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### The Economics of Love

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I argue that the obligation to love based on the Christian tradition requires Christians to disperse their resources in a way that significantly evens out wealth distribution and increases social justice. Christians disagree on the terminology and some tenets of the goal of the Christian life (e.g., deification, beatific vision, communion with God, salvation). However, the requirement to practice love is common to all of these concepts, thus making love normative for Christians. I argue that when love takes such a prominent role in one's life, then it naturally influences how one manages one's resources. If love affects how one handles one's resources, then an outgrowth of love is more balanced distribution of wealth and increased social justice.

The Economics of Love

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology and the School of Social Work

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degrees

Master of Arts and Master of Science

By

Débora Silva Viana

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This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate Débora Viana, has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degrees

Master of Arts in Theology and Master of Science in Social Work

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To my parents, Evandro and Claudiene.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	Proposal.....	1
	The Debate on Love as a Norm .....	3
	Methodology.....	9
	Contribution to Scholarship .....	9
II.	AN ACCOUNT OF LOVE.....	11
	Introduction.....	11
	Two Distinct Loves: Agape and Eros .....	12
	Love and Deification.....	16
	An Account of Love.....	19
	Conclusion .....	22
III.	LOVE OF NEIGHBOR, WEALTH DISTRIBUTION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.....	24
	Introduction.....	24
	Love of Neighbor .....	27
	Love, Wealth Distribution, and Social Justice.....	29
	An Undeserving Neighbor .....	32
	Conclusion .....	34
IV.	CONCLUSION.....	35
	The Economics of Love .....	35



Putting Theory into Practice .....	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	39

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Proposal**

In this thesis I argue that the obligation to love as prescribed by the Christian tradition requires Christians to manage their resources in a way that significantly evens out wealth distribution and increases social justice. Christians have employed several terms to describe the goal of the Christian life (e.g., deification, beatific vision, communion with God, salvation). Although they might not agree on tenets and terminology, what is common to all of these concepts is the requirement to practice love. Scholars, for example, have shown that love is fundamental for Christianity because it plays a facilitating role in the process of deification.<sup>1</sup> If love is essential for the achievement of the goal of Christianity, it follows that practicing love ought to be central for Christians. When love is central to one's life, then it naturally influences all aspects of one's life including one's resources. If love affects how one handles one's resources, then an outgrowth of the practice of love is more balanced distribution of wealth and increased social justice.

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1. For an example, see Frederick D. Aquino, "The *Philokalia* and Regulative Virtue Epistemology: A Look at Maximus the Confessor," in *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, ed. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 240–51. The goal of this thesis is to show that love impacts wealth distribution and social justice rather than to make a case for love's role in the process of achieving the goal of the Christian life. Because of this, here I assume that proposals such as Aquino's are true, and thus I do not spend time arguing for the legitimacy of love's facilitating role in achieving deification, the beatific vision, communion with God, or salvation.

The disciplines of theology and social work are both relevant to this project. This is a theological project, on the one hand, because it analyzes what is entailed by the virtue of love and, in light of that, how love should be practiced by those who wish to attain deification.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, this project also entails social work because it explores concepts such as income distribution, wellness, and social justice. Thus, theological sources inform this thesis when I examine the virtue of love from a theological standpoint, and I turn to social work when I address wealth distribution and social justice.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis, at times it may seem like I am answering a social work question by utilizing theology, while at others it will look like I apply social work thought to address a theological question. Neither of these statements properly represents my thesis because theology and social work are differently represented in each stage of this project. In chapters 1 and 2, I spend significant time on the virtue of love; thus, these chapters represent the theological side of this thesis. In chapters 3 and 4, I argue that the practice of love is consequential to wealth distribution and social justice; thus, chapters 3 and 4 serve as the social work dimension of this project. Still, I hope that chapters 3 and 4 are still relevant to theology-inclined readers given that they address the practical consequences of a theological virtue. Likewise, I hope chapters 1 and 2 catch the interest of social work-inclined readers, especially those who identify as Christians.

However, before I jump to my argument, I would like to set the stage for further discussion on the virtue of love. For this reason, I focus this chapter not just on

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2. As I mentioned before, there is disagreement on terminology when it comes to the goal of the Christian life. However, for the sake of avoiding vagueness, I use the term *deification* here and throughout my project as a substitute for the generic term *the goal of the Christian life* as well as for *beatific vision*, *communion with God*, and *salvation*.

introducing my project but also on the current debate on love as a norm within the Christian tradition. Discussing current positions on love as a norm is important because they are directly related to how theologians perceive the requirement to practice love in light of its role in achieving deification. Hence, in the next section of this chapter I share the position of three theology scholars on love as a norm as well as the biblical witness of love as a commandment. I also introduce my own position on love as a norm, and I explain how Carl Rogers's approach to therapy sheds light on how love is considered a norm within the helping professions. Afterwards, I explain the methodology of this thesis and its contribution to scholarship.

### **The Debate on Love as a Norm**

In "Love's Not All You Need," Stanley Hauerwas argues it is inappropriate to consider love as a norm for Christians.<sup>3</sup> Hauerwas concedes that Christians should love one another in accordance with the greatest commandments, but he maintains the commandments are not enough reason to make love normative. He claims that love cannot be an end in itself or "the purpose of God's eternal will" because "God's identity is prior to his presence and the love we find in his presence is possible only because he stands for goods prior to such presence."<sup>4</sup> Thus, he concludes the love commandment cannot be separated from the life of Jesus Christ. Following from this conclusion, he argues that having love as a norm creates an ethic that can bend to an individual's wishes while an ethic based on the story of Christ can actually transform the individual.<sup>5</sup> He also

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3. Stanley Hauerwas, "Love's Not All You Need," *Cross Currents* 24 (1972): 225–37.

4. *Ibid.*, 227.

5. *Ibid.*, 228.

contends that having love as a norm perpetuates the illusion that “becoming an I to a Thou is the height of human attainment,” so justice is a more appropriate norm than love given that the latter can “blur the pain and the glory of living morally in this life.”<sup>6</sup>

In *The Priority of Love*, Timothy Jackson addresses Hauerwas’s case against love as an ethical norm for Christians.<sup>7</sup> With respect to Hauerwas’s claim that normative love allows for self-indulgence, Jackson argues that Christian love must not be discarded due to distorted concepts of human love. That is, the sentimental love characteristic of romantic relationships must not be confused with the love called for in Christian ethics. As he illustrates, “there are many false coins of ‘love’ in circulation, but the task is to spot and reject them, not to devalue the treasury altogether.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Jackson points out that Hauerwas creates a “misleading dichotomy” by separating the life of Jesus and the Christian notion of love.<sup>9</sup> According to Jackson, Christian love cannot be separated from Jesus and vice-versa given that the two are essentially synonymous.

Another scholar who believes love is not an appropriate norm for Christians is Richard Hays in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.<sup>10</sup> The first reason he gives is that love is not a significant theme in New Testament books such as Mark, Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation. He argues that because these books fail to treat love as a vital message, it would be wrong to consider love a norm for moral life if one’s source is the

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6. Ibid., 230.

7. Timothy P. Jackson, *The Priority of Love: Christian Charity and Social Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

8. Ibid., 18.

9. Ibid., 17.

10. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).

New Testament. He exemplifies his point by saying, “if Mark were the only Gospel in the New Testament canon, it would be very difficult to make a case for love as a major motif in Christian ethics.”<sup>11</sup> His second reason is that, according to his reading of John 3:16, God’s love is shown exclusively in Christ’s crucifixion. Given that Hays already treats the cross as a norm, he reasons it would be redundant to treat love as normative as well if love only has meaning in the context of the crucifixion. His final reason is that love has been demeaned by its overuse in popular culture, becoming “a cover for all manner of vapid self-indulgence.”<sup>12</sup> He concludes that using love as a norm would only cause confusion because the idea of love has been distorted by its overuse.

Jackson also addresses Hays’s three objections to love as a norm. Regarding Hays’s first objection, Jackson says both the Old and New Testaments consistently refer to God as love and command all to love according to God’s example. In relation to the absence of love throughout Mark, Jackson points out Hays’s own acknowledgement that Mark 12:28–34 still treats love of God and neighbor as normative. Second, despite the crucifixion epitomizing God’s love, Jackson contends that the cross is not the only instance where the embodied Christ shows love. Simply put, Christ’s life is full of displays of divine love besides the crucifixion. As a consequence, it is unreasonable to restrict Christ’s love only to the cross. At last, Jackson’s response to Hays’s third objection is similar to his criticism of Hauerwas. More precisely, Jackson disapproves of

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11. *Ibid.*, 200.

12. *Ibid.*, 202.

Hays's discarding the idea of love and all it stands for in Christian tradition simply because the term has gone mainstream.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond criticizing Hauerwas and Hays, the purpose of Jackson's argument is to establish love as a norm within and beyond Christianity. Among his reasons, he advocates that the Christian affirmation that "God is love" is a reminder that practicing love is both participation in the life of God and a commandment, making love normative. In addition, he argues the priority of love prevents both reductionism and pluralism. That is, agape can avoid moral righteousness as well as relativistic ethical claims because love does not allow for a rigid morality and cannot be bent according to one's feelings either. Given this, he concludes that "love is antecedent . . . to other goods in being the necessary condition for their full enjoyment" and that agape "generates itself as its first priority."<sup>14</sup>

Another factor that contributes to love's normative role in Christianity is its status as a commandment grounded in Christian tradition. Love as a commandment has its roots in the Jewish Shema and the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>15</sup> These passages affirm, respectively, that love is expected from those in covenant with God and that it is the most important commandment. Following the biblical text, the Church Fathers ratify the love commandment as a norm for Christians. Maximus the Confessor, for example, explicates that love is required for those who wish to be deified, so putting anything else above love

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13. Jackson, *The Priority of Love*, 24.

14. Jackson, *The Priority of Love*, 11.

15. See Deut 6:5; Matt 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–8.

constitutes a transgression.<sup>16</sup> He also believes knowledge of God comes only through love; thus, “there is nothing greater than love.”<sup>17</sup> On the same note, Basil of Caesarea teaches there is an order to the commandments given by God and the first and most important is the precept to love God followed by love of neighbor.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Thomas Aquinas asserts that love takes precedence over all other commandments and effects union with God.<sup>19</sup>

Like Jackson, I claim that love of God is normative for Christians, which in its turn is consequential for wealth distribution and social justice.<sup>20</sup> While he grounds the priority of love in the theological claim that God is love, I assume love is a norm within the Christian tradition due to its facilitating role in the process of deification. However, since the goal of my thesis is to show how love is consequential for wealth distribution and social justice, I do not attempt to make a case for love as a norm in this project. Instead, I explore the virtue of love and how it can lead to more balanced wealth distribution and increased social justice. My argument is that if love is essential for the achievement of deification, then the practice of love, which influences all aspects of one’s life including one’s resources, ought to be central for Christians. If love affects how

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16. Maximus the Confessor, “*The Four Hundred Chapters on Love*,” in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, ed. John Farina, trans. George C. Berthold, CSW (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1985), 36–98.

17. Maximus “*The Four Hundred Chapters on Love* 1.9,” 36.

18. Augustine Holmes and Basil of Caesarea, *A Life Pleasing to God: The Spirituality of the Rules of St Basil* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 2000), 61.

19. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas* 2.2.44.1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa>.

20. Although it might be possible to make a case for love as a norm for all persons, I restrict my project to love as a norm exclusive to Christians due to time constraints and the abbreviated nature of a master’s thesis. Because of this, the applicability of my claims to any population beyond Christians goes beyond the scope of this project.



one uses their resources, then an outgrowth of the practice of love is balanced wealth distribution and increased social justice.

Inquiry into the normative role of love is not exclusive to theologians; the psychologist Carl Rogers also promotes love as a norm for the helping professions in his humanistic approach to therapy. In “The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change” and *Person to Person: The Problem of Being Human*, Rogers suggests a few conditions which are necessary for the effectiveness of therapeutic relationships.<sup>21</sup> One of the conditions is “unconditional positive regard” (UPR): a concept introduced by Rogers himself which typifies a hospitable posture shown by the therapist toward their clients and is comparable to love.<sup>22</sup>

Rogers equates UPR to love insofar as they both happen independently from how the object of love feels or behaves, which is in agreement with the Christian conception of divine love, agape.<sup>23</sup> He also clarifies that UPR must not be confused with eros when he says positive regard is a love that is not “romantic and possessive . . . not paternalistic, nor sentimental, nor superficially social and agreeable.”<sup>24</sup> Rogers’s application of agape in therapy is still accepted today, proven to be effective, and widely used in different therapeutic approaches.<sup>25</sup> Although the term agape is not commonly applied alongside

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21. Carl R. Rogers, “The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change,” *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 21 (1957): 95–103; Carl R. Rogers and Barry Stevens, *Person to Person: The Problem of Being Human; A New Trend in Psychology* (New York: Real People Press, 1967).

22. Rogers, “The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions,” 98.

23. I discuss the concept of agape in more detail in the second chapter of this thesis.

24. Rogers and Stevens, *Person to Person*, 91. I discuss the concept of eros in more detail in the second chapter of this thesis.

25. Marvin R. Goldfried, “What Has Psychotherapy Inherited from Carl Rogers?,” *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 44.3, 249–52.

UPR in current literature, the two have the same principles and demonstrate that love is normative in theology *and* in social work practice.

### **Methodology**

In this thesis, I employ insights from systematic theology and social work. One such insight comes from Frederick Aquino and his proposal that love plays a facilitating role in the process of deification. I also draw from Anders Nygren and Harry Frankfurt in order to clarify what is entailed by the virtue of love. In addition, I engage social work literature as I speculate how the obligation to love might impact wealth distribution and social justice. For this end, I employ works from Mark Rank, Thomas Hirschl, and Kirk Foster on social welfare and the American Dream. Additionally, I utilize some concepts as described by the National Association of Social Workers.

In order to demonstrate that an outgrowth of love is more balanced wealth distribution and increased social justice, in the second chapter of this thesis I explore what is entailed in the virtue of love. I also elucidate the objects of love, namely God and neighbor, and how the obligation to love constitutes a positive obligation. In the third chapter, I argue that the practice of love has implications for wealth distribution and social justice. I specifically focus on love of neighbor and how one must love one's neighbor as oneself. In the fourth chapter, I sum up my argument and conclude my thesis by answering two questions regarding ways to put my proposal into practice.

### **Contribution to Scholarship**

With this project I hope to contribute to the literature of social work and theology. I contribute to the theological literature by making a logical move that connects systematic theology on love to wealth distribution and social justice. Though this is an

ancient discussion (going back at least to Basil), logical arguments for this position have failed to go beyond the biblical witness. This inability to connect the two subjects in a theological way is exemplified by Basil, who relies exclusively upon biblical assertions. Thus, I hope to contribute to theological scholarship by making a more robust claim grounded on systematic theology. Furthermore, my project also fills a gap in the theological literature given that theologians with accounts of normative love have overlooked love's impact on wealth distribution. For instance, Jackson employs his priority of love to different social justice topics but never considers wealth distribution in light of his theory on love. Thus, with this project I hope to bridge this gap and incite more discussion on the practical implications of love.

I also contribute to the social work literature as I propose a possible way to address the issue of unequal wealth distribution from a logical standpoint. This is important because social work as a social science tends to neglect philosophical inquiry in favor of empirical research. Although this is appropriate when it comes to evidence-based practice, it creates a gap in social work ethical theory. Of course, my proposal relies on speculation without any statistically significant evidence to back it up. However, the purpose of this thesis is more to explore the reasoning that should lead one to action rather than to offer a solution to ending unequal wealth distribution and achieving social justice. Accordingly, in this project I approach social work topics through argumentation rather than data in order to contribute to social work literature with a theoretical thesis.

CHAPTER II  
AN ACCOUNT OF LOVE

**Introduction**

The goal of this chapter is to expand on the virtue of love specifically by introducing the concepts of agape and eros, exemplifying the relationship between love and deification, and offering my own account of love. The Christian conception of love, also known as agape, shares consistent features in the literature on love. Nevertheless, the concept of agape can at times be confused with eros even though the two share little if any similarity. For this reason, I start this chapter by explaining further the concepts of agape and eros as described by Anders Nygren.<sup>1</sup> Next, I provide an example of how theologians have connected love to the process of deification. For this purpose, I briefly introduce Maximus the Confessor's conception of deification and the role of love in its achievement. Finally, I dive into my own account of love where I introduce its four main attributes. I do so informed by the writings of Harry Frankfurt and Gene Outka on love.<sup>2</sup> I also explain what is entailed in love as a positive obligation.

However, before I introduce the concept of love any further, I believe it is important to briefly clarify the objects of love. It is natural to assume that the love that is central in Christianity is only directed toward God, but this conclusion is inadequate and

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1. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London: SPCK, 1953).

2. Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, Yale Publications in Religion 17 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

incomplete. This is because God created the world, endowed it with intrinsic value, and loves creation. If someone loves God, it seems only natural that they would also love what God created and loves. Thus, implicit in love for God is love for God's creation and for what God loves (i.e., among other things, the neighbor) for their own sake. This means that love for neighbor follows from love of God, but they are also unique insofar as both God and neighbor must be loved as ends in themselves. In other words, the love that is necessary for achieving deification has both God and neighbor as its objects given that a person who loves God naturally also loves their neighbor. Consequently, the love that is central to Christianity has both God and neighbor as its objects. With this in mind, I focus the remainder of this project on love directed toward one's neighbor.

### **Two Distinct Loves: Agape and Eros**

In *Agape and Eros*, Nygren addresses the "problem of Agape and Eros," the erroneous association of two concepts of love that have little in common.<sup>3</sup> Much of the confusion that arises between these terms (both of which come from the Greek) is because they are each individually translated as *love* in several different languages including English.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, one can hardly be held accountable for assuming agape and eros are a variety of the same object.

In order to correct the confusion caused by the inappropriate connection between agape and eros, it is necessary to clarify their particularities. According to Nygren, agape draws its meaning from the conception of fellowship with God, and thus it can be

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3. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 30.

4. *Ibid.*, 32.

described in terms of divine love.<sup>5</sup> He explains that God's willingness to extend love and grace to all people (i.e., sinners) demonstrates how fellowship with God is guided by love. From this he concludes that agape (i.e., divine love) must follow from the idea of fellowship with God given that in both cases there is "no longer any reason to ask about either the better or worse qualities of those who are the objects of [d]ivine love."<sup>6</sup>

While it is difficult to do justice to agape in a simple definition, Nygren offers four features that help describe the content of agape. First, agape is spontaneous and disinterested because it exists independently from the value of its object.<sup>7</sup> In other words, divine love is unconcerned with valuation as it is not affected by any features in the object of love. This leads to the second attribute, that agape is disinterested in the value of the beloved. That is, an individual's righteousness or faults do not change their status as a recipient of divine love. Third, agape creates value in the sense that the object of agape acquires value just by being God's beloved.<sup>8</sup> Fourth, agape is an indispensable virtue in

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5. Ibid., 67–81.

6. Ibid., 75.

7. This explanation of agape refers to divine love rather than human love. For this reason, I include here that love is spontaneous because God's love is spontaneous. With this, I do not mean that human love is only real if it is spontaneous or that human love cannot be deliberate or even cultivated over time. Divine love and human love are distinct, and although Christians should seek to love like God loves, as with most things in life, the reality falls short of the ideal. Hence, while divine love is spontaneous and individuals should strive to love like God does, my claim (or rather, Nygren's claim) here is specific to divine love.

8. Nygren suggests that persons have no value in themselves, and instead a person's value comes from the fact that they are the object of divine love. I find it important to present Nygren's position faithfully even when we disagree. Thus, I added this characteristic of Nygren's concept of agape to my project in order to represent his position truthfully, but my own conception of love differs from his in this sense. I defend that persons (and all of God's creation) have value in themselves, so they must also be loved as ends in themselves. I also find it problematic to claim that persons have no intrinsic value, but this goes beyond the scope of this project. My purpose in explaining Nygren's concept of agape is merely to show that love can be understood differently by different people. Distinctions in how one understands love can greatly impact how seriously one takes the obligation to love (e.g., Hauerwas's and Hays's disregarding love as a norm for its current popular significance as I explained in the previous chapter). Thus, because I use Nygren's position only as an example rather than a norm on love, I do not believe our divergence offers a challenge to my position.

the process of achieving deification. Nygren's reasoning is that if individuals necessitate agape to have value, then attaining deification is also beyond anyone's ability because it is dependent upon God's grace and willingness to extend love. Thus, he concludes that agape facilitates the achievement of deification by providing a path to God.<sup>9</sup>

It is because of these features that agape affects both religious and ethical inquiries in the Christian tradition. For instance, Nygren describes Christianity innovating the religious sphere of Late Antiquity because of its theocentric character. While the Greco-Hellenistic religion pointed its followers to the "Highest Good" which could satisfy their needs, Christianity introduced the "Good-in-itself," turning its focus to God while allowing for fellowship between the deity and humanity.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence of this shift in framework from egocentrism to theocentrism, the Christian tradition also altered ethical discourse from individualism to social relationships. In other words, Christianity's reorientation away from the individual and toward God has moral implications as individuals now must turn outward to find the Good. In conclusion, agape is the underlying factor in Christianity's approach to religion and ethics because of its role in facilitating fellowship with God.

The concept of eros, unlike agape, can be characterized by its acquisitive and self-serving nature. Two main features of eros are its awareness of something wanted and the attempt to satisfy that need. Accordingly, eros happens when a need is instigated, and it is extinguished when the desired object is attained. Because eros necessitates desire and

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9. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 75–81.

10. *Ibid.*, 44–6.

longing, value is perceived differently for eros in comparison to agape. While agape disregards value, eros is only directed toward that which is perceived as valuable.<sup>11</sup>

For the same reason, eros only strives for what is upward. Consequently, eros in its highest form also acts as an intermediary between humanity and God but on its own terms in what is called “Heavenly Eros.”<sup>12</sup> In consistency with Plato’s Greco-Hellenist religion, an individual might desire the divine with eros. However, the gods who lack nothing can only experience eros insofar as they are the object of it; thus, they cannot reciprocate eros. Therefore, even Heavenly Eros involves an egocentric nature as the gods are not able to experience eros unless they are the objects of it, and even the human desire for the divine under eros is motivated by self-satisfaction.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the possibility of confusion between agape and Heavenly Eros, correlating the two is incorrect. A main reason they should not be confused is agape’s and eros’s conception in two different historical contexts. Although the word agape was possibly used by Greek polytheists, it is because of the prominence it received in Christianity that agape developed its robust meaning.<sup>14</sup> This can be attested in the references to agape found in the New Testament as well as in the works of ancient and contemporary theologians like Tertullian and Karl Barth.<sup>15</sup> Prior to this, the myth of eros, developed by Plato, portrayed it as the child of Poverty and Resource resulting in eros’s

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11. Ibid., 176–7.

12. Ibid., 51–2.

13. Ibid., 175–81.

14. Frederick W. Danker et al., “ἀγάπη,” BDAG 6.

15. See Danker et al., BDAG 6; Tertullian, *The Apology* 39 (ANF 3:46–7); and Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 4 vols. (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 4:747.



needy nature.<sup>16</sup> Thus, as Nygren points out, “Paul knows nothing of [e]ros, and Plato nothing of [a]gape.”<sup>17</sup> Another reason is that Heavenly Eros is the most spiritualized form eros can attain, while agape is divinely inspired from the get-go. Because even a spiritualized eros is not initiated by the divine, it is erroneous to suggest Heavenly Eros can lead to agape or that agape is a higher form of eros.<sup>18</sup> Conclusively, treating agape and eros as correspondent or commensurable concepts is inaccurate as agape is an essential feature of Christianity and the divine, while eros cannot attain such status even in its most spiritual form.

### **Love and Deification**

Given that agape is intrinsically connected to communion with God, I now introduce Maximus’s approach to deification as an example of how theologians have connected the goal of the Christian life to the virtue of love. The path to deification as conceptualized by Maximus the Confessor illuminates why love must take a central role in the Christian tradition and in the lives of Christians. Deification, the path to achieving divine likeness, is traditionally considered by theologians “the final end of salvation.”<sup>19</sup> According to Maximus, deification requires, among other practices, the employment of

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16. Richard Hunter, *Plato’s Symposium*, eds. Kathleen Coleman and Richard Rutherford, Oxford Approaches to Classical Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85.

17. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 33.

18. *Ibid.*, 51–2.

19. Frederick D. Aquino, “The *Philokalia* and Regulative Virtue Epistemology: A Look at Maximus the Confessor,” in *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, ed. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 240–51. In order not to distract from my goal of demonstrating that love has implications for wealth distribution and social justice, I only address deification insofar as it is directly connected to my project. That is, I only briefly explain deification, and I spend most of my time in this section discussing the role love plays in deification. For more on deification, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

virtues (e.g., prudence, courage, temperance, and justice) with the purpose of attaining stability, redirecting one's passions, and engaging in contemplation.<sup>20</sup> As deification constitutes "a graced mode of experiential knowledge," these virtuous practices also contribute to the obtainment of knowledge of God.<sup>21</sup> In other words, virtues are fundamental for persons to achieve their proper end because they aid in the purification of the intellect, which facilitates acquisition of knowledge of God leading to deification.

Among the virtues necessary for deification, love is one of the most important because it can facilitate the pursuit of knowledge of God while liberating the self from vices.<sup>22</sup> That is, love acts as both an epistemic virtue by aiding the pursuit for knowledge of God and a moral virtue for freeing one from moral corruption. According to Frederick Aquino, making progress toward deification requires "a synthetic power that solidifies other virtues, draws the intellect to its proper source of illumination, and aids in navigating a unified movement toward divine likeness."<sup>23</sup> Because love as an epistemic and moral virtue possesses these characteristics, it has "deifying power" over other virtues causing love to have priority in the process of deification.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, love advances the deification process by playing a fundamental role in the exercise of ascetic practices (*praktike*) and in the pursuit of knowledge of God

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20. Maximus the Confessor, "The Four Hundred Chapters on Love 2.79," in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, ed. John Farina, trans. George C. Berthold, CSW (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1985), 36–98.

21. Aquino, "The *Philokalia*," 244.

22. Frederick D. Aquino, "Maximus on the Beginning and End of Rational Creatures," in *Ethische Normen des frühen Christentums: Gut – Leben – Leib – Tugend*, vol. 4 of *Kontexte und Normen neutestamentlicher Ethik / Contexts and Norms of New Testament Ethics*, ed. Friedrich W. Horn, Ulrich Volp, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 371–81.

23. Aquino, "The *Philokalia*," 248.

24. *Ibid.*, 248.

(*theoria*). *Praktike* and *theoria* have interdependent functions in the path to divine likeness as ascetic practices that further the practice of the virtues and knowledge of God. *Praktike*, the first stage of deification, entails the practice of virtues—and most importantly, love—while facilitating contemplation, or *theoria*, the second stage of deification. Love also furthers *theoria* because it “carries intellectual activity toward communion with God.”<sup>25</sup> In this way, the importance of love for deification goes beyond a moral role as it is intrinsically connected to the pursuit of knowledge of God.

Love is also a “manifestation of divine grace,” and as such it has the ability to facilitate the actualization of divine likeness.<sup>26</sup> Given that deification cannot be achieved by human effort alone, it necessitates God’s grace in order to be accomplished. In this way, love operates as the vehicle that carries the individual to the final stage of deification, *theologia*. Theological philosophy, or *theologia*, comprises direct knowledge of and participation in God.<sup>27</sup> *Theologia* cannot be achieved without successful navigation of the first two stages of deification (*praktike* and *theoria*) and divine grace which are only made possible through love. Thus, love is an essential virtue in the process of deification for its action as both an epistemic and a moral virtue, its role in the three stages of deification, and its capacity to manifest God’s grace. If love is essential for deification, and if deification is central to Christianity, it follows that love must be practiced by those who wish to be deified.

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25. Ibid., 248.

26. Ibid., 248.

27. Ibid., 243.

## An Account of Love

Love has four predominant attributes that are generally agreed upon among scholars.<sup>28</sup> The first one, and more specific to love toward one's neighbor, is that *love includes all in a particular way*. All people are the object of love, but love cannot have a generic beloved because love does not allow for indifference regarding its object.<sup>29</sup> In this way, every individual *qua* human being is a particular object of love.<sup>30</sup> When it comes to love of neighbor specifically, this means that every individual is beloved in a concrete and specific way. As Frankfurt exemplifies:

For a person who wants simply to help the sick or the poor, it would make perfectly good sense to choose [their] beneficiaries randomly from among those who are sick or poor enough to qualify. It does not matter who in particular the needy persons are. Since [the helper] does not really care about any of them as such, they are entirely acceptable substitutes for each other. The situation of a lover is very different. There can be no equivalent substitute for [their] beloved.<sup>31</sup>

This means that loving one's neighbor cannot be a blanket gesture targeting only faceless individuals. Instead, love can only be practiced toward concrete and specific individuals and this must be the same for all persons.

Second, *love is independent and absolute loyalty*. Love is independent from its beloved in the sense that love is unaffected by any traits or behaviors of the beloved. One cannot love their neighbor for their status, wealth, accomplishments or their lack thereof. For this reason, love stays consistent even when the neighbor does not. Meanwhile, love

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28. As I mentioned earlier, divine love and human love are distinct even though persons should aim to love as God loves. The attributes I introduce in this section (regardless of their similarity to divine love) are representative of human love. As such, my account of love should not be confused with God's nature or God's love.

29. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 44.

30. Outka, *Agape*, 9.

31. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 44.

is absolute loyalty because it has no conditional demands. Love does not require reciprocity or for the neighbor to fit a specific identity.<sup>32</sup> While the beloved might change their behavior or position in society, one thing remains consistent: the beloved is perpetually beloved and there is nothing they can do to change their condition as beloved. Thus, love is an absolute loyalty to the beloved independently of any of their characteristics.<sup>33</sup>

Third, *love disregards worth while creating value*. Similar to Nygren's account of agape, love is not grounded on the perceived worth of the beloved.<sup>34</sup> Instead, love holds the beloved as irreducibly valuable.<sup>35</sup> This does not mean that the beloved does not have worth, or that the lover does not perceive the worth of the beloved. Love simply disregards any perceived value of the beloved given that it is independent of any of the beloved's characteristics. Another way to put this is that the lover sees the beloved as valuable in themselves, and thus love is not grounded on any value extrinsic to the beloved. Love disregards exterior notions of worth and, in a way, creates worth by valuing the beloved for simply being the beloved.

Fourth, *love considers the beloved as an end in themselves*. Closely related to love's characteristic of disregarding extrinsic value, love regards the beloved for their own sake. Just as love is not motivated by extrinsic traits of the beloved, it also cannot be engaged in for reasons other than the beloved's own wellness. In this way, any loving actions directed toward one's neighbor must have as their primary goal to improve the

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32. Outka, *Agape*, 14.

33. *Ibid.*, 11.

34. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 38.

35. Outka, *Agape*, 12.

beloved's wellness and to meet the beloved's wants and needs. On the same note, one cannot practice love for the benefits it can bring to oneself. For example, a Christian cannot engage in love because it can facilitate their achievement of deification. Instead, individuals must love their neighbor for their neighbor's sake. Any benefits that might arise from practicing love are secondary to the beloved and their wellness.

It is also important to point out that, insofar as Christians are obligated to practice love, love can be considered a positive obligation. Obligations can be classified as positive or negative according to the type of duty they impose on the duty-holder.<sup>36</sup> Positive obligations are obligations which require the duty-holder to actively engage in the prescribed activities in order to fulfill their requirement. Paying taxes, for instance, is a positive obligation because it demands the duty-holder to engage in the action of paying taxes for it to be accomplished. This way, positive obligations add to the activities one must perform and can only be fulfilled if one intentionally carries out the task established by the obligation.

Conversely, negative obligations impose on the duty-holder the obligation to refrain from certain actions. Laws against homicide and driving under the influence, for example, institute negative obligations as they establish activities that one should refrain from. As these examples show, negative obligations determine actions one should *not* perform. While it is possible that one might need to engage in an activity in order to fulfill a negative obligation, like calling a cab as an alternative to driving under the influence, positive and negative obligations are easy to differentiate. Since the definition

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36. For more on positive and negative obligations, see Dinah Shelton and Ariel Gould, "Positive and Negative Obligations," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Human Rights Law*, ed. Dinah Shelton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 562–83.

still holds that driving under the influence is an action that one must refrain from, even if one calls a cab in order to fulfill said obligation, driving under the influence is still a negative obligation. In summary, a positive obligation establishes an activity one *must do*, and a negative obligation stipulates an activity one *must not do*.

For this reason, insofar as love is a virtue that must be practiced, love is a positive obligation because it requires the lover to actively engage in loving actions in order to fulfill its requirements. As a consequence, one cannot properly love one's neighbor through passive actions or by simply not disrupting their neighbor's life. Love requires the lover to intentionally invest their time and resources in their neighbor's wellness for this is the only means to practice absolute loyalty that cares for the beloved in concrete and particular ways. Consequently, one's actions toward their neighbor must be deliberately loving.

### **Conclusion**

If achieving deification is central to Christianity, and if love is essential for deification, it follows that the practice of love ought to be central for Christians. For this reason, in this chapter I focused on the virtue of love. I described the problem of agape and eros as introduced by Nygren as I believe it is important to understand why love can at times be considered essential to Christian ethics while also being considered inconsistent and mainstream. I also briefly introduced Maximus's conception of deification and its relationship to the virtue of love as an example of how scholars have associated the two topics giving love such a prominent role in the Christian tradition. I finally introduced my own account of love which focuses on four main attributes of love. I explained how love includes all in a particular way, is independent and absolute loyalty,

disregards worth while creating value, and considers the beloved as an end in themselves. Moreover, I explained that love is a positive obligation and what is entailed by love as a positive obligation. This account of love is imperative to my project as it provides the basis to my next chapter that addresses the implications of love to wealth distribution and social justice.



CHAPTER III  
LOVE OF NEIGHBOR, WEALTH DISTRIBUTION,  
AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

**Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to argue that when love is central in one's life (as should be the case for Christians), it can bring about more balanced wealth distribution and increased social justice. I demonstrate that if love indeed is normative for those who wish to achieve deification, then it is also consequential for wealth distribution and the advancement of social justice. To achieve this argument, I first describe what is entailed in the obligation to love one's neighbor as oneself.<sup>1</sup> Second, I demonstrate how the obligation to love one's neighbor has implications for both wealth distribution and social justice. Finally, I take up whether an "undeserving" neighbor discredits my argument by releasing one from the obligation to love their neighbor. That is, whether a neighbor can behave in such a way to be considered undeserving of love which could potentially discredit my advancement for wealth distribution and social justice.

Before I develop my argument, it is important that I define and place in context two prominent terms used throughout this chapter. First, in this chapter I focus on love

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1. Again, I would like to clarify that divine love and human love are distinct, so some conclusions I arrive at in this chapter might only apply to the latter and not the former. This is especially important because my claim can lead to the conclusion that one cannot achieve deification unless they do exactly what I suggest here. This is not exactly what I argue for. I simply show that if Christians believe love must be practiced in order to facilitate deification, and if love involves certain behaviors such as unconditionally caring for one's neighbor, then it follows that love can impact wealth distribution and social justice. Speculation on what happens if someone does not engage in love to the extent I suggest here goes well beyond the scope of this thesis.

specifically directed toward one's neighbor. The word *neighbor* is commonly understood as a person situated within one's immediate context or community. However, in the context of the obligation of love, it is important to understand the word neighbor as encompassing all persons.<sup>2</sup> To place this definition of neighbor in context, Paul Ramsey says love of neighbor "discovers the neighbor in every [person] it meets and as such has never yet met a friend or an enemy."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, a neighbor is each and every person regardless of any spaces or identity that one may share with them. In light of this definition, the obligation to love one's neighbor entails that all persons should be loved by those who seek to attain deification.

Moreover, in this project I will use the formula *love your neighbor as yourself* as the recommended measure for one's love toward their neighbor. Although this is the language used throughout the biblical text regarding the love commandment, my intention is not to impose this measure as a divine command.<sup>4</sup> Rather, loving one's neighbor as oneself also has parallels with the Golden Rule which is taken as a common-

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2. My interpretation of the word *neighbor* within the context of love of neighbor is, of course, consistent with the Christian tradition. For example, in Luke 10:25–37 a lawyer asks Jesus, "who is my neighbor?" (NRSV). In answer to the question, Jerome says, "There are some who think that their neighbor is their brother, or their kindred, or their relative, or their kinsman . . . God forbid such belief! We are neighbors, all men to all men, for we have one father." In the passage, Jesus responds with the Parable of the Good Samaritan which shows a stranger taking care of their enemy. According to John T. Carroll, Jesus's answer "explodes the notion that the imperative of loving action has boundaries that include some persons (kin, friends, ethnic group) but exclude others (outsiders, enemies)." See Jerome, "Homily 5 on Psalm 14 (15)," in *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)*, trans. Marie Liguori Ewald, FC 48 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 38–42, and John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 242–6. For a social work perspective on the topic of neighbor, see also Robert Morris, *Rethinking Social Welfare: Why Care for the Stranger?* (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1986), especially chapter 6 where the author addresses early Christian views on social welfare.

3. Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 94.

4. See Matt 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:26–28.

sense moral agreement among different traditions.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, I apply this formula in my thesis without a formal argument in its defense as I take it to be universally presupposed.

Second, the word *wellness* is defined by *The Social Work Dictionary* as “[a] dynamic state of physical, mental, spiritual, and social wellness.”<sup>6</sup> I assume here that a means to achieving wellness is for one to have their basic needs met. According to A. H. Maslow, basic needs include physiological needs, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization.<sup>7</sup> Maslow argues that as long as an individual’s needs are unmet, they are likely to be “discontent and restless,” which inevitably has a negative impact in their wellness.<sup>8</sup> If love leads the lover to be concerned for the beloved as I suggest in the previous chapter, then the lover must be interested in furthering their beloved’s wellness.

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5. See Jeffrey Wattle, *The Golden Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

6. Robert L. Barker, “Wellness,” *The Social Work Dictionary*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2003), 463. Other definitions provided in the same entry are “a way of life that equips the individual to realize the full potential of his or her capabilities and to overcome and compensate for weaknesses; a lifestyle that recognizes the importance of nutrition, physical and mental fitness, stress reduction, self-responsibility, and civic responsibility.” I would also like to acknowledge that while Maximus addresses well-being from a theological perspective, the use of the term *well-being* here is unrelated to the way Maximus understands it. Although there might be theological implications to one’s well-being that follow from my proposal, in this thesis I only wish to point out the implications of the practice of love to wealth distribution and social justice. Thus, I do not explore Maximus’s version of well-being in this thesis as it goes beyond the scope of my proposal.

7. A. H. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370–96. Meanwhile, *The Social Work Dictionary* defines needs as “[t]he physical, psychological, economic, cultural, and social requirements for survival, well-being, and fulfillment. Types of needs include *normative needs*, *perceived needs*, *expressed needs*, and *relative needs*.” Although I find this definition to be perfectly applicable for my project as well, I chose to only use Maslow’s theory in the body of my thesis because his robust theory addresses important nuances such as the hierarchy of needs and some exceptions to it. Still, I find it important to specify that wellness depends on the fulfillment of physical, psychological, economic, cultural, and social needs as well, even though Maslow might categorize these needs under different names. See Robert L. Barker, “Needs,” *The Social Work Dictionary*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2003), 291.

8. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” 382.

And if an individual's wellness entails that their basic needs must be met, then when one practices love toward their neighbor, one must seek to meet their neighbor's basic needs.<sup>9</sup>

### **Love of Neighbor**

Love of neighbor is the positive obligation to care for the neighbor in a way that is particular and absolutely loyal, while also disregarding worth, creating value, and considering the beloved as an end in themselves. This obligation applies to those who wish to achieve deification. Given that love is important in the process of deification, then those who wish to be deified must practice love for both God and neighbor. Moreover, the love obligation is considered positive because it requires one to actively engage in loving actions in order to fulfill the obligation to love. Thus, those who wish to achieve deification must actively love God and neighbor in order to fulfill the obligation to love.

Loving one's neighbor as oneself is the measure for how much one ought to love their neighbor.<sup>10</sup> This measure determines a *quality threshold* as it relates to the wellness of a neighbor. That is, the quality of what one pursues to meet one's own needs and achieve one's own wellness must be the same for what they pursue for their neighbor. This means that whatever actions one takes to meet their neighbor's needs must be equal

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9. I suggest here that meeting a person's basic needs can improve their wellness but not necessarily entail it. This is because, as Maslow suggests, as long as a need (physiological needs, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization) is not met, a person will still experience lack which directly opposes a state of flourishing (or wellness). Thus, as a person meets individual needs, their wellness can gradually improve but not necessarily be completely achieved unless *all* of their needs are also met.

10. As Maslow notes, there are exceptions to his theory on the hierarchy of basic needs. For example, a person P who suffers from certain mental disorders might not attempt to fulfill all of their five needs as identified by Maslow. In this case, P's pursuit of wellness cannot work as a measure for P's love of neighbor. For this project, I chose not to address these exceptions as that might distract from the goal of this thesis. Thus, my proposal only applies to persons whose wellness can only be achieved by meeting all of their needs as outlined by Maslow, and *this* is the measure for how much one should love their neighbor.

in value to what one would do to further one's own wellness. Take, for example, the human need for safety, which includes longing for protection from natural elements and criminal behavior. If one lives in a place where they feel well protected against such things, then that is the quality threshold one should strive to offer to one's neighbor in terms of safety. This rationale, of course, can be applied to other essential needs (e.g., love, physiological needs). Thus, fulfillment of the obligation to love entails providing the same quality of care that one enjoys for oneself to one's neighbors.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, if love of neighbor is a positive obligation and requires giving to one's neighbor the same quality of care one would want for oneself, then love of neighbor naturally permeates one's whole life. This is because, as a positive obligation, the obligation to love requires one to actively engage in loving actions toward one's neighbor. If one is actively pursuing the wellness of their neighbor by attempting to meet the neighbor's needs with the same effort one puts into achieving one's own wellness, then love of neighbor becomes as natural and recurrent in one's life as concern for oneself. Accordingly, just as concern for one's own wellness is predominant in one's life, so too concern for the neighbor's wellness is to be an organic part of one's life. In this

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11. It is important to note that my argument is aimed at making the requirements of the obligation to love explicit for privileged persons. Thus, when I say practicing love of neighbor entails providing the same quality of care that one enjoys for oneself to their neighbors, I assume that one is in a privileged position in which they have most (if not all) of their needs met. Because of this, they must now seek to provide at least the same level of wellness to their neighbor (i.e., attempt to meet their neighbor's needs as much as their own needs are met). Under no circumstances does this mean that underprivileged people have no responsibilities under the obligation to love, but the nuances of those responsibilities are beyond the scope of this particular project. Moreover, my project might not be applicable to those who self-impose disciplines such as poverty or exile either (e.g., monastics). While such practices might help those who willingly engage in them to achieve wellness, they might not offer the same results to all individuals, especially for those who experience poverty and exile unwillingly. Again, persons who engage in such practices are not exempt from the obligation to love, but their life choices bring up nuances to the obligation that I do not address in this project.

way, the obligation to love one's neighbor is not experienced as a burden but as a practice as natural as one's care for oneself.

### **Love, Wealth Distribution, and Social Justice**

If love of neighbor permeates one's whole life because one is just as concerned for their neighbor's wellness as they are for their own, then love of neighbor ought to include one's resources, financial or otherwise. More specifically, when love of neighbor is properly incorporated into one's life, the wellness of one's neighbor is naturally considered in relation to one's assets. This means that any resources one may have are treated as a way to further one's own as well as their neighbor's wellness. In this way, one's resources are regarded as a means to meet one's needs as well as the needs of their neighbor.

If one's resources are implicated in love of neighbor, then love has implications for wealth distribution. Wealth distribution concerns how the resources of a group, financial or otherwise, are distributed among its members. What I suggest is that love of neighbor virtually balances out unequal wealth distribution when love of neighbor is considered on a larger scale. That is, if every individual who wishes to be deified engages in love of neighbor in a manner that includes their resources, then wealth is redistributed in a more equal fashion. This practice might not eliminate such a complex issue as global poverty (although it might mitigate it), but it could surely decrease inequality which can effectively improve the wellness of most individuals.<sup>12</sup>

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12. For more on global poverty (and the reason why I do not claim my argument can solve global poverty), see Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of The Way to Fight Global Poverty* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

In the United States, for example, wealth distribution is extremely unequal. Mark Rank, Thomas Hirschl, and Kirk Foster report that in 2007 “the top 1 percent of the population held 42.6 percent of the entire US financial wealth” while “the bottom 60 percent . . . possessed a mere 0.3 percent of total financial wealth.”<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, in 2014 the Pew Research Center found that 70.6% of the US population identified themselves as Christian.<sup>14</sup> If individuals who identify as Christian wish to attain deification which demands the practice of love, then 70.6% of the US population is under the obligation to love their neighbors. It is highly unlikely that these individuals are all at the top of the US wealth distribution, but it is safe to assume that a significant number of them can meet their basic needs without using all of their resources.

If this group of people loved their neighbors to the extent that I suggest they should, then they would spend the surplus of their resources attempting to meet their neighbors’ needs. This would effectively change the current wealth distribution in the US.<sup>15</sup> In this scenario, it is possible that wealth would still be somewhat unevenly distributed even in light of the obligation to love one’s neighbor. Nevertheless, financial resources would certainly have be redistributed in such a way to lead to more balanced

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13. Mark R. Rank, Thomas A. Hirschl, and Kirk A. Foster, *Chasing the American Dream: Understanding What Shapes Our Fortunes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 80–1.

14. Pew Research Center. "America's Changing Religious Landscape: Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow," Religious Landscape Study, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study>. Moreover, in this project I assume that all Christians take deification as the telos of human existence as I can only speculate. See chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis for my explanation on deification and its importance within the Christian tradition.

15. My goal with this thesis is simply to argue that the obligation to love has consequences for wealth distribution and not necessarily to suggest how this wealth should be distributed in light of my argument. Thus, in this chapter I do not offer guidelines for how one should disperse their resources.

wealth distribution in the US. For this reason, the obligation to love one's neighbor as oneself is consequential for wealth distribution.

However, resources are not implicated in love solely for the sake of being redistributed but because they are directly connected to wellness. *The Social Work Dictionary* explains that “[i]ncome distribution is a primary indicator of the economic well-being of various demographic groups in society (such as women, older people, black people, people who live in the South, and divorced people).”<sup>16</sup> Consequently, if loving one's neighbor involves pursuing the neighbor's wellness—of which wealth distribution is an indicator—then one's possessions are also implicated in love of neighbor for their capacity to increase well-being. In other words, promoting more balanced wealth distribution counts as love of neighbor not only because one considers one's resources as a means to meet the needs of one's neighbor, but also because it can improve the neighbor's wellness.

Because love of neighbor causes wealth distribution that is directly associated with wellness, love of neighbor is also consequential for social justice. The National Association of Social Workers defines social justice as “[a]n ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits.”<sup>17</sup> In order to bring about social justice, it is necessary “to ensure access

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16. Robert L. Barker, “Income Distribution,” *The Social Work Dictionary*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2003), 212. Bear in mind that my definition of wealth distribution is closely related to how *The Social Work Dictionary* defines income distribution: “The division of moneys and other resources among individuals or family units in an economy.” It is for this reason and this reason only that I treat the terms as interchangeable in this paragraph as I believe they might not always carry the exact same meaning.

17. Robert L. Barker, “Social Justice,” *The Social Work Dictionary*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2003), 404–5.



to needed information, services, *and resources* . . . for all people” (emphasis added).<sup>18</sup>

That is, providing access to needed resources in a way that leads to equal rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits is a means to accomplish social justice. Given that love of neighbor produces wealth distribution, and redistribution of resources (if done correctly) can further the neighbor’s rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits, then love of neighbor is also consequential for social justice. For this reason, love of neighbor has implications for both wealth distribution and social justice.

Moreover, if social justice involves all persons having the same rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits, then social justice also entails all persons having most of their needs met. More specifically, in a society where social justice is a reality, all individuals have at least their most basic needs met. This means that achieving social justice for all can positively improve the wellness of persons who have not met some of their most basic needs. As a consequence, pursuing social justice is itself a loving act given that it can have a direct impact in the wellness of the beloved. Therefore, not only is love consequential for wealth distribution, which can impact social justice, but also love of neighbor should lead one to actively pursue social justice as a way to further their neighbor’s wellness.

### **An Undeserving Neighbor**

A possible challenge to my claim is that someone might argue that certain neighbors might be undeserving of receiving the kind of love that impacts the lover financially. This is because some popular explanations for poverty include lack of

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18. “Code of Ethics: English,” National Association of Social Workers, <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>.

motivation and welfare dependency.<sup>19</sup> An individual that fits any of these categories is often considered an “undeserving poor” and as such unworthy of help—or love of neighbor. The argument goes that one’s hard earned money should not be given away to one’s neighbor because if they are in need, it is probably due to their lack of motivation that leads to impoverishment. Thus, one would be free from any obligation to one’s neighbor if the neighbor is undeserving.

There are two reasons why this claim does not discredit my position. In the first place, the perception that someone who needs financial help is undeserving is often false. After a decade of research on poverty and welfare, Mark Rank found that common explanations for poverty such as lack of motivation or neediness passed down from parents are not supported by evidence. Rather, individuals who experience poverty seem to be particularly vulnerable to structural constraints that lead to unsatisfactory skills and education to compete in the job market. Despite hard work and motivation, they lack important resources to overcome these systemic barriers and, in consequence, find it more difficult to overcome poverty.<sup>20</sup> Thus, if there is no evidence to support “undeserving poor” theories, there is also no reason to withhold love of neighbor on the base of deservedness.

In second place, love is indifferent to any characteristic of the loved object, so the neighbor’s status as deserving or undeserving is meaningless in light of love. The love with which the neighbor is to be loved is unaffected by any traits or behaviors of the beloved, and it holds the beloved as irreducibly valuable despite any perceived worth or

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19. Mark R. Rank, *Living on the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 174.

20. *Ibid.*, 174–85.

lack thereof. If one takes into consideration the neighbor's account balance or motivation to find a job in order to decide if they will show love toward them, then by definition one is *not* loving their neighbor. In order to fulfill the obligation to love, one ought to love their neighbor without being influenced by their neighbor's status. Consequently, making judgements about the neighbor's characteristics or deservedness in order to love them falls outside the scope of love of neighbor. Because of this, considering one's neighbor to be undeserving does not release one from the obligation to love.

### **Conclusion**

Love of neighbor is the positive obligation to care for the neighbor in a way that is particular and absolutely loyal, while also disregarding worth, creating value, and considering the beloved as an end in themselves. I argued in this chapter that, given love's attributes, those who take love as a norm must practice love in a way that improves their neighbor's wellness as one would want one's own wellness to be improved. I also suggested in this chapter that this kind of commitment inevitably leads to one's resources being implicated in one's loving actions toward their neighbor. Because of this, love of neighbor can even out wealth distribution to a certain degree, and this can lead to an increase in social justice. In fact, the pursuit of social justice is already a loving act toward one's neighbor. Thus, love of neighbor impacts both wealth distribution and social justice.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

#### **The Economics of Love**

The objective of this thesis has been to argue that the obligation to love based on the Christian tradition requires Christians to disperse their resources in a way that significantly evens out wealth distribution and increases social justice. In order to defend my position, I explained that Christians disagree on the terminology and some tenets of the goal of the Christian life (e.g., deification, beatific vision, communion with God, salvation). However, all of these concepts are similar insofar as they require the practice of love. Thus, if love is essential for the achievement of the goal of Christianity (whether it is called deification, beatific vision, communion with God, or salvation), it follows that love is normative for Christians. When love takes a prominent role in one's life, then it naturally influences how one manages their resources. If love impacts how one disperses one's resources, then a consequence of the practice of love is more balanced wealth distribution and increased social justice.

I advanced my claim by using the second chapter to explore further the virtue of love. I opened the chapter by explaining the concepts of agape and eros as described by Anders Nygren. I judged this to be necessary as agape and eros can often be confused. I followed with an example of how theologians have connected love to deification by briefly introducing Maximus's conception of deification and its relationship to the virtue of love. This served as an example of how scholars have associated the two topics giving

love such a prominent role in the Christian tradition. I finally introduced my own account of love in which I described four important attributes of love. More specifically, I explained how love includes all persons in a particular way, is independent and absolute loyalty, disregards worth while creating value, and considers the beloved as an end in themselves. I also explained that love is a positive obligation and the consequences that come from love as a positive obligation.

In the third chapter, I argued that when love is central to one's life, it can bring about more balanced wealth distribution and increased social justice. To demonstrate this, I described what is entailed in the obligation to love one's neighbor as oneself and how the obligation to love one's neighbor has implications for both wealth distribution and social justice. I also showed that an "undeserving" neighbor cannot exempt one from engaging in the obligation to love. For all these reasons, I concluded that when love is a norm in one's life, one must practice love in a way that improves their neighbor's wellness as they would want their own wellness to be improved. This kind of commitment inevitably leads to one's resources being implicated in one's loving actions toward their neighbor. Because of this, love of neighbor can significantly even out wealth distribution, and this can increase social justice. In fact, the pursuit of social justice is already a loving act toward one's neighbor. Thus, love of neighbor impacts both wealth distribution and social justice.

### **Putting Theory into Practice**

In this thesis, I was very cautious not to offer practical advice on how to put my proposal into practice as I believe it could distract from the goal of the project. Again, my claim was that the obligation to love as prescribed by the Christian tradition requires

Christians to manage their resources in a way that leads to more evenly distributed wealth and increased social justice. However, now that I have defended my position, I will entertain two of the questions I was asked while writing this thesis. Neither these questions nor my answers offer a comprehensive explanation of how my project should be put into practice, but hopefully they can offer some direction to those willing to engage in what I proposed.

On who should be the steward of the lover's money (i.e., whether the lover should be in charge of dispersing their own money or if they should give it to organizations to disperse it), I say whoever is a good steward. Being a good steward in this context requires keeping up with the best evidence on what is effective to address social justice issues and making adjustments accordingly.<sup>1</sup> If the lover finds an organization that uses evidence-based practice, then they know their money is going toward activities that are proven to further the neighbor's wellness. Thus, if one chooses to give their money to a church or a non-profit organization, they must first ensure the organization will disperse those resources in a way that truly increases the wellness of one's neighbor.

The second question concerns how much one should give to their neighbor, to which I respond: use the Golden Rule. This is not a straightforward answer, but my intention with it is simply to lead one to think critically about how much they should and are willing to give. Then, one must consider honestly and in light of their resources not

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1. For a great example on the use of evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of microlending (as an example of evidence-based practice) and why it is important to prioritize statistically significant findings rather than anecdotal evidence, see Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of The Way to Fight Global Poverty* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 168–72.

only how they wish to be treated in their current position, but also how they would want to be treated if they were in their neighbor's position.

However, until every person can be honest about answering these questions and give their resources away accordingly, I do have a more specific proposal to offer. In *The Life You Can Save*, Peter Singer argues that it is possible for most people to give a significant amount of their resources away without sacrificing “anything nearly as important as the lives they would be saving.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he also suggests a more realistic stipulation to donations as a first step toward the achievement of his argument. His practical recommendation on giving is “roughly 5 percent of annual income for those who are financially comfortable, and rather more for the very rich.”<sup>3</sup> As Singer himself admits, this proposal falls short of the ideal but it is practical, and hopefully it encourages persons to give more often than they currently do. On the whole, what is important is that, if love is the reason for one's giving, then they should have their beloved in mind when deciding how much they should give.

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2. Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* (New York: Random House, 2009), 152.

3. Ibid. Moreover, this should not encourage those who give more than 5 percent to start giving less. This recommendation is also not an alternative to a 10 percent tithe. On the contrary, I share Singer's approach here as a suggestion to those who do not give much or do not give at all. Those who give more than that should actually be challenged by mine and Singer's arguments to give even more.

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