

# The Art of Love: A Roman Catholic Psychology of Love

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This article develops a psychology of love that integrates a Roman Catholic understanding of the person-in-relationship and findings of secular psychology. It demonstrates the dynamics of the virtue of love (as an act of love, a disposition to love, and the command to love) that demands attention to biophysical, psychosocial, and spiritual levels of relationships, emotion, cognition, and freewill. It indicates that love has a role to play in therapy with those in need of treatment, especially couples, families, and special populations. Numerous therapeutic challenges to love exist, including: transcending self, love of self, and love of enemies. This focus on therapy incorporates science and philosophy but also requires something greater, namely Christ's gift of grace and revelation. While this gift remains dependent on God, therapists and clients are called to bear loving witness to it and to God, not only in the therapeutic relationship, but also in all their vocations and life work.

*Love is "divine" because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a "we" which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28; Benedict XVI, 2005, n. 18)*

Love is divine. It is also human. The heart of Christianity is found in the love or charity (*agape*) of God above all things, and in the love of neighbor as self, as put in the synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:30, Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27). The Gospel of St. John's extensive treatment of love makes of it a "new commandment" (Jn. 13:1) and a friendship love (Jn. 15:13). St. Paul sings the praises of charity's enduring qualities (1 Cor. 13). Charity unites the whole of the Christian life by binding "everything together in perfect harmony" (Col. 3:14). It also unites and purifies the whole Church. Out of love for the Church, Christ "gave himself up for her in order to make her holy" (Eph. 5:25-26).

A theologically informed psychology of love, for a Roman Catholic, will start with the "psychology" of God that is revealed through the "living tradition" (see below) and expressed in biblical, magisterial, and theological texts. Since the human person is created in the image of the Trinity, the human psychology of loving God

and neighbor as self is not simply individual, but rather fundamentally relational and communal. This psychology concerns the person, who loves, and the mutuality of persons in love. The psychology of mutual love is based on a gift that is first received from other human beings—parents, spouse, children, friends—and primordially from God.

A Roman Catholic psychology of love recognizes the interdependence of human and divine love and their being rooted in knowledge and faith. God is love and has created all humankind in the divine image as knowing and loving persons (Gn. 1:26). It is God's love that makes possible human love of God, neighbor, and oneself. Since human love is both divine in origin and human in expression, we are constantly reminded that because of the effects of sin, the divine likeness is wounded in humankind (Gn. 3:16-19). Nonetheless, in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, God bestows new dignity on human nature and redeems mankind in a majestic act of love (Tit. 2:14). God's continuous and sustaining gift, which is manifest in loving personal relationships and the living Christian tradition, serves as the basis for the practice of the art of love in a Catholic psychology of love.

## A Catholic Model for the Psychology of Love

What are the implications of this theological vision and definition of love for a psychology and even a psychotherapy of love? What model can a Catholic psychology of love employ? Admittedly, there are different ways that Catholics answer these questions. In this article,

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we would like to draw upon an approach that seeks to integrate a Roman Catholic understanding of the person and relationships, on the one hand, and contemporary psychology and psychotherapy, on the other. We call it the IPS model, because it has been developed at the Institute for the Psychological Sciences, whose mission involves seeking "the renewal of the Catholic Christian intellectual tradition and the integration of the theoretical and empirical bases of psychology and a Catholic view of the human person" (Faculty of the Institute for the Psychological Sciences, 2012).

We view psychology as the study of the human psyche or spiritual soul, which includes behavior and the mind, but more as well. This approach becomes clearer when set in the context of a philosophical and theological understanding of the person-in-representation. There are five philosophical and three theological principles that the IPS Model establishes as an anthropological grounding. On the one hand, philosophically construed, the human person is (1) a personal unity, (2) interpersonally relational, (3) bodily, (4) rational, and (5) volitional and free. On the other, theologically, the human person is created, fallen, and redeemed.

This perspective draws upon not only philosophical and theological sources, but also scientific ones. It requires philosophical bridgework to span these disciplines. It draws upon both a psychology of the body (including the whole person) and a theology of the whole person (including the body). This method is unabashedly a theologically informed and philosophically nuanced, Catholic virtue approach to psychology that takes into consideration the relational capacities that are found in the structures of the human body, emotions, reason, and will (Faculty of the Institute for Psychological Sciences, 2012). It will lead us to attend to the personal, volitional, dispositional, and normative aspects of love and desire, which find their flourishing in the grace of the Holy Spirit. It also forcibly involves a multi-disciplinary approach to the psychological experience of love. Thus, it draws upon empirical studies and psychological theory in order to compare a Catholic understanding with contemporary psychological sciences, with a conviction that these studies provide important information about the flourishing and the ordering of love. They aid in our understanding of the human potential to practice the art of love, personally and communally, including in the context of psychotherapy.

### Sources, Methods, and Contrasts

While drawing on patristic, philosophical, and scientific sources, in differentiated ways, a Catholic perspective focuses primarily on the living Christian tradition constituted by the revealed Word of God (the Bible) and the apostolic tradition of doctrinal and moral teaching. The biblical and magisterial teachings construe love: as a gift that once received calls forth a kenotic movement of self-giving, following the example of Christ (Jn. 4:10; Phil. 2:5–11; John Paul II, 1979); as relational and focused on the other persons (Mk 12:29–31, Benedict XVI, 2005); as purifying *eros* by *agape* (Benedict XVI, 2005); as involving service to neighbor, the poor, and the common good (John Paul II, 1981, 1991; Benedict XVI, 2005, 2009); as uniquely unitive and procreative, for spousal love (Paul VI, 1968; John Paul II, 2006); and as ultimately uniting all in God (1 Cor. 15:28).

Drawing from authoritative doctrinal teaching (Ecumenical Councils and Catholic magisterial teachings), we affirm the importance of Jesus Christ for Christian love as expressed in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et spes* [GS], 1965, n. 22). It is Christ who "reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear." It is Christ who is united to humankind and to the human experience for "He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, He acted by human choice and loved with a human heart" (GS, n. 22). The Second Vatican Council communicates a salient truth about love in this way: Any human person "cannot fully find him or herself except through a sincere gift of self (Luke 17:33)" (GS, n. 24). The term "gift of self" has become synonymous in Catholic circles with *agape* love.

In establishing the parameters of a Catholic approach to the psychology of love, biblical sources provide incontrovertible authority (while requiring interpretation, *Dei Verbum*, 1964), the magisterial teaching and patristic sources provide proper authority (such as the Church Creeds and Councils), while natural reason in various philosophical and scientific sources provide extrinsic and probable arguments and authority (Aquinas, 1273/1948, I 1.8 ad 2). Moreover, a Catholic psychology of love takes these theological positions to be complemented by theoretical and empirical findings in psychology, such as the psychology of attachment and interpersonal behavior that we will identify throughout the paper. In particular, we draw upon theological

sources for the doctrinal and normative principles, but properly scientific psychological ones for understanding the development of love and difficulties therein, and of the art of a good life and of psychotherapeutic healing.

In order to integrate some of the empirical findings on love, we address the grass roots evidence that there is a dimension ranging from selfish to unselfish love, that is, from wholly self-focused love to sacrificial love. Such a dimension impacts on the natural and measurable manifestations of human relationality, attachment, and the expression of love. We find significant, for a Catholic virtue-based understanding of love, the extensive research findings that support the notion that human relationships and attachment are couched dimensionally along a line of negative to positive affect as it is expressed toward significant others (e.g. a love-hate dimension; a low to high relational anxiety dimension) and that these intersect obliquely with a dimension of freedom to control, separation to enmeshment, or intimacy to avoidance (Ainsworth, 1979, 1989; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Benjamin, 2000, 2003; Bowlby, 1982, 1988; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Schaefer, 1965; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007). These dimensions, which we suspect are influenced to some degree by the person dimension (Scrofanì, 2012), are noteworthy for understanding a robust Roman Catholic psychology of love and for developing it further.

### Secular Psychological Sources

In conversation with the above-mentioned theological roots and philosophical reflections, our work and conceptualizations include the contributions of scientific psychology and draw constructively from them. Psychological findings are significant for us, since the Catholic notion of the psychology of love recognizes that divine grace builds up human nature (Aquinas, 1273/1948, ST I. 1.8ad2). This principle leads us to understand that nature includes developmental and healing processes. Disorders of various sorts (personal and social ailments as well as the effect of the various types of sin) influence normal human development and the particular challenges of healing due to the particular conjunctures of nature and nurture (such as difficulties at genetic, developmental, and cultural levels).

This Catholic integrative model is cognizant of the work of early theorists like Eric Erickson (1968), who sees the stages of growth as an ascent from individuality to mutuality and eventually to community (Marcia, 1966). It attends to the contributions of Mary Ainsworth et al. (1978) and John Bowlby (1982, 1988) who gave us attachment theory and its understanding of the primal role of attachment in receiving and eventually participating in the exchange of love. Bowlby sees the limitations of psychoanalytic thought and classic conditioning and their reliance on drive reduction in explaining the needs of the person. He views developing persons as primarily and inherently relationship seeking and the early roots of positive emotional expression as grounded in closeness, contact, and support, all of which is consistent with our Roman Catholic view of the bodily, emotional, and relational elements of the gift of love.

Our Roman Catholic model, furthermore, seeks to integrate the more recent contributions of Gerhardt (2004), who tracks the latest research and discoveries in the role of attachment in infant brain development, in the preparation of the child for relationships and emotional interchange throughout life, and with regard to the psychiatric conditions and distortions of love that can develop when attachment fails (p. 246). Levine (2007) generates a list of nine notions of love that emerge from clinical research (love: as an arrangement; as a deal or contract; as an attachment; as a moral commitment; as a management process; as a force of nature; as a transient, emotional state; as an illusion; and as an emotional "stop sign" that acts as a buffer for destructive words and behavior). They reveal both the strengths and deficits in clients' conceptualization of love when it is uninformed about the fullness of the human person.

More systematic classifications from secular scientific psychology come from the classic works of Sternberg (1986) and Yela (1998, 2006). Sternberg (1986) provides a brilliant triangular theory that identifies three components of love: intimacy, commitment, and passion. Intimacy involves feelings of closeness, connection and bonding in a loving relationship. Passion is that which draws one to another physically through romance, attraction, and eventually to sexual relations. Commitment and decision begins with falling in love with someone in the short term and eventually making the commitment to sustain that love in the long term.

The three components have different levels of significance. For example, in short term relationships, passion is often central, while in enduring relationships, intimacy is usually the most important.

In his construction of the "Love Triangle," Sternberg (1986) presents differing categories of love that consist of a combination of the three components. By way of illustration, there might be simply camaraderie or friendship (i.e. intimacy only); companionate love (intimacy and commitment only); fatuous love (commitment and passion); or consummate love (the most fortified form inasmuch as it involves all three components). Yela (1998, 2006), building on Sternberg's work, proposes four components that include erotic passion, romantic passion, intimacy, and commitment. He has developed scales to measure his own tetragonal model, incorporating his four components.

Sternberg's (1986) model is interesting for our Catholic model, which seeks theoretical contributions from the psychological sciences in order to supply a further basis about how love develops and about the processes of the psychology of love. The Catholic approach affirms that normative, doctrinal, and moral dimensions can remain intact when put into a differential conversation that distinguishes the authority of scripture, theology, and psychology. St. Paul identifies the normative qualities of love. John Paul II and Benedict XVI provide theological guidance and philosophical reflections on the command and virtue of love. Sternberg and Yela provide a complementary level of psychological analysis that indicates the pathways of development and healing. We stand vigilant, nonetheless, about the potential influence of adverse presuppositions and of disordered loves in human experience.

Numerous scientists and practitioners give us insight into the place of bodily processes, emotions, and social transactions in marital life and in healthy and failing relationships. In her plenary address at the Emotionally Focused Therapy Summit in 2006, Johnson (2007) describes attachment theory (a psychologically foundational concept) as a new way of understanding adult love. It provides the road map for couple therapists to make their way through the complicated territory of adult attachment strengths and weaknesses. She posits that in couple and family treatment, attachment theory provides a "language for love among adults," which is constituted by the following elements: (1) There is a basic need for safe emotional

connection; (2) Seeking safe relationships is a manifestation of health and strength; (3) Relationship is a secure base to deal with life and the world; (4) Emotional accessibility and responsiveness are desirable; (5) Couples' distress grows out of protest, dependency, and "hanging on" or clinging, as well as anger over feared abandonment; (6) Intense emotions contribute to the organization of relational dynamics that can be spoiled by negative emotions like anger, sadness, fear, and shame rather than love; (7) Emotions associated with insecure relationships are handled with anxiety or avoidance; (8) Our identity is (partially) forged in attachments and; (9) Observable transactions are more basic than verbal ones.

Other recent work that informs our view of love includes both the understanding and the treatment of attachment processes themselves as an enhancement of love. Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) provide scientific evidence that is partially consistent with a Catholic view of love, as grounded in both the love of God and of the significant people in our lives. In their research, they cite secure attachment as an internal source of strength and propose that this can be expanded by real and symbolic encounters with external or introjected partners that are loving and caring. Whereas the aforementioned work is completely grounded in notions of physical attachment figures of the natural environment, Mikulincer and Shaver allow for other images that are a natural part of our human condition and can include spiritual elements. Moreover, groups, institutions, and symbolic personages (e.g., God) can become sources of security. Here there is an appreciation by secular psychology of the spiritual order of love and relationship. Inasmuch as it is a metaphysical appreciation, this view expresses similarities to the Catholic philosophical position that the human person can experience a loving relationship with the source of life and love, namely, the Creator.

Sparrow (2008) develops this latter point even further. He points out that researchers have thus far overlooked reports of religious experiences as a potential source of hypotheses concerning the curative factors in psychotherapy. The author examined reports of encounters with personifications of higher power. He found that those reporting such encounters often perceived the (spiritual) being, as having a thorough and intimate knowledge of them and an attitude of unconditional positive regard. There is something

unique that is generated from the feeling and belief that a benevolent spiritual presence knows us and accepts us completely.

Scientific research on attachment is rooted in ego psychologist Winnicott's (1958) observations of the mothering process. He noted the naturally inclined way that a mother embraces her child, lovingly holding, bathing and feeding, in a very affectionate and unique way of knowing and understanding that is so essential to the child. From this, Winnicott gives us the notion of the psychological "holding environment" for the child: a bodily, sensory, emotional and relational process that lays the groundwork for secure attachment and the emotion of love. From this very process, he then extrapolates into the environment that the therapist helps to create in the treatment alliance (Winnicott and Khan, 1986). He describes the importance of the mother contemplating the very being of the child rather than the productions of the child, a condition that the therapist can recreate by one well-timed interpretation that reveals profound understanding and loving concern, predicated upon a deep sense of knowing and regard.

In attachment theory, we are informed that insecure attachment produces anxiety and avoidance, where secure attachment allows for the fruits of intimacy and a more complete regard for the other as a separate person rather than an extension of the self meant to satisfy oneself or to bargain in a way that advantages oneself. To the extent that we are enslaved by our own needs, we are less available to others. There is implicitly greater freedom and a more informed exercise of commitment with secure attachment. It is in secure attachment that charitable love clearly flourishes. In a study, Scrofanì (2012) found that secure attachment was positively related to "other-focused" interpersonal behavior and positive affect and was also related to an orientation that focused on the best interest of others. He calls this a "person orientation." Insecure attachment correlated with self-oriented transactions, negative affect, or defensive bargaining. "Person" research opens the way for an "other focused" dimension of relating that goes beyond personal gain from attachment. This seems to require an example and a gift (a grace) that comes as a proximate cause from parents or caretakers, and primordially from an un-contingent being (God) who gives purely out of love. Shortly, we will draw further from these findings of secular and not so secular

psychology, especially concerning the roles of attachment, interpersonal behavior, and person attributions in recent research.

### **Philosophical Reflections on the Structure of Love**

While recognizing the limits of reason, its misuse, and its deformation, Roman Catholics acknowledge the role that a broader notion of reason plays in defending faith (philosophical theology), in reflecting upon human agency (philosophical anthropology and ethics), and in the fine-tuned observations of the psychological sciences (John Paul II, 1998; Benedict XVI, 2005). With the goal of finding a "complete and thus realistic vision of humans," John Paul II (1995) has affirmed the need to enrich a Christian understanding of the human person and love "by the contribution of indisputable scientific data, including that of modern psychology and psychiatry."

A classic statement of the basic psychological structure of human affectivity or love (both as emotion and as volition) is found in Thomas Aquinas' works, as well as in John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* (1998) and the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997). While treating the person (a unity of body and spiritual soul) and his or her attractions to various types of goods (persons and things), this classic view identifies the dynamics and functions related to the embodied loves that: (1) start in a knowledge (apperception of a good) that sparks the attraction and attachment of love; (2) is extended through desire for the good that is not wholly present; and (3) experiences pleasure and joy inasmuch as the good is beheld and attained (Aquinas, 1948, ST I-II 26-28). This basic structure is that of both the sense affections (emotion and sentiment) and the intellectual or spiritual affections (will and commitment). In a perspective that seeks to unite the human person's emotional and volitional affections and virtues, Aquinas (1948) affirms that "to love is to will the good of another" (ST I-II 26.4).

What are the psychological dimensions of human love of God, neighbor, and self, in a Catholic approach? The relationship between Catholic thought and empirical findings in psychology is differentiated according to the competency of each. While Roman Catholic thought is explicit about the presuppositions of its Christian vision of the human person and community, empirical approaches are not always forthcoming on the sources of their presuppositions. Nonetheless, we

will provide some illustrative examples that correlate empirical data and Catholic teaching on love. Of course, a complete assessment of all relevant empirical literature and of its philosophical presuppositions is beyond the scope of this brief article.

This is not in any way to imply though that the task is simple. Defining a Catholic notion of love and charity is a tall order. These two terms are as multifaceted as are the human person and community. The English word "love" applies with nuance according to the sub-disciplines operative in a Catholic integrative approach. In addition to biblical and scientific input, we can turn to key patristic and classic theological sources. St. Augustine (395/1887) defines charity in terms of movement toward and enjoyment of God: "I call 'charity' the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for his own sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and of one's neighbor for the sake of God" (3.10.16). Augustine's definition depends upon his distinction between *frui* (enjoyment) and *uti* (use) and upon his understanding that love orders all the virtues, including faith in Christ, hope in his promises, justice toward one's neighbor, and mercy on the poor. However, it depends above all upon his understanding of a person's ultimate life goal: to rest in God, with joy-filled love.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1948) also treats Christian virtue as the ordering of love (ST II-II 23.1; I-II 62.2), while emphasizing the character and nature of each virtue. In general, following Christ—in all vocations and life work—involves the faith, hope, and charity that purify and elevate human knowledge and love. Charity transforms natural attractions and love. Aquinas makes further distinctions about types of love and knowledge that help us to define our psychology of love. Although there is some overlap with Sternberg's (1986) triangular model, the dimensions Aquinas uses in thinking about love—ensouled emotion, embodied will, and cognition—are different from those of Sternberg, are more fundamentally volitional, and are more integrative of body, mind, and spiritual soul.

First, we can distinguish two sorts of human affectivity: (1) sense affect which is also called passion, emotion, or sentiment; and (2) willed affect, which is also called volition, choice, or the will. From a non-mechanistic view (a non-Cartesian view), there is a distinct yet profound connection between the affect of the body and that of the soul, i.e., between ensouled emotion (feelings of attraction and passion) and the

embodied will (consent, commitment, choice). A dualist and mechanistic view would attribute emotion to the body and will to the soul. But this is not the Catholic approach found in Aquinas, John Paul II, or Benedict XVI. The affection of the body and the affection of the mind, while being distinguishable, are not utterly distinct. They interact and both depend on the soul for expression. Together they specify the sentiment, passions, and affections as well as commitment, that is, emotional and willed aspects of love.

Sternberg's (1986) category of committed love seems to provide an illustration of this integration. It involves, in a single manifestation, all of his love components (intimacy, passion, and commitment), each of which implicitly reflects the inextricable expression of mutuality and knowledge, emotion, and will following the same order of things.

Often contemporary approaches to love—struggling with dualist or materialist tendencies—play emotional love off willed love. The latter, willed love, is sometimes either reduced to reason or, conversely, identified as the master of reason. Judith Butler (1999), in one strain of feminist thought, construes emotion or passion over reason. She adjudicates that passion cannot be ruled by reason and therefore emotion should rule it. Even in the midst of the disorders of love, a Catholic view of the human person recognizes an intimate unity of the body and mind that are held in unity by the spiritual soul (as secondary formal and efficient causes) and by God (as ultimate first, formal, efficient, and final causes). The person uses both reason and will in finding the standard that he or she uses to measure.

We might also see how this notion sizes up to empirical observations and findings. For instance, we know that despite the strong positive, passionate emotions that characterize newlyweds, many marriages end in disappointment. In the recent scientific literature investigating factors that contribute to the long-term success of loving marriages, Neff and Karney (2005) found that romantic feelings initiated by and grounded in global, emotion-filled assessments of one's partner (passion) were less successful than those based additionally on specific, accurate, observable perceptions (subject to reason) of the partner. Passion alone seemed insufficient. And, contrary to any extreme feminist slant, this was more valid for wives.

In another study, Acevedo and Aron (2009) found that warm romantic love, without the obsessive emotional component typical of early stage romantic love (strictly passion and idealization), can and does exist in long-term marriages, and is associated with more objective manifestations of marital satisfaction, well-being, and high self-esteem. Passionate love obsession was negatively correlated with romance in long-term, successful marriages and positively correlated only within short-term relationships. Over the ages, obsessive love has been questioned as true love. We will return to this point in relation to the thought of John Paul II on spousal love and Benedict XVI on *eros* and *agape* love.

Second, Aquinas distinguishes cognition and affection. In his mature (1948) work, *Summa Theologiae*, he specifies that will serves action as the efficient cause (as moderation or charity), while reason serves action as its formal cause (as practical reason or faith). However, is it cognition or affection that claims precedence? Is it knowledge or love that comes first? The question has found different resolutions between various Catholic thinkers as well as between them and other schools of thought.

On the one hand, cognition specifies the desired end of the act, while the will exercises it. We cannot choose to do what we do not know or do not have in mind. (In Sternberg's, 1986, terms, the "intimacy" component aids knowing, and the "commitment" component could not occur without the power of the will).

On the other hand, the will (choice) guides and focuses cognition. This addresses an apparent contradiction in *On the morals of the Catholic Church*, where St. Augustine (389/1887) asserts both that love requires knowledge and knowledge love. Augustine holds (1) that no one can love something that is unknown and (2) that moral knowledge is guided by well-ordered love. Aquinas and the Catholic tradition overcome this seeming contradiction inasmuch as they recognize that reason and will are mutually dependent on each other (Sherwin, 2005, p. 64).

Lastly, Aquinas (1948) defines intellectual love as the will's proper act, which is also called love. It concerns an attraction, inclination, complacency, and attachment that are not completed without the exercise of free will. In addition to the basic human capacity to willed love (also called choice, benevolence, friendship), there is as well a properly theological type of love (also called charity, *agape*, friendship-love). The theological

virtue of charity is a gift of God that, once received, must be given in turn. The gift, as a willed act of affirming God, is based in graced knowledge (the theological virtue of faith), longing for full unity with God and his other promises (the theological virtue of hope). It will not flourish unless it is also given to neighbor and self.

These philosophical (and theological) construals of love can be applied to the psychology of the human person not only at biological, neurological, sense-emotional, and interpersonal levels, but also at the intellectual and spiritual ones—because the body, mind, and the spiritual soul are fundamentally united in the person. This view seeks to reduce neither humankind to the person nor the person to the mind. Nor does it reduce the mind to cognition, volition, sentiment, and behavior. Nor, still further, to more basic instincts and processes. Such a non-reductionist approach to the psychology of love will succeed only inasmuch as it respects the interrelation and diversity of love as (1) emotion, and (2) the will's proper act, and (3) the graced act of the will (and graced disposition of the will to act).

### John Paul II

Pope John Paul II puts Catholic thought on love into dialogue with contemporary philosophy, when focusing on the person and the spousal meaning of the body. This effort to renew a Catholic understanding of love is not to be reduced to concern for the love of married couples. It attends to male and female differences, without reducing the person to a body in search of pleasure and without denying the fruits of pleasure to spouses. Moreover, the body is a sign of human longing for attaining ultimate joy with God and love with others. Following St. Augustine's treatment of 'use' and 'enjoyment' (*uti/frui*), he distinguishes "pleasure for its own sake" from "joy in a totally committed relationship with the object precisely because this is what the nature of the object demands" (Wojtyła, 1993, p. 44). The Catholic personalist regard of spouse for spouse puts pleasure in the context of committed love. Sexual pleasure is taken up in mutual spousal devotion and joy.

Empirical psychology, starting from the physical perspective, provides evidence that seems to favor this understanding of the fullness of love. A number of studies lend support to the view that the one sexual behavior relevant to potential gene propagation appears to be the one most

associated with healthy physiological and psychological functioning (Brody & Costa, 2008, 2009; Brody & Weiss, 2011; Costa & Brody, 2007, 2008, 2010). In Costa and Brody's 2007 study, 30 Portuguese women reported on the frequency of their sexual behaviors and corresponding orgasm rates. They also took the Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) Inventory. As predicted by the authors, frequency of penile-vaginal intercourse correlated positively with the PRQC dimensions: Satisfaction, Intimacy, Trust, Passion, and Love. Various non-coital sexual behaviors with a partner were uncorrelated or negatively correlated with the PRQC dimensions. For example, masturbation was inversely associated with Love, while penile-vaginal orgasmic frequency correlated positively with the PRQC dimensions of Satisfaction, Intimacy, Passion, and Love (all  $r > .44$ ) and the Global Relationship Quality ( $r = .52$ ). This study is admittedly based on a small sample of Portuguese women whose unique cultural roots may not generalize to all cultures but the trend is noteworthy. Again, these findings do not exhaust the entire domain of studies along these lines but they stand out as a trend in the literature. It is noted that the authors discuss their findings in terms of evolutionary and psychoanalytic theories rather than philosophical thought but the findings are nevertheless in concert with aspects of total self-giving espoused by John Paul II and others.

Love from the fully human perspective is not adequately developed within this range of analysis. On the contrary, the Catholic view takes these reflections on empirical findings further toward a more completely developed expression of human love. On the one hand, the findings demonstrate a failure of relationality (i.e., poor ratings of Satisfaction, Trust, Passion, and Love, as well as low ratings on overall quality of relationship) when pleasure is separated from the natural procreative act (variations of sexual activity like masturbation). In the thought of Paul VI (1968), and John Paul II (2006), the procreative and unitive aspects of intercourse are always to be held together. On the other hand, there is a clear sense of greater fulfillment of all things relational when pleasure is separated neither from the natural procreative act nor from a unitive relationship. In natural intercourse, there is not only the possibility of truly mutual, unselfish contributions of pleasure but the corresponding mutuality in the sharing of the potential giving of

life. Here, both parties give completely to each other and participate totally at all levels, but also join their love with God's love and participate as co-authors with the Author of life.

In his papal catechesis (1979–1984), published under the title, *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II (2006) finds that the Genesis account “allows us to speak of revelation together with the discovery of the ‘spousal’ meaning of the body in the mystery of creation” (p. 184). The spousal meaning of the body not only mandates heterosexual marriage, but also underlies further details about the importance of sex differences and complementarity at biophysical, psychosocial, and spiritual levels.

Pope John Paul II's contribution to a Catholic understanding of love is also found in his encyclicals on Christ (1979), women (1988), and men (1989). For each female and male, there is a common dignity of being a human person and of sharing a “common priesthood” of the baptized. There is also a common need to make a “sincere gift of self” in order to “discover themselves” as a true ‘unity of the two,’ which is intended to purify the male tendency to selfishly dominate, objectify, and possess the wife (John Paul II, 1988, n. 10). He identifies the feminine genius with sensitivity and other virtues, including empathy and love. He contrasts it with the personal alienation and loss of sensitivity that is due to discriminatory effects of science and technology.

### Benedict XVI

Pope Benedict XVI (2005) ties together the conceptions of *agape* (love or charity) in Johannine, Synoptic, Pauline, and other biblical sources by affirming that “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 Jn. 4:16). He emphasizes that the fulfillment of the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; cf. Mk. 12:29–31; 1 Jn. 4:10) is actually a response to a prior gift of love (life, affection, family, friendship). His treatment of love contrasts the Judeo-Christian tradition with religious expressions and corruptions of both *agape* and *eros*.

Benedict XVI (2005) resolves the apparent contradiction between *eros* and *agape* in a way that is quite different from that of Nygren (1930/1982), who pits pure love or *agape* against *eros*. De Rougement (1956/1983) and Barth (2010) also reject Nygren's scorn of *eros* and, in their own ways, find some conciliation between



*eros* and *agape*. Benedict XVI resolves the apparent contradiction by defining the root of *eros* at the level of the Wisdom that created the world and that persists in spite of the wounded (post-lapsarian) human condition. The solution is not Pelagian, but requires divine grace.

For Pope Benedict XVI (2005), *eros* in the large sense implies an attraction toward the other. *Eros* is a first step in love; it is an "extasis," a movement out of oneself. *Eros* is a fascination that carries the person toward the other: a transport in joy, marvel, and beatitude. This surprising use of "*eros*" recognizes the unity of love in creation and salvation history. Benedict XVI indicates that the term *eros* (as meaning attraction) is almost absent from the Bible. It is used twice in the Old Testament, and never in the New Testament. Nonetheless, the basic and emotional aspect of attraction is knit tightly with biblical anthropology. He covers in theological and philosophical terms what is learned from Costa and Brody's (2007, 2008, 2010) empirically based sexual behavior studies (where psychological functioning in the areas of satisfaction, trust, passion, and love correspond to the natural expression of *eros* and are inextricably intertwined with it) and the theoretical categories of Sternberg (1986; where "commitment intimacy" combines all his components of love) and integrates them into a higher, more comprehensible (and indeed more natural), biological, psychological, theological, biblical, and human context. This attraction moves the human agent because of beauty, goodness, and intelligence.

This movement, for Benedict XVI (2005) is *not* "sexual" attraction per se. He uses the word "sex" or "sexual" only three times in the text. In the first two (n. 5), he critiques the commercialization of sex and a materialist perspective. In the third (n. 11), he contrasts the biblical account of sexual differentiation from that of Plato's myth, which sees it as a punishment for pride and a source of torture.

It is in this larger context that a Catholic psychology of love can speak of the order of desire, the ordering of love. All types of desire and love have a basic movement toward the other. From the womb to the grave, the movements of justice, friendship, caring, and courage all concern this movement. Even our strongest pleasures and conjugal desires (including sexual intercourse—but not exclusively) guide us toward other persons. The "extatic" or "erotic" involves a goal that is outside oneself. It guides a person to another, to the cosmos, and to God.

Benedict XVI (2005) understands that love involves a unity that needs further unification. In effect, *eros* requires the further unity that develops through discipline, purification, and healing. The unity of body and spiritual soul must face the challenges of *eros*. With this unity and that of *eros* and *agape*, there is new nobility, thanks to Christ and Christian Faith. Benedict XVI (2005) says:

Christian faith ... has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter compenetrates, and in which each is brought to a new nobility. True, *eros* tends to rise "in ecstasy" towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing (n. 5).

*Agape* is thus a second step in the one unified movement of love. Benedict XVI (2005) says: "Even if *eros* is at first mainly covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to 'be there for' the other" (n. 7). In the larger vision, Benedict XVI (2005) argues that "The element of *agape* thus enters into this love, for otherwise *eros* is impoverished and even loses its own nature. On the other hand, man cannot live by oblation, descending love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive" (n. 7).

The upward path and purification is found in *agape*—love as a true discovery of the other. This love has a twofold character: exclusivity (this person alone) and permanency. "Love is indeed 'ecstasy,' not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God" (n. 5). In this context Benedict XVI (2005) cites the words of Christ in the Gospel of Luke (17:33): "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it" (n. 6). How the conversation between this theological reflection and psychological research might eventually lead us to further understanding of authentic self-discovery and of the discovery of God through love lies further down the road.

## **A Catholic View of Love and Applied Psychology**

The major preoccupation for clinical psychologists involves the application of their knowledge and understanding of psychology to treat those who are suffering and to improve society at large. The IPS Model promotes an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the human condition and the person. The Model is guided by anthropological premises that are deeply embedded in Catholic faith and faith-informed reasoning about the person and loving relationships. Briefly, the Model includes theological premises that refer to our being created beings made in the image of God. We are fallen and therefore suffer imperfection, pain, sinfulness, and death. We are nevertheless redeemed by Jesus Christ who fulfills our nature and gives us hope and salvation. Philosophically, we are a unified embodiment of attributes that are physical, sensory, motoric, emotional, rational, volitional and free, and deeply relational. As we have demonstrated, our view of physical existence, psychology, and spirituality is reflective of all these attributes. And the dynamics of the virtue of love (as an act of love, a disposition to love, and the command to love) run through them all. Hence, in our work with those in need of treatment, the role of Christian love from a Catholic perspective is always present. Our work incorporates all that we know from science and philosophy but also requires something greater, namely Christ's gift of grace and revelation. While the gift remains dependent on God, we can participate in bearing witness to it.

As a conclusion, we will list some areas in which a Roman Catholic view offers elements for a vibrant psychology of love of God, neighbor, and self. In so doing, we identify some challenges and suggest some ideas for future study.

1. The human groundwork for love has primal roots in early relationships with parents and caretakers and sets the tone for physical, emotional, and interpersonal development. The degree to which this love is at the onset self-giving, sacrificial, and unconditional allows for secure attachment. It promotes openness to others and ultimately guides us to manifest the love of God and love of neighbor and of oneself.

2. Love is greatest when it transcends self and genuinely attends to others, especially to those who are suffering and poor. This is true in parenting, marital relationships, neighborliness, community, and in efforts to assist and

treat others, so that they may also love more fully. Love from the Catholic perspective is other-directed and, ultimately, is always intended to bring us closer to God. It has to permeate all aspects of clinical treatment: in our assessment, in our individual therapies, in our marital and family interventions, and in the climate we set in our groups and organizations.

3. The love of self is a particular challenge, since misunderstandings about self-gift and sacrifice deprecate the person, wrongly thought to be called to hate oneself or not care for oneself in order to love others. In between the extremes of self-effacement and self-aggrandizement are found the diverse styles of authentic love of self, involving the capacity for self-possession and care for self. It requires accepting gifts from others, for it is the gift of God, parents, spouses, and friends that makes life possible and that makes possible the sacrificial gift of self to others.

4. Particular demands of love challenge client and therapist: to remain true to one's vocation to love spouse and family; to give of oneself in various forms of service, justice, and mercy in and outside of work; and to persist in one's faith by accepting the grace to grow in holiness and love for God, neighbor, and self. The therapist is called to love his or her client, even when they are interpersonally inaccessible, confusing, rejecting, and despairing.

5. In couple and family therapy, the therapist sets the parameters for attending to natural needs and desires. The therapist also helps clients receive the grace to be Christ-like in their love of each other.

6. There are growing, special populations who will predictably make an increasing demand for Christian love: the ailing, the aging, the persistently mentally challenged and mentally ill, and the disenfranchised from broken homes, shattered relationships, trauma, and abuse.

7. Finally, the dictum to love one's enemies is perhaps the greatest challenge, especially as we feel inimical to people who are closest—family members, Christians of other denominations or different allegiances, or colleagues. Nonetheless, God's love is the first source of all true love, even incomplete loves. It is the efficacious power for conversion of mind and heart, in each person. And finally, God's love is the ultimate attraction toward a full communion of love, with the divine plan

being "that God will be everything to everyone" (1 Cor. 15:28; RSV) and that God will continue to be the ultimate source, guide, and end for the art of love.

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