

Christian Love

by Harald Lindström

Christian love is a means to union with God and the essence of sanctification, as seen in the ideas of William Law and John Wesley.

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, Matthew 22:39, Luke 6:31, John 13:34, Romans 12:10, Romans 13:10, 1 Corinthians 13:4, Galatians 5:13, 1 John 4:19-20

Topics: "Christian Love", "Sanctification"

Description

Harald Lindström preaches about the importance of Christian love, emphasizing that God's love to man initiates man's love to God and his neighbour. Love to God is seen as the foundation of sanctification, leading to a perfect union with Him. Neighbourly love is considered a necessary fruit of love to God, with both deriving from God's love. The idea of love is regulated, with self-love being a legitimate form of love when harmonized with love to God and neighbour. Wesley's ecumenical outlook stresses unity among Christians based on love, regardless of denominational differences.

Transcript

The Idea of Love in William Law.

Christian love is a factor both in the objective events of atonement and justification and in the subjective transformation of new birth and subsequent sanctification. In the former we see God's love to man in the latter man's love to God and his neighbour. In this chapter the latter kind of love must be considered. God's love, we have seen, is poured into the heart of man on new birth. One result is that man begins to love God and his neighbour; and as the Christian life develops this love increases. In Christian perfection, we have found, it becomes a perfect or pure love.

In order to fill in our survey of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification we must examine the composition of the love in which the true essence of sanctification is manifested.¹ Our aim, however, is also to determine his whole conception of religion from the standpoint of the idea of love. First, let us run over some of the outstanding characteristics of William Law's attitude to Christian love. Law's influence, we know, was decisive in Wesley's earliest period, before 1738. Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, there is even some affinity between Wesley's later outlook and that of Law in his earlier phase.

In Law attention is concentrated more on man's love to God and his neighbour than on God's love to man. This is a natural consequence of Law's general standpoint in religion. Everything is directed towards

personal holiness as the preparation for entrance into eternal life. "If thou rememberest," he says, "that the whole Race of Mankind are a Race of fallen Spirits, that pass through this World as an Arrow passes through the Air, thou wilt soon perceive, that all Things here are equally great and equally little, and that there is no Wisdom or Happiness, but in getting away to the best Advantage."² Our life on earth is a mere journey to eternity. Man is sent into the world to "prepare himself to live with God in everlasting Happiness."³ Law sees everything in terms of the goal of eternal life. The sole end of Christianity is to deliver us from our present misery and disorder and raise us to the blissful enjoyment of the divine nature.⁴ Religion is the means necessary to the attainment of this end. For Law, Christianity is "a Course of holy Discipline, solely fitted to the Cure and Recovery of fallen Spirits, and intends such a Change in our Nature, as may raise us to a nearer Union with God, and qualify us for such high Degrees of Happiness."⁵ Human nature must be transformed, the injury done to it cured. A pious and devoted life is the means by which man may recover spiritual health and achieve a state of perfection and happiness in God.⁶

Law defines the ultimate goal of religion as participation in the happiness of Christ in Heaven. But if this is to be enjoyed we must in this life model ourselves upon Christ. Such imitation does not require outward resemblance, to the "particular Actions" of Christ, but it does require inward resemblance in "Spirit and Temper." It means that we must act in accordance with the same rule as He and with eyes focussed on the same goal. It is the whole temper of Christ that must be imitated, not the trait of forgiveness alone but also His "Meakness, Humility, Devotion, and Renunciation of the World."⁷ Man must purify and perfect his soul to the utmost of his power. Only if he does everything he possibly can for his own salvation, can he expect to be accepted by God. We can have no "Security of our Salvation, but by doing our utmost to deserve it."⁸

Human nature, however, cannot be changed without God's grace. His Spirit regenerates man's heart. This birth in the Spirit must of necessity be accompanied by complete self-denial, for the spirit of the world and man's corrupted heart are opposed to the Spirit of God.⁹ For Law progress in sanctification towards perfection is a result of co-operation between divine grace and human obedience and effort. Through self-denial and mortification and through the imitation of Christ man becomes ready and worthy to receive grace; by these means he can promote the operation of grace within him. Accordingly we must give up all such "Tempers and Ways of Life" as make God "withold his Grace from us; and likewise all those Enjoyments and Indulgences, which make us less able and less disposed to improve and co-operate with those Degrees of Divine Grace, that are communicated to us."¹⁰ We must "prepare ourselves" for the presence in us of the Divine Spirit by loving Christ and keeping His commandments. Man must fulfil his obligations, for instance that of humility, not merely because it is a "reasonable Duty" and "proper to our State" but because it also "qualifies and prepares us for larger Degrees of Divine Grace, such as may Purify and Perfect our Souls in all Manner of Holiness."¹¹ Human conduct must conform to the requirements of a life guided by the Holy Spirit.¹² Through any "wrong Turn of Mind," any "false Satisfaction," as well as through open vices, the soul can be thrown into a state contrary to religion and man become "unfit to receive its Doctrines." This is why religion "calls us to a State of Self-denial, Humility, and Mortification, because it is a State that awakens the Soul into right Apprehensions of Things, and qualifies us to see, and hear, and understand the Doctrines of eternal Truth."¹³

A marked teleological tendency is, we see, a feature of Law's Christianity. And this is determined by an eschatological motive: eternal life in Heaven. Everything is directed to the sanctification of man through an inherent ethical transformation as the condition of his justification at the last judgement. In this life man must be trained to qualify for "an eternal happiness in Heaven hereafter."¹⁴ He must be fitted "to be

glorious in the enjoyment of God to all eternity."¹⁵ This is the end to which all else is but the means.

For Law, the practical mystic, salvation is primarily imitation of Christ. Christ came "to make us like Himself."¹⁶ The objective aspect of atonement is always minimized. Instead, emphasis is laid on the necessity for man to live the life of the Cross, to imitate Christ.¹⁷ Thus humility, mortification, and love to God and our neighbour become the chief characteristics of the Christian way of life and the essentials of Christianity.

This general alignment is naturally reflected in Law's attitude to love, the stress falling on man's love to God and his neighbour. Like the transformation as a whole, love is seen as a means by which man is elevated to God's sphere. Man must become more and more like God, must become more and more perfect to attain final union with Him. Love, that is, is seen as an expression of progress upwards, the ascent from man to God.¹⁸

We see here how the idea of likeness to God and Christ dominates his conception of neighbourly love. "The newness of this precept," he writes of the text on love in St. John xiii. 34 f., "did not consist in this, that men were commanded to love one another; for this was an old precept, both of the law of Moses, and of nature. But it was new in this respect, that it was to imitate a new, and till then unheard-of example of love; it was to love one another, as Christ had loved us."¹⁹ The highest view of man is one that regards him as a creature as like God as possible, when the concept of God employed is also the highest possible: that of a being of immeasurable love and goodness, who puts forth "an infinite wisdom and power, for the common good and happiness of all His creatures." In the same way man should also put forth "all his infinite faculties, whether of wisdom, power, or prayers, for the common good of all his fellow-creatures; heartily desiring they may have all the happiness they are capable of, and as many benefits, and assistances from him, as his state and condition in the world will permit him to give them."²⁰ Such universal love of our neighbours makes us like God, and thus no "principle of the heart" is more acceptable to Him.²¹ In the character of Miranda in his *Serious Call* Law makes her compassion to sinners an example of likeness to God.²² Miranda's behaviour is modelled on that of God, Christ, and the Apostles. Imitation of God is the motive of her love to her neighbour and of the practical application of that love.²³ Love, then, can make us one with God only if it is so pure and universal "as to imitate that love which God beareth to all His creatures."²⁴

Man in his love of his neighbour is to imitate God in His love. Further, man is to love his neighbour like himself. These two principles emerge most clearly in Law's definition of the scope and nature of neighbourly love. Like God's love to us, man's love of his neighbour must be pure and universal. Like God Himself we must unselfishly wish all beings happiness.²⁵ Just as all created beings are the objects of God's eternal love, so our love of our neighbour must be universal.²⁶ The importance of this universality is particularly stressed.²⁷ It is only when extended to all that love becomes Christian love.²⁸ Otherwise it is without righteousness and piety and not superior to love on the natural plane.²⁹ The necessity of such universality is motivated firstly by reference to the Creation³⁰, secondly by the idea of Christ's love of the sinner³¹, or by the idea of God's love to us "not because we are wise, and good, and holy, but in pity to us, because we want this happiness: He loves us, in order to make us good³²." Thus man's love of his neighbour does not arise from the merits or qualities of the object.³³ It must include love of one's enemy too.³⁴

Neighbourly love is "a love of benevolence."³⁵ It means feeling "all those sentiments" towards our neighbour that we feel towards ourselves. It means wishing him "everything that we may lawfully wish to

ourselves; to be glad of every good, and sorry for every evil, that happens to him; and to be ready to do him all such acts of kindness, as we are always ready to do to ourselves." It "requires nothing of us but such good wishes, tender affections, and such acts of kindness, as we show to ourselves."³⁶ Neighbourly love is seen as a universal benevolence. This "love of benevolence" is not the same thing as the "esteem or veneration" that a human being should feel towards good men. The latter is appreciation of and respect for virtue. Thus it applies only to good and pious people and their actions. The former, on the other hand, embraces all men without exception, all, in equal degree and without regard to merit. Man should love himself with this "love of benevolence," but on the other hand he ought not to have "a high esteem or honour" for his own "accomplishments, or behaviour."³⁷ A man may detest many of his own actions without ceasing to cherish "tender sentiments" towards himself, sentiments in which this benevolence is expressed, and it is possible to learn to love others in the same way: "We may have the highest good wishes towards them, desiring for them every good that we desire for ourselves, and yet, at the same time, dislike their way of life."³⁸

We are beginning to see that Law regards even self-love as a legitimate form of Christian love. Neighbourly love means that we feel the same benevolence towards all others as we do towards ourselves. Proper self-love, that is, is the standard of neighbourly love. No opposition need arise between them; proper self-love can be fully reconciled with neighbourly love and indeed with every other form of Christian love. It is a conclusion that results from the incorporation of Christian love into a system of legality and rationality. In basing self-love and neighbourly love on the word and will of God, Law also makes them agree with an objective moral order. God's will itself harmonizes with this order too; the former is an expression of the latter. It is an order, which, since it expresses the divine law, is also regarded as an expression of reason and justice. Thus we are told that self-love is "just and reasonable."³⁹ In strict justice man should love all other men with the same love with which he justly loves himself. Neighbourly love becomes a duty based on the laws of God and of our nature.⁴⁰

The rational and legal form given to the concept of love is an outcome of Law's basic theological position. Religion is associated with reason, despite his maintenance of a supernatural point of view against the rationalism of the Enlightenment.⁴¹ The part played by reason in his theology is conspicuous in his early works, where the relation between religion and reason is expressly treated⁴², but the same fundamental view is also apparent in the exposition of sanctification in *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (1726) and in his *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728). For Law the holy life was the reasonable life, in harmony with an objective rational order manifested in the laws of God and nature. It was man's duty to live in accordance with his reason.⁴³ Failure to do so was an offence against the law of his nature and rebellion against God, who had endowed man with this nature.⁴⁴ The sin lay in the fact that man abused his nature, refusing to adapt his behaviour to the end for which God had created him.⁴⁵ The duty or virtue of the Christian was based on the very nature and reason of things.⁴⁶ This necessarily implied acting according to God's will, for God was the highest reason.⁴⁷ Accordingly, the universality of neighbourly love is also based on a reasonable objective order, on grounds independent of any mutable subjective qualifications in the human beings to be loved. Thus we must love good and bad people equally.⁴⁸ Similarly, as we have seen, neighbourly love becomes a matter of strict justice.

Law puts heavy emphasis on neighbourly love but his guiding principle is nevertheless love to God. The former is regarded only as an offshoot of the latter.⁴⁹ Love to God is the most proper form of man's love. True, this is not often stated explicitly; but it is implicit in the general structure of neighbourly love and in Law's basic theology. Neighbourly love cannot have the same independent character as love to God since

its necessity is urged by the need to imitate God and since it is seen as a means to union with God.⁵⁰ True, neighbourly love is also based on the divine word.⁵¹ God's will is the chief motive behind all actions. But God's aim is the sanctification of man and the happiness that comes with it. Religion thus becomes identical in essence with sanctification. It is seen as the means to the end of man's glorification and reunion with God. It follows that the imitation of God by which the end is attained must be put first and become the decisive factor in religion. Man's love, which constitutes the essence of sanctification, acquires the form of a life force flowing towards God. All love comes from God, Law says, and love alone can lead us back to Him.⁵² In the mystical way, love to God becomes the most proper form of love in man. The way of life typical of mysticism is thus apparent.⁵³

To recapitulate, then, we can say that the outstanding characteristics of Law's outlook are as follows: the teleological alignment, the emphasis given to the idea of imitation in his attitude to love, and the union of love with legality and rationality. Further, we have seen that love to God is the truest form of love in man. The stress is laid on the realization of fellowship with God on the basis not of sin but of holiness.

II

The Idea of Love in Wesley: General Characteristics.

Wesley shares the teleological leaning of Law and the mystics. It is the dominant principle in his approach to sanctification and religion generally both before and after 1738. We find it expressed in the idea of man as a spirit coming from God and whose object and task it is to return to Him. Like the mystics Wesley employs the metaphor of rivers returning to their source. In his university sermon, *The Circumcision of the Heart*, delivered at Oxford in 1733, he says: "Let the Spirit return to God that gave it, with the whole train of its affections. 'Unto the place from whence all the rivers came', thither let them flow again."⁵⁴ After 1738 we find the same idea in the preface (written in 1746) to his *Standard Sermons*. Here the return of the human spirit to God is illustrated by the simile of the flying arrow, an image he has obviously taken directly from Law. "To candid, reasonable men," he writes, "I am not afraid to lay open what have been the inmost thoughts of my heart. I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: Just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, -- the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven."⁵⁵ This, as we have already seen in another connection, is the attitude that ultimately determines his theology, as it did that of the mystics. Everything is directed toward the perfecting of man as the condition of his glorification. In his life on earth man must be so transformed that he is fitted for eternal life.⁵⁶ A natural consequence, we have noted, is that salvation becomes a process of sanctification by which man is increasingly purified and perfected to attain his final goal. And since love was for Wesley the very essence of sanctification, it too must be teleologically determined in the same way: love must be accommodated to this progress towards the goal of salvation. It is also the highest value in the scale. Church, ordinances, outward acts, and inward tempers, all else acquires value only in so far as it leads to love, the highest goal of human zeal.⁵⁷

The teleological structure of his theology is thus clearly seen in the way everything is directed to the final end and all else regarded as means to this end. The same alignment in the conception of love is again seen in the relation between atonement and sanctification, even after this had been deeply modified on Reformed lines. Sanctification is regarded as the object of atonement and justification. God's love in atonement and justification aims at the establishment of the law of love in the human heart.⁵⁸ The main

interest is thus directed towards the realisation of that aim. The stress falls on inherent ethical transformation in man, by which he becomes the subject of love. Thus when the relation between faith and love is under consideration the main stress will fall on the latter. This is the inevitable consequence of the teleological and subjective character of his idea of salvation. The object of salvation is the restoration in man of the love of God. This is effected by faith. But faith is only the means, the end is love.⁵⁹ The former, that is to say, is subordinated to the latter. Love is described as having eternal duration, whereas faith is transitory, something that applies only to man's life on earth. In the original state, we are told, love had no rival in the heart of man. Thus love existed before faith. Faith did not come until love had been lost through sin, and the intention is that it shall not survive the attainment of its purpose: the restoration of man to the love from which he has fallen.⁶⁰ It follows that man's fellowship with God in sanctification is seen primarily as a fellowship not of faith but of love. Under earthly conditions it must also be simultaneously fellowship in faith, but in proportion as the purpose of salvation has already been realized it will become increasingly a fellowship of love. And in the eternal life the perfect fellowship with God will be one of love alone.

Nevertheless, Wesley's conception of love, in spite of the influence on it of his fundamental teleology, could not be identical with that of Law and practical mysticism. Here too, and inevitably, the Reformed outlook, particularly as expressed in the conceptions of sin, man, atonement, and justification, makes itself felt. The Reformed influence -- like the directly Biblical one earlier -- made him give a new kind of prominence to atonement.⁶¹ One result is that his way of basing the idea of love on that of atonement is not Law's way. Side by side with the teleological leaning a causal view can also be seen in Wesley and is much more stressed than it was by Law. The teleological approach is one of ends and means, in which ends are emphasized; the causal approach one of causes and effects, in which causes are emphasized. The former, as we have seen, stresses the subjective aspect (man's love), the latter the objective (God's love).

In Wesley, then, a causal view impinges upon the teleological. The former is again seen in the relation between faith and love: faith is the source of love. The derivation of this love from faith implies that the natural man is entirely without Christian love. He is, as we saw in chapter one, totally corrupt. In spite of his supernatural leanings Law allowed a certain continuity between natural man and the Divine and could regard religion as the purification and refinement of man's resources⁶², but Wesley's attitude to the Fall gave his view of man a deeper and Reformed purport. Natural man cannot love God and his neighbour. He cannot love God because he has no knowledge of him.⁶³ Love, therefore, must come from above. Man's love must be born of God's love. The latter must always precede the former.

This love is linked chiefly to faith in atonement and forgiveness. After 1738 faith is anchored in the atonement of Christ, and it is from this faith that Christian love derives.⁶⁴ Just as sanctification is now regarded as a consequence of saving faith in atonement⁶⁵, so love to God and our neighbour, which is the essence of sanctification, is linked up with faith in atonement and assurance of forgiveness⁶⁶. Love is seen as the direct fruit of justifying faith.⁶⁷ Love to God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Through this Spirit man looks up to God as his forgiving and loving father.⁶⁸ Thus God's love to man, manifested chiefly in the Atonement, precedes man's love, the former being regarded as the cause of the latter.

The conviction of God's forgiving love is the immediate cause of man's love to God. This is an idea to which he frequently returns; for instance, in *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743): "How came you then to love him at first? Was it not because you knew that he loved you? Did you, could you, love God at all, till you tasted and saw that he was gracious; that he was merciful to you a sinner?"

What awaits then controversy, or strife of words? Out of thy own mouth! You own you had no love to God till you was sensible of his love to you. And whatever expressions any sinner who loves God uses, to denote God's love to him, you will always upon examination find, that they directly or indirectly imply forgiveness. Pardoning love is still at the root of all. He who was offended is now reconciled."⁶⁹ Thus not merely God's love to man but also the Spirit's direct testimony to it precede man's love. This witness, conveying to man the certainty of forgiveness and acceptance by God, is regarded as the chief cause of love to God and of all other fruits of the Spirit.⁷⁰ Thus faith in God and the conviction of His love are prerequisites of man's love to Him. It is only through this faith that the heart of man is imbued with the love of God and that man is led to love other men. Wesley develops this idea in his sermon *On Charity* (1788), maintaining that in I Cor. xiii the apostle means love of our neighbour: "I believe whoever carefully weighs the whole tenor of his discourse will be fully convinced of this. But it must be allowed to be such a love of our neighbour, as can only spring from the love of God. And whence does this love of God flow? Only from that faith which is of the operation of God; which whoever has, has a direct evidence that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.'" When this faith becomes a personal faith in the heart of man, "then, and not till then, 'the love of God is shed abroad in his heart.'" It is a love that "sweetly constrains" him to love "every child of men."⁷¹

A causal approach is seen in the way the emphasis is laid on God's love to man as the source of man's love. God's love is the cause, man's love to God and his neighbour the natural consequence.⁷² God's love in Christ is the source of man's love to God and his neighbour. Wesley finds the best expression of this in the words of St. John: "We love Him, because He first loved us."⁷³ The attention is first directed to God as the subject of love. It comes from above; its direction is from God to man. Accordingly, he draws attention to the necessity for man to receive the Holy Spirit if he will love, for love is a fruit of the Spirit.⁷⁴ Love to God is shed abroad in man's heart by the Holy Ghost that has been given to him.⁷⁵ It is seen as a fire descending on his heart, a divine fire of love, coming to man from above.⁷⁶

Similarly, a causal approach is seen when we turn to the perfect love bestowed on man in entire sanctification. In both cases love is regarded as a gift conveyed to man by grace, by a direct and instantaneous act of God. We saw, however, that in Wesley new birth and entire sanctification must be regarded as stages in the process of salvation and not as isolated phenomena, and in the same way his idea of love cannot be disassociated from the idea of the order of salvation. Salvation is seen as a process composed of momentary and gradual steps. In the former case a causal approach is evident in justification (including the New Birth) and entire sanctification, whereas in the latter a more teleological attitude is seen in sanctification otherwise. Thus, as love is the essence of the Christian life, the causal approach is combined with a teleological one in the idea of love. But as love is seen within the framework of an order of salvation, the causal view will always be subordinate ultimately to the teleological. In the idea of salvation as a process a teleological standpoint must come first. In the last resort everything is directed towards its object: final justification and glorification. Love, then, will be seen both as the point de départ of the Christian life in new birth and as the object and final goal of this life in the ethical perfection on earth which constitutes the condition for glorification. Since the main emphasis in the order of grace falls on sanctification the idea of love in this connection must carry a primarily teleological import. The idea of a love instilled on new birth will thus be determined by its object: that the work begun shall continue -- that thus love shall grow and be developed and perfected to the attainment of the final goal of salvation.

Further, the idea of Christian love is closely bound up with the idea of law. Love to God and our neighbour is also regarded as fulfilment of the law, the law of love.⁷⁷ Wesley's insistence on the law here is a result

of his view of atonement, of the way in which he sees sanctification as the object of atonement. Thus the righteousness of Christ is considered imputed to man, but only in order that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in him.⁷⁸ And so fulfilment of the law is still a Christian duty, although now it derives from faith instead of being brought about by man's own works. The Christian is immune "from the curse of the moral law" but not released "from observing it." He is exempt from the "condemning power" of the law if he truly believes in Christ but not independent of its "directing power."⁷⁹ It is called the great and unchangeable law of love of God and our neighbour.⁸⁰ It is also binding for the believer.⁸¹ Christ has not repealed it.⁸² Love is the fulfilment of the law, not by delivering us from it but by compelling us to observe it. It does not render good works superfluous.⁸³ It is seen as an instrument of the grace of God.⁸⁴ It drives man to Christ, and to it man is driven by Christ.⁸⁵ It leads him steadfastly to the blood of atonement until its righteousness is fulfilled in him.⁸⁶ And thus it is again established through faith.⁸⁷

The Christian, then, is bound by obedience to the moral law. But it is now written in his heart.⁸⁸ He obeys not in fear but in love.⁸⁹ Yet this evangelical principle behind obedience and works should be no less active than the previous legalistic one.⁹⁰ Grateful love to God because of his work in Christ compels man to love his neighbour. It is a love that does not rest content with refraining from the infliction of injury upon our neighbour, but one that continuously prompts us to do good. And thus the positive as well as the negative law of God is fulfilled.⁹¹ In this way obedience to God, inward and outward, of the heart and in life, comes to be regarded as a fruit of the Spirit or of love to God and our neighbour.⁹² He who verily loves God will try his best to do His will on earth as it is done in Heaven.⁹³ To the Christian it is happiness to do the will of God.⁹⁴ Such conformity to the commandments of God, by which man shows his love of Christ, is regarded as a work of Christ in him.⁹⁵

But Wesley can reconcile with even greater clarity the idea of the law with an evangelical approach. He holds that the law and the gospel are simply two different points of view. If, for instance, the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves is regarded as an order, it falls under the law, but if seen as a promise it becomes an integral part of the gospel. For the gospel is nothing but the law presented as a promise. In the light of the gospel the injunctions of the moral law are only a like number of glorious promises. The close connection between the law and the gospel is also seen in the way the law directs man to the gospel, and the gospel shows him how to fulfil the law with greater exactitude. The moral law commands man to do what he cannot possibly achieve by himself, but he trusts in God's promise to give him what the law prescribes. Thus every commandment in the Scriptures is a veiled promise. In undertaking to write His law in the heart of man God has engaged Himself to give whatever he commands.⁹⁶ Wesley can see love and obedience now as a gift, now as a law, and the consequence is that the idea of love never overthrows the idea of law. The moral law remains a law, to be fulfilled by the Christian, although fulfilment occurs through faith and can therefore also be regarded as a work of God. Accordingly religion is sometimes defined in terms of love, sometimes in terms of the law.⁹⁷ The two are not at all incompatible. The close association of love with the law emerges again in his definition of Christian freedom. In a negative sense it means deliverance from the guilt and the power of sin; in a positive, it involves love to God and our neighbour and fulfilment of the law.⁹⁸ It comes to mean above all deliverance from the power of sin and ethical change. The concept is almost identical with that of sanctification.⁹⁹

Wesley, like Law, can also give the idea of the law an appearance of rationality. This is not as marked in Wesley as in Law, but the resemblance is nevertheless striking. Wesley too can look at the law, an expression of God's will, as an eternal, reasonable scheme of things, and at religion as founded on, and

fully in harmony with, eternal reason. "Why," he says, "this is the very religion we preach; a religion evidently founded on, and every way agreeable to, eternal reason, to the essential nature of things. Its foundation stands on the nature of God and the nature of man, together with their mutual relations."¹⁰⁰ Christianity is not "contradictory to right reason," and of the Christian we are told that, "so far as he departs from true, genuine reason, so far he departs from Christianity." His frame of mind, words, and actions must harmonize with "right reason."¹⁰¹ The moral law, regarded as the imperishable image of God, can also be identified with supreme unchangeable reason, unalterable rectitude, and the everlasting fitness of all things.¹⁰² Or it is defined as the immutable rule of right and wrong, resting on the nature and fitnesses of things and on their fundamental relations to one another. Since all these things and all the relations between them are the works of God, the law is seen as depending on God or His will.¹⁰³ It is a law that prescribes exactly what man ought to think, say, and do, with regard to the Creator, himself and all created beings, and in all respects it is adapted to the nature of things and to their mutual relations. Of the justice of the law we read: "It renders to all their due. It prescribes exactly what is right, precisely what ought to be done, said or thought, both with regard to the Author of our being, with regard to ourselves, and with regard to every creature which he has made. It is adapted, in all respects, to the nature of things, of the whole universe, and every individual. It is suited to all the circumstances of each, and to all their mutual relations, whether such as have existed from the beginning, or such as commenced in any following period. It is exactly agreeable to the fitnesses of things, whether essential or accidental. It clashes with none of these in any degree; nor is ever unconnected with them. If the word be taken in that sense, there is nothing arbitrary in the law of God. Although still the whole and every part thereof is totally dependent upon His will; so that, 'Thy will be done', is the supreme, universal law both in earth and heaven."¹⁰⁴ The idea of God's will as the supreme rule of every intelligent creature follows from his view of the creation. He says it rests on the essential unalterable relation in which the creatures stand to the Creator.¹⁰⁵ It is the natural, inevitable result of the relation between all creatures and their Creator.¹⁰⁶

In this way Wesley reconciles religion with law and reason. The idea of order and harmony which is a typical feature of his theology fits in here.¹⁰⁷ In its practical formulation religion becomes a uniform, universal obedience, in which everything, great and small, has its proper place in the whole.¹⁰⁸

It follows that even the idea of love must be adjusted to legality and rationality. Love becomes ordered love. It can be measured in size and degree and be marked by reason or merge with it. In *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743) he asks: "And can there be a more equitable rule than this: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself?' You will plead for the reasonableness of this, as also for that golden rule, (the only adequate measure of brotherly love, in all our words and actions,) 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them?'"¹⁰⁹ Love is seen as regulated. After saying that the Christian loves all men, Wesley, in *An Letter to the Rev. Dr. Middleton* (1749) continues: "And yet this universal benevolence does in nowise interfere with a peculiar regard for his relations, friends, and benefactors; a fervent love for his country; and the most endeared affection to all men of integrity, of clear and generous virtue."¹¹⁰ The regulated nature of this love is also seen in the relation between neighbourly love and self-love.¹¹¹ Thus this train of thought, which Wesley shares with Law, finds expression even in the first post-1738 period. He employs it even when in other respects his new evangelical awareness is paramount and forces him to oppose Law. It is an attitude that persists, a typical element in his idea of love. He resorts to it again in speaking of the sharp antagonism between holiness and love and "all vile and inordinate affections."¹¹²

Yet this regulation of love and its alliance with law and reason does not lead Wesley to modify his supernaturalism.¹¹³ This is even truer of Wesley than of Law. The former, as we have seen, based his view of love primarily on faith in atonement. Indeed his whole theological outlook is at variance with contemporary rationalism.

Love, however, is accommodated to a framework of rationality and legality. The Reformed outlook is merged with one that follows the directive of William Law. Nor did the Enlightenment, we see in this alloying of the idea of love, leave Wesley entirely uninfluenced in spite of his reaction against it.¹¹⁴

III

Love in Relation to its Objects.

So far we have been discussing his idea of love in general terms. We must now examine love in relation to its objects. The law prescribes man's relations to God, his neighbour, and himself, and Wesley adopts the same pattern in speaking of love. He is not concerned only with love to God and one's neighbour; self-love also has a place.

In our general analysis of love in Wesley, attention was paid to his view of love to God. We saw that God's love to man precedes man's love to God. We have seen how this love has its source in God's love, particularly as revealed in the act of atonement. But it can also refer to God as Creator and be seen as gratitude to Him.¹¹⁵ The condition for it is knowledge of God, and this is supernatural knowledge. It is accorded to man by a Divine act of self-revelation. When determined in this way by its Divine origin it is clear that love acquires a causal character. Man loves God because God has loved him. His love is a natural result of God's. It is a reciprocated love, the immediate outcome of God's love. We have also seen that this Reformed, causal train of thought is linked up with a fundamental teleology in the idea of love.

An examination of love in its relation to its divine object will make it clear that into the Reformed outlook is woven another derived from mysticism and in line with Augustine's conception of love. Love to God has a parallel in love to the world. Love of the created competes with love of the Creator. The former is a kind of "affection," which, if directed to created things, is misdirected: it should be turned towards God. Man may desire other things only in so far as such desire is subordinated to love of God. Already in a letter of 1731 Wesley dwells on the opposition between *frui* and *uti*. Love to God is seen in the fact that man enjoys God, whereas he only uses the world.¹¹⁶ Two years later, in a university sermon, *The Circumcision of the Heart*, love to God is defined entirely on the same lines. God is the only perfect good and as such He should be the sole ultimate goal of man. Man may enjoy created things but only in so far as this enjoyment is subordinated to love of God and promotes it. "The one perfect Good," he says, "shall be your one ultimate end. One thing shall ye desire for its own sake, -- the fruition of Him that is all in all ... One design you are to pursue to the end of time, -- the enjoyment of God in time and in eternity. Desire other things, so far as they tend to this. Love the creature as it leads to the Creator. But in every step you take, be this the glorious point that terminates your view. Let every affection, and thought, and word, and work, be subordinate to this. Whatever ye desire or fear, whatever ye seek or shun, whatever ye think, speak, or do, be it in order to your happiness in God, the sole End, as well as Source, of your being."¹¹⁷

Such desire and yearning after God can be said to give love an egocentric stamp. But note that it is given a theocentric quality at the same time. Man's highest wish must be to do honour to God and suffer his life to be completely determined by God's will.¹¹⁸ It is not only because God is the summum bonum that man shall exclusively concentrate his love on Him -- and love his neighbour merely because such love is

implied in his love to God¹¹⁹ or duly subordinated to it -- but also because it is God's desire to rule without a rival¹²⁰. The two ideas are interwoven. Both, however, can be fitted into the framework of a view which lies behind and gives final unity to the total concept of love. We have already seen that man is considered as a spirit deriving from God whose goal and task on earth is to return to his origin.¹²¹ Love to God is accommodated to this teleological context. It is the way back to God. It is both a desire to enjoy perfect fellowship with God and a means of attaining that end. Accordingly Wesley sees perfection in terms of the mystics' idea of purity in intention and affection. Love is a wholehearted attitude to God, a means to attain the end of perfect and final union with Him.¹²²

The causal view dates, as we have seen, from 1738. The earlier teleological outlook persists but is modified in that the idea of love is given a new point of departure. However, love to the Creator and to the creature can still be compared. Natural man desires and finds his pleasure in the creation, the Christian finds his pleasure in God. This view of God as the highest good of man is expressed in 1742 in *The Character of a Methodist*. Here the Christian is described in ideal and perfect conditions: "God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!'"¹²³ He has "the loving eye of his mind still fixed" upon God¹²⁴ ; on the other hand he is dead to the world for "all his desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of his name"¹²⁵. And he who loves God is also "happy in God."¹²⁶ A similar train of thought is found later, for instance in the sermon on Original Sin (1760) when the state of natural man is described. The natural man seeks happiness and satisfaction in the creation instead of the Creator: "What is more natural to us than to seek happiness in the creature, instead of the Creator? -- to seek that satisfaction in the works of his hands, which can be found in God only?"¹²⁷ Because we delight in what we love we cannot in our natural state find delight in God: "What we love we delight in: But no man has naturally any delight in God. In our natural state we cannot conceive how any one should delight in him. We take no pleasure in him at all; he is utterly tasteless to us."¹²⁸

Yet the love, directed exclusively to God, which grows out of man's desire for Him, is quite different in kind from love to the world and the creature, although both types seem to be synonymous with desire for their respective objects. The second type is regarded as an expression of man's corruption. It reveals the self-will of the natural man. He wants to exert his will and ignore his Creator's.¹²⁹ His love of the world comes out in "'the desire of the flesh' . . . 'the desire of the eye' . . . 'the pride of life' . . . the desire of praise, of the honour that cometh of men."¹³⁰ On the other hand love to God denotes an attitude to life determined by the will of God. Man's desire for God alone is identified with his longing to do His will alone. "Agreeable to this his one desire," we read, "is the one design of his life, namely, 'not to do his own will, but the will of Him that sent him'. His one intention at all times and in all things is, not to please himself, but Him whom his soul loveth."¹³¹

In love to God, then, the idea of man's desire for God is merged with that of surrender to Him and His will. Instead of loving the world and what is of it man must be crucified for it. He must deny himself and do, not his own will, but God's. This attitude to life links up with the idea that man should only use the world but enjoy God and seek all his happiness in Him. Fellowship with God, that is, is a happiness and joy to man precisely because his attitude to life is dictated by God's will, so that he has no higher wish than that His will shall be done.¹³²

Later we again find the ideas of *uti* and *frui*.¹³³ We also find that of purity of intention as an expression of man's proper attitude to God. Purity of intention, which Wesley calls "the single eye,"¹³⁴ means a

wholehearted attitude to God unsullied by any kind of ulterior motive. It is having "one design and one desire."¹³⁵ The one design is to learn to know God and Christ, to love God and in all respects to live to please Him¹³⁶ with singleness of heart¹³⁷. At the same time it embraces enjoying "God in all, and above all things, in time and in eternity."¹³⁸ Such an attitude to God brings "Wisdom, Holiness, and Happiness."¹³⁹ The result is that knowledge and love flow into man's soul. If the eye of faith is steadily fixed on God's love in Christ man is filled with ever greater love to God and man.¹⁴⁰ Love to God can also be regarded as a direct result of the contemplation of God.¹⁴¹

In this formulation of the idea of love, love to God is seen in a will determined by God, but a teleological thread bearing on the present and then final happiness of man is also apparent. This train of thought is accommodated to a dominating and fundamental view of human life: in this world the soul must be changed and qualified for entry into life everlasting. By loving God only man qualifies for the state in which, his soul freed from his body, he can enter the immaterial world of immortality.¹⁴² This concentration on God and eternity is sometimes expressed as a yearning for, and obtaining of, happiness.¹⁴³ Nothing in this world can satisfy the immortal soul of man. It was created by God to enjoy fellowship in Him. It is only in God that man can find peace, satisfaction, and happiness.¹⁴⁴

In regarding love to God in this aspect of man's reunion with Him, Wesley has logically to make Him ultimately the sole object of human love. All else becomes a means to this end. Further, as love is considered a gradual growth, it follows that love to God as well as already involving fellowship with Him must also be seen as a progress towards an ever more perfect fellowship with Him.

The new starting point for love in 1738 also affects love to our neighbour. Its status in relation to love to God becomes rather more independent and as a result it is given greater emphasis.¹⁴⁵ Love to God, however, is still the main principle, although the two are welded indissolubly together. Love to God is accompanied by neighbourly love.¹⁴⁶ Both have their common source in God's love to man. Occasionally neighbourly love and love to God are seen as deriving directly from God's love, particularly as manifested in the Atonement.¹⁴⁷ But this is not usually the case. Normally man's love to God is inserted as an intermediate link, neighbourly love being derived from it.¹⁴⁸ The order is thus: God's love to man -- man's love to God -- neighbourly love.

God's love to man, then, is the first but indirect cause of man's love to his neighbour. Man loves God because He loves him; further, because he loves God he loves his neighbour. Neighbourly love is regarded as a necessary fruit of love to God.

God is again the primary object of love when imitation of the behaviour of God and Christ is advanced as a reason why man should love his neighbour.¹⁴⁹ Because God loves all men, man must also do so.¹⁵⁰ The same attitude is seen when, in treating works, Wesley stresses the importance of purity of intention. Both in "works of piety," which show love to God, and in "works of charity or mercy," which show neighbourly love, man's sole intention must be to add to the honour of God and increase the happiness of man for God's sake.¹⁵¹

Neighbourly love can also be motivated from the idea of the creation. Here, too, the relation between man and his neighbour is of secondary importance in comparison with that between man and God. Because all men are brothers, children of the same father, they should love one another.¹⁵² This love of our neighbour must issue from "a grateful, filial love to the common Father of all; to God, considered not only as his Father, but as 'the Father of the spirits of all flesh'; yea, as the general Parent and Friend of all the

families both of heaven and earth."¹⁵³

As to nature and scope, neighbourly love is described as a goodwill which man extends to everyone including his enemies. It means that he should "embrace his neighbour with the most tender goodwill, the most earnest and cordial affection, the most inflamed desires of preventing or removing all evil, and of procuring for him every possible good." Loving his neighbour like himself means loving "with the same invariable thirst after his happiness in every kind; the same unwearied care to screen him from whatever might grieve or hurt either his soul or body."¹⁵⁴ Wesley's definitions of neighbourly love become with time increasingly like what Law calls universal benevolence. It is a "universal, disinterested love¹⁵⁵, "a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind¹⁵⁶," "universal benevolence; tender good-will to all men¹⁵⁷." It is described as a "tender good-will to all the souls that God has made"¹⁵⁸ or as "benevolence to our fellow-creatures¹⁵⁹." It is also defined in the words of St. Paul in I Cor. xiii.¹⁶⁰ Like Law Wesley too distinguishes between this "love of benevolence," which also includes love of God's enemies, and "a love of esteem or of complacency."¹⁶¹

The graduation and regulation of love which was mentioned above can now be specially applied to neighbourly love. The fields within which it operates can be represented as three concentric circles, the object of love covering a greater or smaller area. Later in life Wesley tends to speak increasingly of a type of brotherly love different from the all-embracing kind treated above. The latter applies to all men, the former to the Christian brotherhood only. Here there is an outer and an inner circle. The former embraces all mankind, the enemies of man and the enemies of God, and the stranger of whom we know neither good nor evil. The latter is restricted to friends, brothers in Christ, citizens of the New Jerusalem, comrades in the same war and under the same leader.¹⁶² Especial love is due to these latter, who love God.¹⁶³

In both cases the kind of love is the same. We have already seen that the love of the outer circle could be described in the words of I Cor. xiii. It is "in itself generous and disinterested; springing from no view of advantage to himself, from no regard to profit or praise; no, nor even the pleasure of loving. This is the daughter, not the parent, of his affection."¹⁶⁴ The second kind of love can also be defined in the words of I Cor. xiii. "Love," we read, "me (but in a higher degree than thou dost the bulk of mankind) with the love that is longsuffering and kind ... that envieth not ... that is not provoked ... Love me so as to think no evil of me ... Love me with the love that covereth all things ... that believeth all things ... that hopeth all things."¹⁶⁵ Thus the love is the same in kind; the difference is one of degree.

There is also a third area of love, an inner circle within that of Christian brotherly love. This comprises those to whom the Christian is joined not only in the Spirit but also by all the outward bonds of Christian fellowship; those who belong to the same congregation and in whose company he receives the means of grace. These are his nearest, his dearest brothers. These he regards as his own family.¹⁶⁶ As was the case between the love of the two other circles, there is again no distinction in kind. The difference is in degree. Thus love increases in degree from circle to circle in proportion as the area of the object of love shrinks.

The experience of God's love to man, resulting in sanctification, becomes the foundation of the unity of Christians. The fellowship of all Christians is based on love as the fruit of faith. This ecumenical feature is clearly discernible soon after 1738. In *The Character of a Methodist* (1742), he writes: "By these marks, by these fruits of a living faith, do we labour to distinguish ourselves from the unbelieving world, from all those whose minds or lives are not according to the Gospel of Christ.

But from real Christians, of whatsoever denomination they be, we earnestly desire not to be distinguished at all, not from any who sincerely follow after what they know they have not attained. No: 'Whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.' And I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that we be in no wise divided among ourselves. Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thine? I ask no farther question. If it be, give me thy hand.

For opinions, or terms, let us not destroy the work of God. Dost thou love and serve God? It is enough. I give thee the right hand of fellowship."¹⁶⁷ He expresses himself similarly in *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1745): "I will not quarrel with you about any opinion. Only see that your heart be right toward God, that you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ; that you love your neighbour, and walk as your Master walked; and I desire no more. I am sick of opinions: I am weary to hear them.

My soul loathes this frothy food. Give me solid and substantial religion; give me an humble, gentle lover of God and man; a man full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy; a man laying himself out in the work of faith, the patience of hope, the labour of love. Let my soul be with these Christians, wheresoever they are, and whatsoever opinion they are of. 'Whosoever' thus 'doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother'."¹⁶⁸ In 1750, in a sermon entitled *Catholic Spirit*, the ecumenical idea is presented in amplified form: although love is again graduated and divided between the three circles, great emphasis is given to the catholicity of the love represented by the first two categories.

It is in the exposition of the second of these that Wesley defines his ecumenical outlook. The Christian fellowship is based on brotherly love between all Christians, a love that overrides distinctions of doctrine, ritual, or ecclesiastical organization. It excludes all sectarianism and partisanship. Yet it need not involve indifference in these respects. It does not mean latitudinarianism, he says, whether speculative or practical. The man who is actuated by this Catholic spirit is steadfast in his judgement concerning the main points of Christian doctrine.

His religious views are clear and definite although he is always ready to hear and ponder anything that can be said against them. He is not indifferent to the manner of worshipping God. He is "fixed in his congregation as well as his principles." Yet although the closest ties bind him to a particular congregation, he embraces all men with "strong and cordial affection"¹⁶⁹, and feels unceasing solicitude for those who believe in Christ, an "unspeakable tenderness," whatever their particular opinion, form of worship, or congregation, may be¹⁷⁰.

Thus the ecumenical attitude in Wesley follows the line later called "Life and Work" as distinguished from "Faith and Order." The unity refers to the heart, not opinions. All Christians, Wesley maintains, may be one in faith and experience, although differing in opinion and expression.¹⁷¹

When Wesley speaks of neighbourly love he sometimes touches on self-love as well. Yet in expounding the commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself in St. Matthew xxii. 39 all the emphasis is laid on neighbourly love. Self-love does not emerge as a delimitation of the former. Instead it is employed to underline the importance of brotherly love by comparison. This is done particularly when love of our neighbour is identified with the mind of Christ. Every Christian, we are told, loves his neighbour like himself, exactly, indeed, as Christ loved him.¹⁷² In early Christian times neighbourly love was a love of all men, the evil and ungrateful included, and not least one's enemies. The latter "had a peculiar place, both in his heart and in his prayers." The Christian "loved them 'even as Christ loved us'."¹⁷³ Neighbourly love,

we are told in the description of the marks of regeneration, includes love of our enemies. It is a love "whereby we love every man as ourselves; as we love our own souls. Nay, our Lord has expressed it still more strongly, teaching us to 'love one another, even as He hath loved us'."174 Man must love his neighbours, each one of them, with such love that he is willing to lay down his life for any of them.175 Love of one's enemy is particularly stressed.176 Perfect love means that man feels and thinks as Christ did, that "we shall love every man so as to be ready to lay down our life for his sake; so as, by this love, to be free from anger, and pride, and from every unkind affection."177

This view is merged with another in which self-love expresses the idea of an ordered and regulated love and is a legitimate form of love. In the exposition of the commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself, self-love is regarded as an obvious pre-requisite. The commandment is understood to mean that equilibrium should be achieved between them. But this self-love must be of such a kind as to harmonize with love to God and our neighbour. The same idea emerges clearly when Wesley describes the commandment as a particularly just rule, and the golden rule "the only adequate measure of brotherly love."178 The harmony in love achieved by this regulation means that there can be no opposition between true self-love and love to our neighbour.

"By experience," we are told, "he knows that social love, if it mean the love of our neighbour, is absolutely different from self-love, even of the most allowable kind; just as different as the objects at which they point. And yet it is sure, that, if they are under due regulations, each will give additional force to the other, till they mix together never to be divided."179 Proper self-love is not "a Sin" but "an indisputable Duty."180 Man has obligations to himself just as he has to God and his neighbour.181 Unregulated self-love is an expression of Sin182 and thus proper self-love acquires the character of regulated love.

The relation between neighbourly love and self-love should be a regulated one, a conclusion reflected in the directions for practical behaviour. "Again: we would that all man should love and esteem us, and behave towards us according to justice, mercy, and truth. And we may reasonably desire, that they should do us all the good they can do, without injuring themselves; yea, that in outward things (according to the known rule), their superfluities should give way to our conveniences; their conveniences, to our necessities; and their necessities, to our extremities.

Now, then, let us walk by the same rule: let us do unto all as we would they should do to us. Let us love and honour all men. Let justice, mercy, and truth govern all our minds and actions. Let our superfluities give way to our neighbour's conveniences (and who then will have any superfluities left?); our conveniences, to our neighbour's necessities; our necessities, to his extremities."183 In the treatment of Christian stewardship in his sermon *The Use of Money* (1760) self-love and neighbourly love appear as forms of an ordered love grounded on love to God.

"The directions which God has given us, touching the use of our wordly substance, may be comprised in the following particulars. If you desire to be a faithful and a wise steward, out of that portion of your Lord's goods which He has for the present lodged in your hands, but with the right of resuming whenever it pleases Him, first, provide things needful for yourself; food to eat, raiment to put on, whatever nature moderately requires for preserving the body in health and strength.

Secondly, provide these for your wife, your children, your servants, or any others who pertain to your household. If, when this is done, there be an overplus left, then 'do good to them that are of the household of faith'. If there be an overplus still, 'as you have opportunity, do good unto all men'. In so doing, you give

all you can; nay, in a sound sense, all you have: for all that is laid out in this manner is really given to God. You 'render unto God the things that are God's', not only by what you give to the poor, but also by that which you expend in providing things needful for yourself and your household."¹⁸⁴

Self-love, then, must not be regarded as a rival to the love of God. The latter renders the former legitimate. Like neighbourly love, self-love operates within the framework of love to God. Thus it is this love that constitutes the quintessence of sanctification.

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