom of God is at hand" (NSRV 1918).

[155] Though other, longer endings were appended to the Gospel of Mark, the most ancient authorities either end the book with Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome's discovery of the empty tomb, or they note that the following verses 9-20 are of doubtful authenticity (NSRV 1951). Mark 16:5-8:

In Matthew as well, the redemption story finds its resolution in the concept of the kingdom of God, which in Matthew, is usually referred to as the kingdom of heaven. While the Gospel of Matthew ends on a happier note than the Gospel of Mark, the resolution of the redemption story still involves perplexing reversals of the expectations for God's kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is not a greater, more powerful, or more majestic kingdom outstripping all earthly kingdoms in its splendor and might; rather, this gospel's depiction of the kingdom of heaven stands the human (earthly) order on its head. The kingdom of heaven belongs not to proud kingly figures of towering strength, nobility, and grandeur nor to holy and pure priestly figures but to the meek, the poor in spirit, the humble, and the reviled. "The greatest in the kingdom of heaven" is neither the triumphant hero, the august king, nor even the pure and righteous priest, but the one who, in humility, becomes like a child (18:4). Crossan's historical investigation clarifies the radical meaning of becoming like a child. A child in the first century Mediterranean world, Crossan finds, "was quite literally a nobody unless its father accepted it as a member of the family rather than exposing it in the gutter or rubbish dump to die of abandonment or to be taken up by another and reared as a slave" (64). Crossan's conclusion—"that a Kingdom of Children is a Kingdom of Nobodies" (64)—rather poetically conveys the extent to which Matthew's depiction of the kingdom of heaven reverses the earthly order of things.

"As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going head of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Acceptance into the kingdom of heaven, therefore, has nothing to do with nobility or worthiness but solely with the receiving of and response to God's mercy. Consequently, the kingdom of Heaven is realized only through compassionate and unmerited forgiveness:

> For this reason the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he could pay the debt. . . . Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?" (18:23-33)

Those who are granted entrance into the kingdom of Heaven do not earn it by their own noble striving for righteousness. Just as the wicked slave could never have repaid his lord the ten thousand talents, for each talent "was worth more than fifteen years' wages of a laborer" (NSRV 1891), so also the sinner could never obtain enough righteousness to earn a place in God's kingdom. Nonetheless, through his compassionate forgiveness,

which cover's over man's unworthiness and thus redeems sinners, God grants entrance into his kingdom to the very least of men. Participation in God's kingdom, however, entails a response to God's compassion. Even as the sinner yields himself utterly to God's mercy, so also does he, in humility, forgive the debts of those who have trespassed against him. The sinner who forgives from the heart becomes a child of God's kingdom. Thus the kingdom of Heaven—the kingdom of the "least of these" (25:40, 45)[156]—is realized on earth.

The realization of the kingdom of God serves in the Gospel of Luke also as the resolution of the story of redemption, and again, in Luke, this kingdom is realized in the most unexpected of ways. Luke 17:20-21 relates a conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees about the coming of God's kingdom. The Pharisees ask Jesus when the kingdom of God is to come. Their expectations are, presumably, shaped by their stories recounting God's involvement in the history of the Israelites and the heroic actions of God's chosen leaders: The Pharisees expect a Moses, who led the Israelites out of Egypt,[157] or a David, who conquered the Jebusite fortress of Jerusalem.[158] Accordingly,

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[156] Matthew 25:31-45 reiterates the ideas that the children of God's kingdom are the least of men and that the kingdom of heaven is realized through the showering of merciful compassion on these: "Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'" (25:34-40).

[157] Consider "The Song of Moses" from Exodus 15, as an example of the Hebrew tradition that shapes the Pharisees' expectations: "Then Moses and the Israelites / sang this song to the Lord; / 'I will sing to the Lord, for he / has triumphed gloriously; / horse and rider he has thrown / into the sea." (15:1); "Pharaoh's chariots and his army / he cast into the sea; / his picked officers were sunk in / the Red Sea. / The floods covered them; / they went down into the depths/ like a stone. / Your right hand, O Lord, / glorious in power-- / you right hand, O lord, / shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty / you overthrew your / adversaries; / you sent out your fury, it / consumed them like / stubble. " (15: 4-7); "In your steadfast

the Pharisees, in all probability, expect the kingdom of God to be ushered in by a mighty warrior-king vanquishing his enemies or by some similarly wondrous exhibition of divine power at work vindicating the people of God. Jesus, however, answers them saying, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For in fact, the kingdom of God is among (*ĕntŏs*) you" (17:20-21). The meaning of the Greek preposition, '*ĕntŏs*,' is ambiguous, and Barr reports that "Commentators are divided on the translation of the last phrase in Jesus' reply to the Pharisees:

the Greek could equally well mean the kingdom is 'among you,' is 'in your midst,' or is 'within you'" (310). Jesus' words could mean that the kingdom of God is something akin to an attitude that orients the members of God's kingdom toward the world in a particular manner—the kingdom is within; they could also indicate that the kingdom of God is present in the world in the person of Jesus and his followers as they wend their way toward Jerusalem—the kingdom of God is in their midst or among them. In either case, the coming of the kingdom of God is no observable event but is rather realized by the manner in which Jesus lived.

To redeem his people, to bring them into the kingdom of God, Jesus walks the road to Jerusalem—a road of suffering and rejection. He makes himself wholly available to and gives himself up for those who would spit on him, curse him, and even kill him. To belong to the kingdom of God is to follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. The

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love you led / the people who you / redeemed; / you guided them by your / strength to your holy / abode." (15:13).

[158] 2 Samuel 5:6-7: "The king and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, 'You will not come in here, even the blind and the lame will turn you back'—thinking, 'David cannot come in here.' Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, which is now the city of David."

kingdom is realized within Jesus' followers and they may be called children of God when they "love their enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return" even as the Most High "is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked" (6:35). The kingdom of God is in their midst when his followers give up their concern to justify themselves according to the law and *become* the neighbor, as illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan.[159] The kingdom of God, then, is no blissful paradise resplendent in its majesty but is instead a life of self-giving love.

In the Gospel of John, eternal life plays the role that the kingdom of Heaven plays in the synoptic gospels. The resolution of the redemption story in this gospel comes when the redeemed receives eternal life; though "eternal life" is not, as the words seem to imply, life that stretches out infinitely in time. Although the Gospel of John maintains some of the tension, seen in the Pauline writings, between the present and future, such that redemption is both now and not yet, the focus in this gospel is on the present. Eternal life is not a possession to be attained at some future moment, but is, as Thompson writes, "precisely what one has when knowing God through Christ" (192). In Jesus' prayer for his disciples in chapter 17, he defines eternal life in just this manner. Looking into the heavens, he prays, "Father the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. *And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*" (17:1b-3; emphasis added). Knowing God, however, is not a matter of knowing the facts about God. To know God is to "participate in the life of God" (Thompson 191). The eternal life that the redeemed has in Jesus, therefore, is a way of living—a way of living here and now.

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[159] Luke 10:25-37 Refer to my previous discussion of this parable pages 27-28.

The Johannine School follows the Gospel of John in asserting that the redeemed has eternal life now by participating in the life of God. 1 John further interprets this participation in God's life in terms of abiding in love: "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16b). Because God is love and because eternal life belongs to God, when the redeemed loves as Christ loved, he passes from death to life and eternal life abides in him.[160]

IV. Step four: Narration of the New Testament story of redemption

In step three, I extracted the various elements of the redemption story from the New Testament texts. In step four, by employing the higher forms of understanding, which draw on the vital connectedness of lived experience, I bring these elements together and narrate a story that has its own inner organic coherence. The narration of this story draws upon the initial discussion presented in step three. For the sake of brevity and to allow the narration to flow as much as possible like a story, I do not repeat any of the explication or analysis from the previous section. I, therefore, presuppose an understanding of the paradoxes, metaphors, and other symbolic or figurative expressions, such as "the road to Jerusalem," "the mind set on the flesh", "eternal life," "righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees," or "kingdom of children," presented in step three.

To narrate a story with the vital connectedness of an organic whole, I trace the logic of the fundamental motif, redeeming love, as it connects all the other elements of the story and "communicates to all its parts their special content and colour" (Agape and Eros 35). In other words, I will use the internal logic of redeeming love to guide my

[160] 1 John 3:14-15: "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them."

application of the higher forms of understanding in the creation of an organically coherent story. It is well to remember, however, that this inner organic coherence is quite different from the severe, rational systematicity of metaphysics or science, which must make use only of expressions that have been "adapted to logical norms" (Dilthey 226), de-paradox all paradoxes, resolve all ambiguity, and otherwise tie up all lose ends. Unlike science and metaphysics, a narrative may embrace paradox and ambiguity without shattering its internal logic, and this one certainly does so. The narration that follows completes the motif research as well as the retrieval-type re-experiencing.[161]

The story begins with love:

God so loved the world that he delivered his only son to the world, so that, by his son, he might reconcile the world to himself. For, the people of the world had become his enemies. Though he would have given them freely all that they needed, in their hearts they turned away from his merciful love. They ceased to trust him: Like sheep all had gone astray, each turned to his own way. Seeking "to establish their own" (Romans 10:3), the people of the world strove to make themselves like God. And so, the Most High God surrendered them—giving them over to their self-seeking and pride.

Thus exiled from God, the world was enslaved to the despotic power of sin. Under sin's reign, they committed many trespasses against God and also against each other. To his chosen people, whom he repeatedly sought to bring back into fellowship with himself, he gave the law, but in their captivity to sin the law could not save them. For the law is powerless to free anyone weakened by the mind set on the flesh.

[161] Refer to my discussion of the two types of re-experiencing on pages 126-127.

So the people lived on in captivity. They busied themselves with sin's labor, pursuing wealth or purity, honor, or pleasure, thinking to ensure their security in the world. But in their pursuits they lost their lives. For sin's wage is death.

Only by means of a sacrifice could the people be bought out of their captivity to sin. So, to redeem this wretched and perishing world, at the right time, the Most High God sacrificed his only son by sending him into the world. The son "was with God" (John 1:1) and he was "in the form of God" (Philippians 2:6), but in obedience to the father, Christ Jesus "emptied himself" (Philippians 2:6). He came into the world "in human likeness" (Philippians 2:6), giving himself up to the sinners. Thus God's love for the world became manifest in the realm of sin's reign.

The son dwelt in the world's midst. Anointed by God as their king and savior, Jesus, Emmanuel, lived as a servant to sinners. By the power of God, he opened the eyes of the blind and made the lame to walk. Miraculously, he healed their wounds, cured their diseases, cast out their demons, filled their nets with fish, their bellies with bread, and, for some, their hearts with living water. He gave himself utterly to the world of sinners: holding back no part of himself from those he came to serve, he reached out to the very least of these, beckoned the children into his arms, forgave the trespasses of the most wretched, broke bread even with the prostitutes and tax collectors, and washed the feet of his disciples. With such love, he called the sick, lost, and needy—powerless and dying in their captivity to sin—into the life-giving fellowship of their savior and king and thus into fellowship with the Most High God, who sacrificed his very son out of love for this wicked and wasted world.

As their Messiah and king walked unrecognized among the people of the world, healing their wounds and ministering to their hearts, he spoke to them in parables and paradoxes, guiding them to the way that leads out of captivity to sin and death and into the kingdom of God, wherein all receive freely his life-giving fellowship.

Once, "to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt" (Luke 18:9), he told a parable of two men who went to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, Jesus told them, stood by himself and prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people, thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income" (Luke 18:11-12). The tax collector, Jesus said, stood far off and would not even look up to heaven. He beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18: 13). Then, to the shocked amazement of his audience, Jesus pronounced, "I tell you, this man [the tax collector] went down to his home justified rather than the other" (Luke 18:14).

Jesus spoke often of the kingdom of God and its righteousness. On one occasion, he taught the crowd that followed him that to enter God's kingdom, their righteousness must surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees and other zealots for the law. At other times, his disciples picked grain on the Sabbath and ate without washing their hand, violating the traditions of their elders, and the Pharisees were indignant with them. In response to the Pharisees' offense, Jesus taught of the vanity of "teaching human precepts as doctrines" (Mark 7:7), challenging all righteousness founded on mere obedience to tradition and custom. Later, he told the chief priests and elders of the people that the tax

collectors and prostitutes, repenting and following “the way of righteousness” (Matthew 21:32), were entering the kingdom of God ahead of them.

A few of those who encountered Jesus walking in their midst wished to follow him as he carried out his ministry in service to the world. Those who followed left behind everything that secured them to the world. For, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). He taught his followers that by leaving behind all worldly security and trustingly following him down the road to Jerusalem, they had gained life. “For those who want to save their life will lose it,” he told them, “and those who lose their life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:23).

And so with parables and paradoxes he taught them that God’s love is not like the love of the world, which, seeking its own and striving to justify itself, loves only what is beautiful, good, valuable, and worthy of love. He taught them also that God’s kingdom is not like earthly kingdoms whose rulers make themselves great and “lord it over” the poor and the weak (Mark 10:42). For though, by his own merit, no man could become righteous before God or earn admittance into the kingdom of God, through his unmerited love, God reckons sinners as righteous and freely grants them acceptance into his kingdom. Prostitutes and Pharisees alike can enter into the kingdom of God if only they can, by the grace of God, trust in his Word enough to put aside their own ambitions, cease striving to provide their own security through the world, leave behind everything, and follow Jesus down the road to Jerusalem.

Many of the people to whom Jesus spoke were unhearing and indifferent to his word. Some were blind, and though they saw his miraculous deeds, they could not see

that he was the way and the truth and the life. Even his closest followers, his disciples who proclaimed him as the Messiah, doubted him. Others, those who considered themselves to be righteous, the chief priests, Pharisees, elders and scribes, were provoked to anger by Jesus' words, which contested their righteous status. And so, Jesus was scorned, rejected, and betrayed by the world he so loved. The light had come into the world, "and people loved darkness rather than light" (John 3:20).

A greater sacrifice was yet required to free the people from the prison of the mind set on the flesh and to bring them into God's kingdom.

The chief priests and elders plotted against Jesus and brought him before Pilate to be tried. Though Pilate found him innocent, the religious leaders stirred the mob, inciting them to cry out for Jesus' crucifixion and inadvertently fulfilling the prophesies of scripture. So Jesus was stripped, flogged, and nailed to a cross. "Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews'" (Matthew 27:37). Passersby taunted him, shaking their heads they scoffed, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:39). The elders, scribes, and chief priests mocked him in the same way, sneering "He saved others, he cannot save himself" (Matthew 27:42). But Jesus loved them to the very end, and he did not come down.

Then "darkness came over the whole land" (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33). After hanging in the darkness for three hours, Jesus cried out loudly, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). Then he breathed his last. The temple curtain tore down the middle from top to bottom. The centurion who stood facing him said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Matthew 27: 54; Mark 15:39)

Thus because of the greatness of his love for this wicked and unworthy world, Jesus took the full wages of sin upon himself. He emptied himself and died the death of a murderer and slave. By so sacrificing himself, the Son of God, the anointed king, paid with his life the ransom needed to buy sinners out of their slavery to sin. He gave up his life, so that those enslaved to sin and death might live. And so the unfathomable depths of God's self-giving love were revealed on the cross, for "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Knowing full well that just as his words of life fell mostly upon unhearing ears, so also would the fullness of his love fall mostly upon barren hearts, Christ suffered himself to become a lost love.

His love was lost to the world, but "the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:6). Death could not hold him. He was resurrected and returned to God. But before he left, he reminded his followers of his continued presence in the world, proclaiming, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). And so, God's love, though lost on the world, though spurned and trampled upon by human pride and self-seeking, never ceases to give itself to the world.

Jesus left, but the Spirit of his love remains to carry on his work of redemption. To show those born into slavery to sin the way to that life-giving fellowship, which belongs to all the children of God's kingdom, the Spirit of his love testifies to God's Word—to Christ's death as the embodiment of that love expressed in his teaching and ministry.

Those whose hearts have been tilled by grace, those whose ears have been opened that they might hear, are provoked to confession by the Spirit's testimony: They cry out, "What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him?"

(Hebrews 2:6) “Wretched man that I am! (Romans 7:24), God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13) Gone is all striving for security, righteousness and honor. In its place is the confession of the insufficiency and futility of all such striving.

Yet the sinner, brought by grace to confess, lives no longer in fear of being unacceptable before God, for, provoked to confession, the sinner has been opened to receive that abundant and unmerited love which the Holy Spirit pours into the hearts of sinners. By the grace of God, the redeemed is overcome and held fast by the power God’s unfathomable love. He lives now in the trusting assurance of the Father’s love.

And so captivated by God’s terrible love, the redeemed cannot help but take up his cross and follow Jesus down the road to Jerusalem. Abiding in life-giving fellowship with the Spirit, he cannot but make himself the neighbor to his enemies. Under sway of God’s love he risks all that he is, for he can neither avoid the suffering entailed by such self-giving love nor relinquish his hope for the restoration of the kingdom of God. Thus he has eternal life here and now.

So ends the story of redemption, but it does not end here. The newly redeemed sinner has been crucified with Christ, yet he dies every day. He has entered the kingdom of God though he awaits his adoption into God’s kingdom and its fulfillment. With his mind he walks in the Spirit, while in the flesh he is a slave to sin. He has become a new creation even as he is daily renewed by the Spirit of love.

V. Phenomenological description of the appropriative re-experiencing of the story

In step four, I completed that re-experiencing by which I retrieved from the New Testament texts the story of redemption. By tracing the internal logic of redeeming love, I used the method of motif research to guide my employment of the higher forms of understanding in order to narrate the redemption story in its integrity as a vitally connected whole. In this fifth and final step, I describe the attitudes, or orientations, toward the world and others to which the story gives expression and which the person who takes the story seriously as Christian appropriates, thus re-experiencing the story in himself not just as a involved spectator but as a participant. These are the attitudes of the sinner who is redeemed from sin by love through grace. I describe also the experiences of subjective reality entailed by those attitudes.

From my phenomenological description of the New Testament story of redemption it should become apparent that this story is indeed an expression of existential concern in which redeeming love serves as a response to that concern. However, it is well to remember that a phenomenological description of any subjective experience must describe that which is precisely not an object to be described. It must also describe that which has the character of mineness without describing any specific individual's actual experience. Accordingly, in striving for an accurate phenomenological description of subjective experience, it is necessary to point back to the concretely existing individual. In other words, the phenomenologist must direct the reader to his own concrete existence, for only when the reader refers to his own concrete existence can he recognize the described sense of subjectivity. Hence, only if the reader

refers to his own concrete existence will it be possible for a phenomenological description of the New Testament story of redemption to disclose to him those attitudes and that sense of subjective reality expressed in this liberated expression of lived experience.

The phenomenological description of the New Testament story of redemption must begin with a description of the attitude of the sinner held captive by sin. This is the attitude of the individual who dedicates himself to seeking after his own. In his orientation toward the world, the sinner is concerned primarily to secure his own sustenance, happiness, reputation, dignity, or gratification. It is as much the attitude of the principled, young entrepreneur resolutely struggling to make her new company competitive without compromising her values or the hardworking, underpaid custodian watching the clock in anticipation of that well-deserved cold brew waiting in the refrigerator as it is the attitude of the canny conman scoping out his next mark or the sultry, bored coquette, flashing long bare legs and a wickedly seductive grin at her unwary prey. For, the attitude of the sinner is the commonplace, day to day attitude of any existing subject caught up with the practical considerations involved in assuring his security, well-being, and self-satisfaction in the world.

This attitude is characterized by a predominately pre-reflective sense of self-importance, or pride. The individual exists in the world as though he were its axis. His desires, goals, feelings, customs, beliefs, viewpoints, etc. are the frame of reference according to which the world comes to have its significance. In this sense, his existence is entirely inward looking. In his inward looking pride, the existing individual comports himself to the world in the mode of reserve: endeavoring to hold himself fast in the

world, he strives to construct a secure fortress of wealth, respectability, comfort, and pleasure; guarding against anything that might knock the world off its axis, he evades any serious risk to himself—to his sustenance, happiness, or dignity.

This mode of comportment attunes the existing subject to the world in a particular manner, shaping his experience of his subjective reality. The world is for him at once that against which he must protect himself and that in which he endeavors to secure himself. It is the source of all safety and pleasure, yet it threatens at any moment to overwhelm the defensive barriers that hold him fast in it. The world represents for him the full range of his possibilities—from stability and comfort to destitution and utter destruction. Worldly occurrences and objects, material or otherwise, provide the occasions, resources, and tools he needs to carry out his projects. Worldly occurrence and objects give rise as well to the forces of erosion against which the existing subject must routinely struggle to maintain the structural integrity of his laboriously constructed stronghold.

The sinner's orientation attunes him in a similar manner to the others he encounters in the world. To the individual whose mind is set on the flesh, other people are given in terms of the roles they play with respect to himself and to his projects in the world. Others are clerk, waiter, passerby, confidant, colleague, antagonist, neighbor, lover, boss, underling, teacher, servant, rival, beggar, judge, quarry, oppressor, and so on. Their significance in his experience is a function of the role they fill for him.

So attuned to others, his subjective reality is an economy of transaction, desert, and recompense. He holds himself in a calculated reserve, revealing or making available only those parts of himself required to fulfill the function of each of his affiliations, and

ready at all times to pull back and break off the transaction at any sign of an unwarranted risk to himself. To those who represent for him comfort, security, joy, or pleasure, he offers his cheer, amity, and goodwill. He has them round for dinner or is a guest in their homes. He relishes their conversation, esteem, and affection and seeks to reciprocate their generosity and friendship in good measure. Many of those he encounters stir up his enmity and ire, and these also he seeks to repay in good measure—an eye for an eye. Others represent for him the quotidian and utilitarian and, unless they get in his way or fail in their tasks, he offers them, at most, his polite indifference—a hollow "how are you?" Some cause him to experience shame or obligation, and before them he seeks to justify himself and to carry out his duty in a manner worthy of respect, that he might be admired by all and at the mercy of none. Still others embody for him the vulgar, disgraceful, and low, and to them he offers only his scorn and contempt, though perhaps disguised in the form of a charitable donation (by which he can justify himself before more worthy others) or in the form of pity which condescends to volunteer some token handout. Some stimulate desire or envy and he does what he can to procure for himself that good upon which he has cast his eye; he charms, cajoles, dissimulates, is witty, sincere, or forceful, as best suits his interests. In each case, the significance that others come to have for him and the manner in which he relates to them is directly correlated to his perception of their relation to his security, pride, happiness, and well-being.

The accounts of Jesus' teaching, his parables and paradoxical sayings, express the sense that, in this ordinary, everyday attitude of sin, existence is lost. Seeking to save his life, the sinner toils to store up worldly goods,—wealth, reputation, success, etc—but such earthly treasures are stored in a world "where moth and rust consume and where

thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19). Upon storing his goods, the sinner must constantly strive to insure them against the forces of the world which erode away the ground beneath his storehouses. Thus striving leads neither to fulfillment nor peace and security but always to more anxious striving. And so the words of Jesus express the absurdity of the toilsome existence shared by all sinners, for "what will it profit them to gain the whole world but lose or forfeit themselves?" (Luke 9:25), and who, by all his anxious striving can guarantee the addition of even a single hour to his life span (Matthew 6:27; Luke 12:25)? Even if the sinner has been so successful that he may cease his struggle to save and store up, even if he has so secured the foundations of his stronghold that he might say to himself, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry" (Luke 12:19), he cannot safeguard himself against the world's disastrous contingencies. His life may, that very night, be demanded of him, and he will be powerless to refuse. What then of all his ambition and striving? The words of Jesus thus express and evoke, in him who has ears to hear, dread even nausea in the face of the world's precariousness, of his own fragility, and of the futility of all his efforts to save his life and safeguard himself from uncertainty, harm, and devastation.

The words of Jesus and the dread and nausea they express break in upon the sinner's average, everyday existence, reorienting him in his world and altering the sense of his subjective reality. In dread at the precarious fragility of his existence in the world, all of life's trappings, the earthly treasures he strove so ardently to obtain are empty—voided of meaning. In nausea at the futility of his most earnest efforts and noble pursuits, the customs, traditions, and principles so highly esteemed and scrupulously upheld are nothing but fancy costumes disguising dust and ashes. The fortress of his existence, so

carefully constructed to hold his very self in reserve and protect it from any risk to its security and well-being, is nothing but a "whitewashed tomb," which looks beautiful on the outside, but inside "is full of the bones of the dead" (Matthew 23:27). In such moods the senselessness of ordinary existence presses in upon him; its contingencies and emptiness—its lack of any intrinsic meaning or ultimate significance—exposes itself to him. What matters then his very self? What matter his being here at all?

The words of Jesus coupled with the testimony of his death and unmerited love for sinners express a new attitude that arises in response to such existential concern—the attitude that gives rise to the language of confession. The sinner, who turned away from God to seek his own way and became enslaved by sin, cannot through his most valiant effort free himself from sin and from the senseless, empty existence he lives under sin's reign. Yet, God, ever faithful in his love, made the sacrifice to buy the sinner out of his captivity. Of this act of love, the sinner is wholly undeserving. Nothing he could do by his own power could merit such unconditioned love. He has nothing with which he could even begin to repay his debt, nothing to offer by means of the most modest reciprocation. For what can a sinner give to God? He cannot, even in some small way, place himself on equal footing with God. All he can do is, as a child, receive, in utter humility, God's love and acceptance, offered through the crucified Christ. Thus the testimony of Christ's death for the sake of sinners expresses that attitude from which the sinner confesses his unmitigated insufficiency and insignificance. It expresses the attitude in which the sinner's intricately stitched veil of pride and self-importance is torn away to disclose him, not as he wishes to be or thinks he ought to be, but as he is: powerless to provide for himself any firm ground on which to stand secure from the world's contingencies,

consummately dependent on some incomprehensible fate, living a meaningless and insignificant existence, from which he cannot extricate himself. In this way, the testimony of God's love for the sinner in Jesus' death expresses the attitude of an existing subject standing before God's unmerited love and confessing, "What is man that you [oh God] are mindful of him? Or the son of man that you care for him?" (Hebrews 2:6)

From such an attitude, the subjective reality of the individual's existence is given as finitude. Confession which involves the utterance of 'God,' which places the existing individual before the Most High, as Nietmann notes, "frames one's finitude" (169). The attitude of confession, which is expressed in the testimony of Jesus' sacrifice and God's great and unmerited love, discloses the subjective reality not only of the existing subject's ultimate insignificance but also of his inexorable insufficiency to save himself from the senselessness of his own existence, which might any moment be demanded of him by the contingencies of an indifferent world. In confession, he does not shield himself from the terrible penetration of the subjective reality of his finitude nor can he soften its ruthless finality. He can never, no matter how arduous or noble his striving, surpass the limits placed upon him by the world. No amount of striving can provide any firm ground on which to build a meaningful and secure existence. If his existence is to have any meaning, any sense, it must come from something other than his own efforts, from whence he knows not. So he cries out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13) Thus that confession which frames his finitude is the confession of categorical dependence on something other than himself. In such confession, the hold that his inward looking existence—the attitude of sin—has on him is shattered; he can no longer conceive of himself as the world's axis.

The story of redemption emphasizes that this confession is wrought by grace. It thus expresses the sense that existential concern, the experience of the senselessness of existence, breaks in upon the existing subject as if from outside. It expresses as well the sense that the attitude of confession comes upon him unbidden. The existential concern, which alters his orientation toward the world, and the confessional response to that concern, which shatters his inward looking existence, are both unwilled; the shift in orientation comes upon the existing subject like a fallen log on an unlit road or the kindness of a stranger who, unrequested, gives up her seat in the crowded squalor of a subway car. Only by an unwilled grace does the existing subject come to perceive the futility of striving and the emptiness of his existence under sin, and only by grace is the confession, which frees him from the chains of his inward looking attitude, drawn from his depths.

The story of redemption, however, does not end in confession; it does not end with the sinner standing unveiled before the senselessness of his existence and its lack of intrinsic meaning. This story expresses yet another attitude which is the attitude of faith made effective through love. This attitude speaks the language of availability.

At the moment when unbidden confession has freed him from his futile striving to preserve his security and well-being, his mode of comportment is no longer that of someone who is closed off, holding himself in reserve and eschewing every risk to himself. For the attitude of confession frees the existing subject from self-seeking and pride and readies him for an attitude constituted by the openness to receive unmerited love, which is as well the openness to give unmerited love. The openness to receive such love involves an orientation to the world characterized by trusting receptivity. The

individual, freed from the functional economy of desert and recompense, leaves off striving to earn or reciprocate the gift of love. Comporting himself in openness, he humbly receives into himself the unconditioned fellowship offered to him by another. The openness to receive such love is just as much the openness to give it freely. In this mode of unreserved openness, the individual gives up everything to make himself wholly available to another. He holds back no part of himself but gives himself over completely, and so he genuinely addresses another as "you."

In the attitude of sin, the existing subject offers himself only insofar as necessary to carry out his projects, fulfill his obligations, and attain his desired ends, and he retreats at any sign of a threat. He loves only what is valuable and worthy of love. Accordingly, any person so existing in sin might make himself available to his neighbor or friend, who is deserving of his love and a safe bet besides, but in the attitude of openness there is no such calculation of value, efficacy, or security. In the attitude of sin, he asks, "Who is my neighbor?" In the attitude of openness he becomes the neighbor. He goes into the world and speaks "you" to his enemy. He picks up the ragged looking hitchhiker, brings him home to have dinner with his family, and puts him up in the guest room. If, in the middle of the night, he wakes to find the hitchhiker stealing his silver, he gives him his gold as well. Then, giving himself completely to his "you" he joins his guest in a nightcap and, without judgment or reluctance, asks to hear the story of his life. In this way, the individual whose existing is characterized by openness risks his very self to impart value in the existence of another by unreservedly giving himself in unconditioned love.

The story of redemption emphasizes that even the possibility of so risking himself is by grace. The emphasis on the necessity of grace expresses the sense that openness as

trusting receptivity and unreserved availability does not result from decision or from the direction of the will to some end. As Buber remarks, “The You encounters me by grace—it cannot be found by seeking” (62). It is not by his own efforts that the existing individual is able to open himself completely to another. If he experiences such openness, it neither by his own merit nor because he has earned it. It comes upon him unbidden, from whence he knows not. Such openness is a spontaneous response to another that arises from the existing subject’s confession of the meaninglessness of his own existence.

This mode of comportment, wrought by grace, generates yet another sense of subjective reality. For, while the individual’s average, everyday existence is intrinsically meaningless, the attitude of openness creates the possibility of existing with another in life-giving fellowship. In fellowship, in the giving and receiving of unconditioned acceptance everything becomes new. For, while existing in such fellowship, a genuine relation with another is created, and this relation imbues senseless existence with new meaning. In the face of the subjective reality of meaninglessness, redeeming love generates anew the possibility of life-giving, meaning-creating fellowship.

Nonetheless, to speak “you” freely and unconditionally involves genuine loss. For the existing subject who speaks “you” from the attitude of freely given and unreserved openness gives up everything that he has and everything that he is for the sake his “you,” and he does so without expectation of receiving anything in return. He willingly suffers for and suffers with his “you.” And though he does not give up hope of fellowship, he, like the Christ of the redemption story, suffers himself to be a lost love. For he gives himself freely without even the guarantee that the “you” to whom he

addresses himself will receive him. Thus in that mode of comportment which involves both trusting receptivity and unreserved availability the existing subject risks his life completely.

The story of redemption ends here with this risk of unconditioned love, which creates the possibility life-giving fellowship that imbues meaninglessness existence with new meaning, but it is an ambiguous story which does not end here. It thus expresses the sense that life is ambiguous. Even with the possibility of life-giving fellowship, subjective reality is not redeemed once and for all from its senselessness nor is the individual redeemed forevermore from the intrinsic meaninglessness of his existence. Buber calls this “the sublime melancholy of our lot” (68) that every “you” will cease to be “you” that every new creation of life-giving fellowship will recede at the inevitable return of the mind set on the flesh. And so meaninglessness and the possibility of life-giving, meaning creating fellowship exist together in flux, for the attitude of openness must constantly be renewed, and if it is renewed it is only by a grace—whence the existing subject knows not.

Conclusion

In response to Augustine's interpretation of Christianity as a metaphysical doctrine consistent with Platonic metaphysics and the resulting distortion of the meaning of redeeming love, I conjectured that if the story of redemption were interpreted as an expression of existential concern, the meaning of redeeming love would disclose itself as a true response to such concern. I argued also that if the Christian story of redeeming love discloses a true response to existential concern and if existential concern is something that the honest and rigorous thinker must face, then Christianity is something an honest and rigorous thinker could take seriously. It then became my task to determine (1) whether or not existential concern is something an honest and rigorous thinker must indeed face, (2) what constitutes a true response to such concern, and (3) whether or not the New Testament story of redemption is an expression of existential concern which discloses a true response to that concern.

In order to address the question of whether or not existential concern is something an honest and rigorous thinker must face, I considered what it means to be an honest and rigorous thinker. I concluded that the honest and rigorous thinker must address himself, at times, to questions that call for rationally grounded answers or solutions and, at other times, to the question of his very own existence. Since the honest and rigorous thinker is yet an existing subject, that thinker eschews altogether the question of his own existence at the expense of both honesty and rigor. Insofar as the honest and rigorous thinker must address the question of his very own existence, existential concern is something he must face.

A true response to existential concern is a response to the question of existence. This is a question to which neither reason nor science can respond, for reason and science seek objectively valid answers, which are therefore impersonal, abstracted from the very existence in question. A true response to the question of existence, however, must be one that the existing individual can appropriate into his existing; it must be deeply personal. A true response to the question of existence is, therefore, *a manner of being involved* in the concrete situation that neither ignores the absurdity of existence as it is experienced in existential concern nor denies that existence in question by giving in to suicide, despair, apathy, or nihilism.

To address the question of whether or not the New Testament story of redemption is an expression of existential concern which discloses a true response to that concern, I made use of Dilthey's conception of an expression of lived experience whose spiritual content has been liberated from its creator. If the New Testament story were such an expression, I argued, it would be possible for that story to express existential concern in such a way that even an interpreter in the twenty-first century would be able to access that concern and its response as the story's spiritual content. For an interpreter to have access to the story's spiritual content, she would have to make use of what Dilthey refers to as the higher forms of understanding, and her use of these forms of understanding must be rule guided, lest she read anything at all into the story.

Therefore, in order to determine whether or not the New Testament story is an expression of existential concern in which redeeming love serves as the response to that concern, I developed a hermeneutic framework by which I could employ the higher forms of understanding in a rule guided way. Though not specifically what Dilthey had in

mind, Nygren's theological method of motif research allowed for a rule-guided recreation of the New Testament story of redemption implicit in the New Testament texts. Likewise, the phenomenological method allowed for rule-guided re-experiencing of the attitudes expressed in that story and the corresponding sense of subjective reality implicated in those attitudes. Thus a modified method of motif research coupled with phenomenological description became the hermeneutic framework through which I interpreted the New Testament story of redemption.

By interpreting the story through this hermeneutic framework, I disclosed its spiritual content as an expression of existential concern and a response to that concern. According to the phenomenological description of the attitudes expressed in the story of redemption, sin is a particular orientation toward the world and toward others, namely it is that seemingly innocuous, ordinary attitude in which the existing subject is caught up in the practical concern of securing for himself a safe and satisfying existence. The parables and paradoxical teachings of Jesus express dread and nausea, moods in which existential concern is made manifest, at the senselessness of the existing individual's average everyday existence. In this manner, the accounts of Jesus' teaching express the question of existence. In response to the question of existence, the New Testament story of redemption testifies to the Most High's unconditioned love for sinners and Jesus' self-sacrificial death. As disclosed in the phenomenological interpretation, this testimony expresses the existing subject's insufficiency to save himself from an existence that is intrinsically meaningless. That is, the testimony of God's redeeming love for the world and Jesus' sacrifice for sinners is an expression of that attitude which gives rise to the language of confession in response to the question of existence. The New Testament

story of redemption testifies as well that the redeemed, who has confessed, is gripped by Jesus' act of love and cannot but love likewise. As the phenomenological description reveals, this testimony expresses yet another response to existential concern—an attitude of openness which gives rise to the language of availability.

I argued previously that both the attitude that gives rise to the language of confession and the attitude that gives rise to the language of availability yield a true response to the question of existence. To speak the language of confession is to abide in this truth of the individual's existence: Naked he came into this world not of his own choosing and in death the earth will swallow up not only his body but his every deed. In the face of the question of existence, for the existing subject to confess his finitude and his inability escape the senselessness of that very existence in question is to stand in an attitude of truth, to be true. Likewise to speak the language of availability is to be true. By risking the unconditioned openness in the face of dread and the presence of profound absurdity, the existing subject can respond to the question existence with a truth that he is in the whole of his being.

Because existential concern is something an honest and rigorous thinker must face and because the New Testament story of redemption expresses not only existential concern but a true response to that concern, Christianity, when interpreted as a liberated expression of lived experience is something that can be taken seriously by an honest and rigorous thinker. However, to find that the story expresses both existential concern and a true response to that concern is not yet to take the story seriously *as Christian*, or as a Christian form of religiosity. To take this story seriously as Christian, the honest and rigorous thinker must also appropriate the attitudes involved in being a sinner redeemed

by grace through love. The question then becomes are these attitudes ones that an honest and rigorous thinker can appropriate into his existing?

Before I conclude with an answer to that question, I think it necessary first to address what must certainly be a glaring objection to my description of what it means to take Christianity seriously. Would not the majority of those professing to be Christians take issue with this description, objecting that this is not how they understand themselves as Christian? I accede that, by and large, they would. For, Christians, as well as religious skeptics, predominately take their religion to be a metaphysical doctrine. To be a Christian is to acknowledge the objective truth of the articles of faith. But certainly, even a self-proclaimed Christian would not suggest that such an acknowledgement alone constitutes taking Christianity seriously. And if we came across an honest, self-proclaimed Christian, she must admit that she herself does not, indeed cannot, always take Christianity seriously. What would she mean by this? Would she mean that she does not always acknowledge the objective truth of the articles of faith or that she cannot always live in the attitude of the follower of Jesus, who has received the grace to confess her insufficiency before God and to love with Christ's self-sacrificial love? I deeply suspect it would be the latter. In other words, I argue that no matter how a Christian understands his faith, he takes Christianity seriously only when he appropriates the attitudes of the sinner redeemed by grace through Christ's unmerited love.

I now return to the question of whether or not these attitudes are ones that an honest and rigorous thinker can appropriate into his existence. Here I must make one of those refined distinctions for which philosophers are infamous. To say that taking Christianity seriously is a form of honest and rigorous thought and to say that the honest

and rigorous thinker can take Christianity seriously, i.e., can appropriate these attitudes into his existence, are different. Yes, to take Christianity seriously is to partake in honest and rigorous thought, but can the honest and rigorous thinker take Christianity seriously? Only, I think, in interludes of grace.

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