

Completing the Reformation

Agape or Eros

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Seventh-day Adventists have historically considered themselves to be the Elijah of the end time preparing the world and the Church for the second coming of Jesus. We have also considered ourselves to be the movement that was to follow a long line of reformers in completing the reformation carried forward by such as, the Waldenses, Wycliffe, Huss and Jerome, Luther, the Wesleys, William Miller and many others.

They were not entirely free from error. Are we? But as Paul said, “We press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus...Therefore, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you” (Phil. 3: 14, 15).

Unfortunately, some in the church have been influenced by concepts alien to the biblical principles by which God has sought to guide us in our mission of proclaiming the third and fourth angel’s messages, especially the everlasting gospel as well as a correct understanding of the Sanctuary truth and Jesus as our great High Priest.

Current alien concepts include those of the Emergent Church movement, initiated by the Papacy at Vatican Two, and others who promote the reading, studying and practicing of the various spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola, the Desert Fathers, Quakerism, Buddhism etc. based on Caritas and mysticism, and some promoting egocentric or anthropocentric religious philosophies. These are designed to nudge Protestants into a closer alliance with the Roman Church.

Ellen White dealt with most of these non-biblical issues. She wrote nearly ninety pages in support of Martin Luther’s reformation in the book, *The Great Controversy*. Although we think of Luther in connection with justification or righteousness by faith, he is lesser known for recovering Agape from the Scriptures a highly influential view of the Love of God. Both Luther and Nygren, it appears, believed

in predestination, but what they wrote of God's Agape fits well in the free will understanding of Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventists. We must continually keep in mind what Nygren says about Christian beliefs that are fundamental to a proper understanding of Agape.

Three fundamental beliefs of the primitive church (*ibid.*, 276-288).

1. The confession of God as "Creator of heaven and earth" is a clear conscious rejection of the Hellenistic way of salvation, Eros.
2. The confession of the Incarnation still more clearly distinguishes Christianity from Hellenism.
3. The ancient church differs most of all from Hellenism in its belief in the resurrection. Christian tradition affirmed the "resurrection of the flesh" which the Apologists opposed to the Hellenistic doctrine of the "Immortality of the soul".

The critical issue is, how do sinners like us experience intimate fellowship with God in an Eros dominated world. It appears obvious to me that misunderstandings of Nygren's work derive from a failure to understand fully this main purpose of Nygren's and Luther's study of Agape, *fellowship with God*. For example Emotion: The Gospel of John and the epistle 1 John as well as the life and teachings of Jesus, "Jesus wept", the joy, gratitude, and depth of emotion involved in the teachings, healings, and resurrections of Jesus, the disciple that Jesus loved and the fellowship set forth as the purpose of 1 John contain the emotion of fellowship with God and one another so needed today.

The inclusion of Nomos bothers some unless one understands the perversion of the law even in the understanding of Jesus own disciples as well as of the Pharisees and others is what Nygren is dealing with. There was no attempt to deal with every phase of the plan of salvation and man's response to God's Agape such as the new birth and repentance.

However, if we understand everything else including the 28 fundamentals, but don't understand and experience Agape, nothing else matters as evidenced by the superficial gratitude and love for God and one another so prevalent in the church today. Without Agape we can't really be "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12).

Man cannot become what he was meant to be, so long as he is self-centered, taken up with himself. He needs to be taken out of himself, out of his cramping preoccupation with himself and his own affairs. And that is precisely what Agape does for him in in so far as he accepts it. It delivers him out of the prison of his own egocentricity into the glorious liberty of the children of God. From the point of view of Agape, the rationality of Eros and Nomos is that of the “natural man”, who can see no sense in doing anything for nothing unless he does it for himself – and who is prepared to ‘rationalize’ even God’s Agape by explaining it is an expression of Divine self-love” (*Agape and Eros*, p. xxii).

Only by the Holy Spirit can we begin to comprehend God’s Love, Agape. As we see ourselves in our self-centered sin in comparison with Jesus, we are humbled and repentant. Continuing to meditate on his Love and longing to be like Him we are born again by the Spirit, and become transformed more and more into His likeness. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with unveiled face (veil of self) beholding, as in a mirror the glory of the Lord (Jesus Love), are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as the by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:17, 18).

(1) *The New Birth: In a midnight interview with a leader of the General Conference*, the Sanhedrin, Jesus pointedly asserted, “Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

“Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, and cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3: 3-8) “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the (spiritual) children of God” (John 1:12).

(2) *Deepening repentance*: This can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit with our consent. “Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). “At every advance step in Christian experience our repentance will deepen...None of the apostles or prophets ever claimed to be without sin” (White, COL p. 160). Repentance is sorrow for our sin

and a change of mind (metanoia) from self-pleasing to pleasing Jesus and serving others. Saul justified himself in disobedience. David repented, and God forgave/justified him in Jesus. God can't justify anyone who justifies himself.

(3) *Agape Love*: "Behold what manner of Love (Agape) the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God. Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (1 John 3:1) Jesus is Agape.

(1) The new birth (2) deepening repentance (3) Agape: are basic fundamentals of the Christian and are daily, moment by moment, experiences.

English is a poverty stricken language when it comes to defining what love is, as I love ice cream, beauty, money, my new Ferrari, my spouse, my dog.

The Greek language has four main specific words that leave little doubt as to the type of love referred to: (1) Eros (2) Phileo (3) Storge (4) Agape

Eros. Heavenly Eros. A human acquisitive, egocentric love, the arising of the soul for fellowship with God in his holiness and majesty. This view was brought into the Christian Church by the educated "converted" Gentile "Church Fathers" who were versed in the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Proclus and others, along with a belief in the natural immortality of the soul. They brought Eros into the Christian church in the second and/or third centuries introducing numerous corruptions. *John warned the believers, "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18).*

Eros is sinful human love. We love what tastes good, looks beautiful, is of great value, or that or those who give us support or pleasure, especially God. *The word Eros never appears in the Greek New Testament.*

Lower or vulgar Eros is human intimacy, as in marriage. Apart from Agape, an egocentric love.

Phileo is brotherly love and affection. Philadelphia, the so called city of brotherly love derives its name from Phileo. When this word in the Bible describes God's Love the emphasis is on the tenderness and affection of God. Apart from God's indwelling by the Holy Spirit (Agape), natural human nature bends this love to personal advantage.

Storge is the loving of someone through the fondness of familiarity, family members or people who relate in familiar ways. Apart from *Agape*, it is also bent toward self.

Agape is giving. “For God so loved the world that *He gave His only begotten Son*, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16, 17). *Agape* gently controls *Phileo* and *Storge*.

This study of God’s Love is based on Scripture, the inspired writings of Ellen G. White and the book *Agape and Eros* (741 pages), the result of research by Anders Nygren in the works of Martin Luther. Nygren reports in The Author’s Preface,

“Part One of the present work appeared in an English translation - somewhat abridged – by A. G. Hebert in 1932.

“Part Two was translated by Philip S. Watson and published in two volumes in 1938-39. It has now been thought desirable to make a full version of Part One available to English readers, and I am deeply grateful to Professor Watson for undertaking the task of preparing it... (published in 1953 by Harper and Row) In the discussion of the subject that has so far taken place, *I have found no reason to abandon my original position at any point*, and my work is therefore being published without alteration” (*Agape and Eros*, pp. xiii and xiv).

In the Translator’s Preface Philip S. Watson addresses some recurrent misunderstandings of the theme,

“Which may be obviated if something is said here about the meaning of the major technical terms employed in it...These are Greek words, both commonly translated as ‘love’. They are used here to represent two distinct ideas (or motifs) of love, one of them prevalent in the ancient Hellenistic world, which is called *eros*, and the other characteristic (or motif) of love of primitive Christianity, to which it was known as *agape*” (*ibid.*, p. xv, xvi)

A religion deprived of its fundamental motif would lose all coherence and meaning; and therefore we cannot rightly regard anything as a fundamental motif unless its removal would have such an effect...It need only be added, in order to prevent a possible misunderstanding, that the

fundamental motif need by no means consist of a clearly formulated idea, but can equally well consist of a general underlying sentiment (*ibid.*, p. 37)

Agape and Eros was a seminal work. Our understanding of Agape (God) will grow and continue to challenge and delight us in eternity. When *Agape and Eros* by Nygren was published, the following appeared generally to be true in the Evangelical world. What about the Seventh-day Adventist world? Perhaps we have unintentionally overlooked Agape's significance. *A clear understanding of God's love, Agape, is essential to a correct understanding of the gospel and successful Christian living*

In the history of doctrine, comprehensive and painstaking work has been devoted to the elucidation of quite peripheral details, while this central question has been largely left on one side as though the meaning and structure of the Christian idea of love were self-evident and unambiguous, and were sufficiently defined by the mere mention of the word "love"; and as though the idea of love had one and the same significance for all Christians in all ages. Nor is the position any different when we turn to the history of Christian ethics. (*ibid.*, p. 27)

Christian Love...is not concerned with the love with which we love God, but essentially with which God Himself loves" (*ibid.*, p. 683).

Caritas is a Latin word used by Augustine which defined a new view of love (a new motif). It is neither Eros, ascending love, or Agape, descending love, but the synthesis of them (*ibid.*, p. 451). Gratia is the motor which alone can set Heavenly Eros in motion, the power which makes the ascent successful (*ibid.*, p. 531) The more I love God, the more I love myself too (*ibid.*, p. 539). The importance of self-love in Augustine's thought is best seen in the way in which he uses it as the foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity (*ibid.*, pp. 541-543). The Papacy's current view is a mixture of truth, Agape, and error, Eros; Caritas (see *Deus Carita Est* by Pope Benedict 15).

In Augustine the issue between Eros and Agape is decided in favor of synthesis; in Luther, in favor of reformation" (*ibid.*, p.692).

There is an inner connection and an exact correspondence between Luther's doctrine of justification and his view of love. *The very thing that made him a reformer in justification, made him also a reformer in the Christian idea of love (ibid., p. 683)*

Luther longed for fellowship with God, but discovered from experience and scripture that he could never attain fellowship with God by his own effort but only as a sinner, in self-denial humility (*ibid.*, pp. 693-695; Matt. 16:24)

Luther finds the solution to this vital problem only when he has learnt from Paul to make the right distinction between law and gospel. From the evidence he realizes that he, like the church as a whole, has been following a false Way of salvation, the Way of Caritas. (*ibid*, p. 695).

Not even the reformation succeeded in making any serious alteration. In Evangelical Christendom to the present day, Augustine's view has done far more than Luther's to determine what is meant by Christian Love. (*ibid.*, p. 450)

God loves because it is His nature to love, and His loving consists, not in getting, but giving, in doing good, and nothing but good! Agape, *God's love, compelled the Apostles and fellow believers to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the then known world, but never by force or coercion. What power! (2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 19-21)*

The writings of Ellen White harmonizes with scripture, Luther and Nygren. For example, she says, "God is love. His nature, His law, is love. It ever has been; it ever will be" (White, PP p. 33).

True, there is an abiding joy with God and believers in the *intimate fellowship* Jesus brings. With great emotion they find pleasure in expressions of gratitude, and praise to God. However, God's greatest pleasure derives primarily from seeing the creatures, made in His image, reflect His self-denying love in serving their neighbors including the oppressed, and even enemies. He paid an infinite price to redeem them that they might experience His joy in passing on His Love as He loves. This is the restoration He longs for His children to experience.

Grace and Truth came by Jesus:

John, the beloved, proclaims that *"The law was given through Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No One has seen God at any time. The only begotten,*

Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father He has declared Him” (John 1:17, 18). This is the first principle of Agape that directs us in our study of God’s love to the New Testament. Luther and Nygren based their definition of Agape on the New Testament alone; the teachings of Jesus, Paul’s epistles, and the gospel and epistles of the Apostle John and others.

In our natural sinful nature we give to receive. Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). This is the essence of God’s Agape. This is the second principle revealed in the Trinity, Agape and Christian love. It conveys a divine principle that governs the relationship within the Trinity and God’s fellowship with sinners.*

The distinctive character of the *believer’s* ethic, as it arises out of fellowship with God, can be summed up in Jesus words to His disciples: *‘freely you have received, freely give’” (Matt. 10:8) Those who have received God’s Love (Agape) are called to pass this joyful and liberating message freely in their lives and words to their fellow men” (ibid., p. 91 This is the third principle of Agape).*

We Have therefore every right to say that Agape is the centre of Christianity, the Christian fundamental motif, *the par excellence*, the answer both to the religious and the ethical question” (*ibid.*, p.48).

Agape in the fullest sense of the term has neither the appetitive nature of Eros nor the responsive character of faith; it is entirely independent of external stimulus and motivation. God loves because it his nature to love, and His loving consists, not in getting, but in doing good. (*ibid.*, p. 17)

God loves all. We are His children. Made in His image at creation, and depraved by sin, He, in Christ, has restored the whole human race to favor with God. We may either accept His gift in Christ or neglect and resist it.

The content of Agape: (*ibid.*, pp.75-80)

1. Agape (God) is creative. What is ultimately decisive for the meaning of Agape and can only be seen when we observe that it is Divine Love and therefore shares in the creativeness that is characteristic...Agape loves and imparts value by loving. “But the Lord said to Him (Ananias), ‘go for he (Paul) is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel’” (Acts 9:1-30). Luther said sin-

ners are lovely because they are loved; they are not loved because they are lovely (*ibid.*, p. 765).z

2. Agape is the initiator of fellowship with God. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).
3. Agape is spontaneous and "unmotivated". (It is unconditional, changeless, and self-sacrificing). In Christ there is revealed a Divine love which breaks all bounds, refusing to be controlled by the value of its object. And being determined by its own intrinsic value. (Rom 3:23, 24).
4. Agape is "indifferent to value". It is when all thought of the worthiness of the object is abandoned that we can understand what Agape is. "Love your enemies...that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven for He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good" (Matt. 5:44, 45; In other words, He is no respecter of persons).

The object so clearly stated by Nygren and Luther is that, as God's children, He longs to have intimate fellowship with each one of us (John 17:3, 21). He created us in His own image, but sin has ruined us and almost entirely obliterated that image, the power to think, do and choose. The Holy Spirit, Agape, is resisting the work of Satan and alluring rebels to a better way, God's way of Agape. In the Father's heart, Jesus was crucified from the foundation of the world, to preserve, by the Holy Spirit our freedom of choose between Christ and his humility and Satan's self-exaltation.

Under God, Adam was to stand at the head of the earthly family, to maintain the principles of the heavenly family. This would have brought peace and happiness. But the law that none "liveth to himself" (Romans 14:7), Satan was determined to oppose. He desired to live for self. He sought to make himself a center of influence. It was this that had incited rebellion in heaven, and it was man's acceptance of this principle that brought sin on earth. When Adam sinned, man broke away from the heaven-ordained center. A demon became the central power in the world. Where God's throne should have been, Satan placed his throne. The world laid its homage, as a willing offering, at the feet of the enemy. (White, CT 33.1)
As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. He has given life and light to all, and according to the measure of light given each is to be judged (White DA p. 210; John 1:9)

Agape is forgiving/justifying. Christ's corporate universal amnesty has given us a probationary justification to life so that we have the opportunity to believe and receive Jesus as our wisdom, justification and sanctification. "And you being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven all your trespasses" (Col. 2:13).

"For all have sinned and (all) come short of the glory of God (and all are) being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23, 24). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19) Why? "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. To declare I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. 25-27 (Rom. 5:

Agape is a love that loves to give, freely, selflessly; Eros is a love that loves to get, a highly refined form of self-interest and self-seeking. Therefore it must be regarded as sinful by the Agape "that seeketh not its own"...If the Neoplatonist is egocentric in his Eros, the Pharisee is just as egocentric in his aspiration to a place in the kingdom of God on the ground of his own righteousness, his observance of the law. But Hellenistic Eros-religion and the religion of Nomos are by no means the same thing, although both are opposed to the religion of Agape...Agape is by nature so utterly self-forgetful and self-sacrificial that it may well seem (from an egocentric point of view) to involve the supreme irrationality of the destruction of the self, as some critics have alleged that it does. But in fact, Agape means the death, not of the self, but selfishness.. " (*Agape and Eros*, p. xxi, xxii).

Luther had discovered the Eros features of the Caritas-synthesis. He therefore had to destroy it. In justification we have to do with Christ alone. 'Christ, however is not my Caritas.' Christ is not my Eros, but God's Agape" (*ibid.*, p.721).

Against the egocentric attitude which had come to mark the Catholic conception of love, Luther sets a thoroughly theocentric idea of love. When Luther wishes to say what love is in the Christian sense it is, not from our

love, not, especially from the realm of human love at all, but from God's love (*ibid.*, p.683).

Luther and Nygren insists:

As to the Religious Question, Doubtless, there is scarcely any religion from which the theocentric tendency is wholly absent; but it has nowhere else been able to overcome that appeal to man's natural tendency to take everything around him into his own service and to judge and value everything according as it advances or retards his own interests" (*Ibid.*, pp. 45, 46).

By nature we are self-centered. Self-love is the root of selfishness which is the essence of sin. "As it is written, 'There is none righteous, no not one.' (Rom. 3: 10-18). Human values are based on knowledge, performance, skills, abilities, social relationships, position, riches, power and influence. Of course love is what we all long for, from others and God. All these and even love for God or others is "naturally" bent towards self-interest.

Even the Medieval idea of Caritas, as we saw above, contains in its way an attack on self-love. But the peculiar thing is that the self-love it attacks is retained as the basis for the doctrine of love as a whole. The over-selfish egoism of self-love is to be overcome by the sublimation into pure love for God...Augustine speaks of a right self-love, which *seeks its satisfaction* in God Himself" (*ibid.*, pp. 708, 709).

Jesus made several statements that strongly emphasized that self-love is not appropriate for the Christian but in His teaching affirmed the value of self-respect. "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37, 38). "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, *let him deny himself* and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and *whoever loses his life for My sake will save it*'" (Matt. 16:24, 25).

The religion of the natural man consists in this, that he wishes to become good and holy, and by this means to enter into fellowship with God. But this is all just the source of all his perverseness. It is a Satanic temptation, which if we yield to it leads us away from God and prevents us from receiving His love in Christ...In the will to purify oneself first, before one will take refuge in God, there lies a secret, “presumption”. *By so doing man ascribes to himself, the work which God has reserved to Himself, and which He carries out through Christ.* For to give grace, forgiveness of sins, life and righteousness, together with deliverance from sin and death, is not the work of any creature, but belongs solely and alone to the Divine majesty. (*ibid.*, p. 685).

It is only man and the devil who in everything seek their own, so far from being a natural ordinance of God in nature, it is a devilish perversion. (*ibid.*, p. 740).

Ellen White agrees, “The gospel of Christ sanctifies the soul by expelling self-love” (White, 9T, p. 211; 8T, p. 315). “Those who are true to their call as messengers of God will not seek honor for themselves. Love of self will be swallowed up in love for Christ” (White, DA, p. 179).

The ground of self-respect is, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1).

“Cherish self-respect firmly and constantly” (White, CH, p 295; AH, p.404).

Although Ellen White may not be considered by some as a recognized theologian, yet as a Seventh-day Adventists it is essential to give appropriate weight also to her inspired insights. *A correct understanding of the gospel depends in large measure in understanding God’s love and our scripturally enlightened response.*
Ellen White insists that:

...we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we saw that it was God’s glory to give. ‘I do nothing of myself,’ said Christ, “the living Father has sent Me, and I live by the Father.’ ‘I seek not mine own glory, but the glory of Him who sent Me’” (John 8:26; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18). In these words is set forth *the great principle which is the law of life for the universe.* All things Christ received from God, but *He took to give.*

So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings, through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all; through the Son *it returns, in praise and service*, a tide of love to the great source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete representing the character of the great giver, the law of life" (White, DA p. 21).

He who blessed the nobleman of Capernaum is just as desirous of blessing us. But like the afflicted father, we are often led to seek Jesus by the desire for some earthly good, and upon granting our request, we rest our confidence in His love. The Saviour longs to give us *a greater blessing* than we ask; and (sometimes) He delays the answer to our request that he may show us the evil of our own hearts, and our deep need of His grace. *He desires us to renounce the selfishness that leads us to seek Him*. Confessing our helplessness and bitter need, we are to trust ourselves wholly to His love" (White, DA, p. 200).

Paul defined Agape.

It seems to have been Paul who introduced it (Agape) as a technical term for the Christian Agape motif - though not of course, in the sense that he coined the word. There is very little ground for the old contention that the word Agape is a new creation of Christianity, for even though its occurrence in non-Christian sources is very rare, it is not entirely absent from them...Where the word occurs in non-Christian sources, it does not occur as the name of this reality, does not signify the same thing".

And it seems to have been Paul who... made Agape a technical term for Christian love – so far as the sources allow us to trace the matter back; it is by no means impossible that this designation, may have been used in the primitive church before Paul, though for lack of information we cannot be certain about it. Perhaps P. Feine's principle is applicable here:

It is only because Paul stands before us in his letters as a theological personality that he has been regarded as the creator of these ideas. But on closer examination we find that he stands in line with others, or else has merely given sharper theological definition to what was the common property of primitive Christianity. Yet even if that be so, it is Paul that first de-

velops the use of the term Agape in the scriptures and thereby establishes it for future generations.

Little is achieved by the fixing of the name or term, unless it is accompanied by a clear delineation of the thing it signifies; but Paul gives us both. It may have been chiefly due to his powerful delineation of the idea of the Agape motif that the idea of Agape was able to gain any ground at all: think of the importance of the “Hymn to Agape” in 1 Cor. 13 in this respect (*Agape and Eros*, pp. 113-115).

Such a love as this cannot be shown by man towards God, since man’s love for God at its best is never more than a response (of faith) to God’s prior love to man. But man can show such love to his fellow man. He can become a child of the heavenly Father and learn to love his enemies as the Father does. Not that he will love his enemies to the exclusion of his friends, any more than the heavenly Father’s love excludes His love for His sinless Son (*ibid.*, p. xvii).

Ellen White issues this challenge to us all in our “good”, church attending, self-centered lives , *“Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God’s ideal for His children... Godliness, God likeness is the goal to be reached”* (8T p. 63).

Agape In The Gospels :

The New Testament alone has the most comprehensive picture of God’s love as manifested in the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless them who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you...If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them...but love your enemies, do good and lend, hoping for nothing in return: and your reward will be great, *and you will be sons (and daughters) of the Highest*. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:32-36).

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in an everlasting covenant, giving Love with Agape flowing from each to each other and every member of the human race. The Father glorifies the Son, the Son glorifies the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit seeks to glorifies us. (John 17:22, 23; Rev. 1:1-3) God is three persons and we are created in His image.

Agape's deep experience is an *overwhelming personal covenant fellowship of Jesus with believers*, as Jesus extravagantly proclaims, "This is eternal life that they may know you (intimately), the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent...I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as you Father, are in Me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent Me" (John 17:3, 21). This is the *fellowship with God* that all believers may experience that is so characteristic in first John.

Human nature cannot originate Agape. It is closely aligned and expressed through grace. We can only receive it as a gift from God by grace through faith by the Holy Spirit and the word. This is most clearly revealed in Jesus statement, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17) "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom.6, 23).

When asked by the lawyer "What is the great commandment of the law?" Jesus replied, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is One, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matt. 22:35-40; Deut. 6:4,5) Then added, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:35-40; Lev. 22:35-40).

Jesus insisted that "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) In other words we are to love and serve others with the same commitment and intensity we loved and served self before knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord. This is confirmed by Jesus when He said, "A new commandment I give you that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 12:34).

Everything in creation obeys the law of love. There is no tree in nature that bears fruit for its own use; The sun does not shine for itself. It is only man and the devil who in everything seeks their own. So far from self-love being a natural ordinance of God in nature, *it is a devilish perversion*. That which in all things only seeks its own is thereby closed against God" (*ibid.*, p. 740)

Paul's most important contribution to the development of the Agape motif lies in the inward relation he establishes between the idea of Agape and

the theology of the Cross, as it is called. The Cross of Christ undeniably stands at the centre of his preaching.

The reason why Paul attaches such importance to the Cross is to be found in his conviction that it is the Cross which determines the character of his new Christian relationship to God, just as the Law had determined his pre-Christian relationship to God...It is characteristic of Paul's entire thought that the Cross of Christ and the Love of God are viewed as one...

Of the many passages we might quote from Paul to illustrate this between the Cross and Agape, let us look first at the most important, the classical passage for the "Agape of the cross", Romans 5:6-10: "While we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly God. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God commendeth His own Agape toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God-through the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Four things should be noticed here:

First: If we ask what Agape is, we are pointed to the cross of Christ... No where else is there to be found a revelation of Agape comparable to that in the death of Jesus on the Cross. What Paul says here is exactly the same as we find in other words in the First epistle of John: "Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us" (I John 3:16).

Second: It is *God*, says Paul, who proves His love in that Christ died for us. Christ's work is God's own work. Christ's Agape is God's Agape...The atonement does not mean that we reconcile ourselves with Him, but that He in Christ reconciles us to Himself; and it is only on this basis that Paul goes on to say: "be ye reconciled to God" (verse 20). Here too, Agape is God's way to man.

Third: Nowhere is the *absolutely spontaneous and unmotivated nature of God's Agape so clearly manifest as in the death of Christ*...Paul emphasizes this point three times in the passage quoted (verses 6, 8, 10) and with four different expressions.: the weak, the ungodly, sinners, enemies.

Fourthly: The greatest thing ever previously said of God's love and its spontaneous and unmotivated nature, was that it is love for sinners, for the unworthy and unrighteous...when we remember the part paid by religious allegiance in those days, we can see how much further Paul goes when he adds Christ died for those who were godless, for those who belonged to other religions, to those who were devoted to strange Gods. In thus describing the Agape of the cross, Paul has risen to the sublime conception of God's Agape ever given or capable of being given" (*Agape and Eros*, p. 116-119).

Naturally, there is no question of Paul's wishing to eliminate the spiritual reality denoted by the phrase "love towards God", he merely seeks to give it its proper name "faith". Faith includes in itself the whole devotion of love, while emphasizing that it has the character of a response, that it is a reciprocated love. Faith is love towards God, but a love of which is the key note of receptivity, not spontaneity" (*ibid.*, p. 127). Luther asserts, "To preach faith in Christ, on the other hand, is nothing else but to preach Love – that is God's Love" (*ibid.*, p. 720).

God does not design that our will should be destroyed, for it is only through its exercise that He can accomplish what He would have us do. Our will is to be yielded to Him, that we may receive it again, purified and refined, and so linked in sympathy with the Divine that He may pour through us the tides of His Love and power" (White, MB p. 62).

Then there is a willingness to let God work by His Agape "to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

Paul repeatedly emphasizes,

Love for one's neighbor is "the fulfillment of the law". This thought occurs several times in Paul, and is given particular prominence. We may recall first his "fundamental statement" in Rom 13:8-10, "he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: love therefore is the fulfillment of the law".

And in Gal. 5:14 it is stated explicitly: “the whole law is fulfilled in this, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (*Agape and Eros*, p. 127).

There is no Divine-human fellowship that doesn't include great thoughts and emotions in being intentional and intelligent channels for God's heart transforming, overflowing love. Man can never be a passive channel of God's love, Paul affirms, “For the love of Christ constrains (motivates or compels) us” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

Agape creates an intimate fellowship with God based on love, not law as he (Paul) previously understood its role. This is the righteousness of God apart from the law, “Being witnessed by the law and the prophets (Rom. 3:21).

In 1 Cor. 13 Paul characterizes Christ's descending Love for us, and through us for our neighbor:

In 1 Cor. 13 (A Hymn to Agape) there is a definite opposition, a contrast between two different “ways”, two different kinds of fellowship with God: on the one side the Gnostic-mystical “vision of God” typical of Hellenism; and on the other, the primitive Christian and Pauline way of Agape (*ibid.*, p. 134).

Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not Agape, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging symbol.

And although I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not Agape, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not Agape, it profits me nothing.

Agape suffers long and is kind; Agape does not envy; Agape does not parade itself; is not puffed up. does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Agape never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues they will cease; whether there is knowledge it will vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as also I am known.

And now abides faith, hope and Agape, but the greatest of these is Agape
“Pursue Agape” (1 Cor. 14:1; That is, pursue God in your response to His pursuit of you.

The Apostle John in 1 John, Christian fellowship is the stated purpose.

Broadly speaking, then, it can be said that already in the Synoptic gospels, and still more in Paul the thought of God and the thought of Agape are so closely associated as to be virtually identical. Paul often suggests their identity, and at times comes very near to putting it into words. God is for him “the God of Agape”...

This final step is taken in the First Epistle of John, where the *identity of God and Agape* is inserted in the twice repeated formula: “God is Agape”. (1 John 4:8, 16). Whereas the Pauline “Agape of the Cross” gives the supreme description of the content of the primitive description of Agape motif, the Johannine “God is Agape” gives the supreme formal statement of it. Nothing greater can be said than this: God is Love, love, Agape is God.

It has long been customary to speak of John as “the Apostle of love.” The title is justified inasmuch as the Johannine identification of God and Agape places the coping-stone, so to speak, on the edifice of the primitive Christian conception of Agape.

To this, however, it may be added that nearly all the characteristic features of the Agape motif which we find elsewhere in the New Testament are to be found in the Gospel and First Epistle of John. Here, as elsewhere, the starting point is in God’s own Agape. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us” (1 John 4:10) but the Divine Agape of necessity calls forth love in man: “We love because He first loved us.” (*Ibid.*, 19). The love shown by Jesus is the pattern for His disciple’s Love toward one another, and their love toward one another is the token that they are His disciples (John 13: 13, ff., 34 f.; 15:12).

Furthermore, the Johannine agrees with the Synoptic idea of Agape in that it represents Christian love as manifested in two directions: toward God and toward man. There is no trace here of the Pauline reserve in speaking of love for God. Love for God and love for the brethren belong so inseparably together that the one can be inferred from the other (1 John 4:20), though brotherly love can be connected either with love for God, as in Paul, or directly with God's Love and Christ's Love... What unites the Johannine with the Synoptic idea of Agape and produces this wide range of agreement is chiefly the fact that they are both based on the new conception of *fellowship with God*. In this respect indeed, the Johannine outlook can very well be said to mark an advance on the Synoptic, inasmuch as the thought of fellowship with God forms the foundation on which the entire first epistle is based (*ibid.*, pp. 147-149).

Luther...is perfectly aware that the Love he describes is no human love, is no human art, nor grown in our garden. Christian Love is not produced by us, but it has come to us from heaven. The subject of Christian Love is not man, but God, in such a way that the Divine Love employs man as an instrument and organ. The Christian is set between God and his neighbor. In faith he receives God's Love. In Love he passes it on to his neighbor. Christian Love is, so to speak, an extension of God's Love...

To love God is to love one's neighbor. It is there God is found to be loved, it is there He is to be served and ministered to, whoever wishes to minister to Him and serve Him; so that the commandment of the love of God is brought down in its entirety into Love...for this was the reason why He put off the form of God and took on the form of a servant, that he might draw down our Love and fasten it on our neighbor" (*ibid.*, pp. 733, 734, 736).

His (man's) love for God loses the character of deserving achievement and becomes pure and unfeigned. It flows by inescapable necessity from the fact of his belonging unreservedly to God; and being aware of so belonging, it devotes its whole attention to the carrying out of God's will. It is obedience to God without any thought of reward (*ibid.*, pp. 94, 95; Luke 17:10).

Jesus said this to those in the Judgment who were motivated by Agape to share God's Love with others, "Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40)

Differing Understandings of the Love of God (*ibid.*, pp. 220-226)

Agape

1. Revealed Bible Truth
2. Faith
3. Man is Mortal
4. Man a Unified Being
5. Agape Awakens Love
6. Resurrection of the flesh

Eros and Caritas

- Rationalism and Mysticism
- Works, Human Achievement
- Man is Immortal
- Material Body, Divine Origin of Soul
- Divine Beauty Awakens Love
- Immortality of the Soul

There are three powerful *essential ways* to love God with all our heart, with all our strength, and all our mind. (Matt. 22:37, 38).

1. *Faith* is a heart appreciation response for who God is and what He has accomplished for us in Christ (Rom. 10:10; 11:33-36; Agape and Eros, p.127).
2. *Obedience*. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4; *ibid.*, pp. 94, 95).
3. Transformed and compelled by His Agape, *we become channels for God's Agape to overflow flow through us in love to our neighbors, including the poor, disadvantaged, enemies* (Matt. 5:43-48; *ibid.*, pp. 733, 734, 736).

Divine love has been stirred to its unfathomable depths for the sake of men, and angels marvel to behold in the recipients of so great love a mere surface gratitude. Angels marvel at man's shallow appreciation of the love of God.

Heaven stands indignant at the neglect shown to the souls of men. Would we know how Christ regards it? How would a father and mother feel, did they know that their child lost in the cold and snow, had been passed by, and left to perish, by those that might have saved it?

Would they not be terribly grieved, wildly indignant. Would they not denounce those murderers with wrath hot as their tears, intense as their love. The suffering of every man are the suffering of God's child, and those who

reach out no helping hand to their perishing fellow beings provoke His righteous anger.

This is the wrath of the Lamb. To those who claim fellowship with Christ, yet have been indifferent to the needs of their fellowmen, He will declare in the great judgment day, "I know not whence you are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity" (Luke 13:27; White, DA, p. 825)

The Investigative Judgment:

God's Agape faces man with an inescapable "Either – Or". Just because Agape means a complete reckless giving, it also demands unlimited devotion. As creative and productive of fellowship, it becomes also an annihilating judgment on the selfish life which will not allow itself to be re-created into a life of love and refuses the offered fellowship. It is in the presence of the Divine Agape that a man's destiny is ultimately decided. The question is whether he will let himself be won and re-created by God's love, or will he resist it, and so encounter it only as a judgment on his life" (*Agape and Eros.*, p. 104)

May the Lord give us a deepening repentance for our neglect of the souls for whom Christ died. Let us redeem the time. He is still as merciful and gracious as He was as when, in Love, he paid that infinite price for us in the garden and at Calvary.

God has given freedom of choice to each of us, confirmed and guaranteed by Jesus love sacrifice on the cross. The good news is that as we are learning to intimately know Jesus (Agape) and how to pass Him on to others, we have a promise, a guarantee, "I thank God for every remembrance of you....being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6)

Agape, God's love, compelled the Apostles (and fellow believers) to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the then known world in one generation without radio, television, or the internet, but never by force or coercion. What power! (2 Cor. 5:14, 15) And all, except John, paid a price, similar to their Savior, martyrdom.

At the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as

the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow (gush) rivers of living water (John 7:37, 38).

The most unfortunate, those who have the most disagreeable temperaments, need our love, our tenderness, our compassion. Those who try our patience need most love. We pass through the world only once; any good thing we can do, we should do most earnestly, untiringly, with the same spirit as is stated of Christ in his work. He will not fail nor be discouraged. The rough, stubborn, sullen dispositions are the ones who need help the most. How can they be helped? Only by that love practiced in dealing with them which Christ revealed to fallen men. Treat them, you say, as they deserve? What if Christ had treated us thus? He, the undeserving, was treated as we deserve. Still we are treated by Christ with grace and love as we did not deserve, but as he deserved. Treat some characters as you think they richly deserve, and you will cut off from them the last thread of hope, spoil your influence, and ruin the soul. Will it pay? No, I say no, a hundred times no. Bind these souls who need all the help it is possible for you to give them close to a loving, sympathizing, pitying heart, overflowing with Christ-like love, and you will save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins. Had we not better try the love process?" (White SpM 144Ta; White, YI, Feb. 20, 1986).

As members and ministers together, empowered by the Holy Spirit, let us embrace all that is included in Agape, the essence of the gospel, then the message will go like "fire in the stubble"? (White, RH, Dec. 15, 1885, p. 769). The Spirit driven proclamation of the "loud cry" of the third and fourth angel's messages in *the lives and testimonies of ministers and members* will result in the same results as in the days of the Apostles. Agape will burst forth in a mighty torrent from the church to lighten the whole earth with His glory (Rev. 14:6, 12; Rev 18:1-3).

The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown, and now it will spring up and bear fruit. The publications distributed by missionary workers have exerted their influence, yet many minds that were impressed have been prevented from

fully comprehending the truth or from yielding obedience. Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness...A large number take their stand upon the Lord's side (White, GC, p. 612, 1888).

Jesus will *allure sinners through us in great power*. The shaking will ravage the Church. Babylon, with Eros and Caritas, will be aroused to battle Jesus in the persons of the saints with persecution and death threats. Then Babylon and death will perish in the lake of fire, and the Saints will reign eternally with Jesus in *everlasting fellowship*. Even so come Lord Jesus!

