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“We Love Because He Loved Us First” (1 John 4:7-21)

By VICTOR BARTLING

OUR design in this paper is to present a practical exposition of a Scripture passage in which we who work in the Church hear God speaking to us about that which must live in our hearts if our plans and programs, our skills and techniques, our studies and preaching and teaching, are to enjoy God's approval and blessing. Behind, within, and ahead of all we do must be the great love (*agape*) of God Himself. Divine *Agape* has established the Church and its institutions. Divine *Agape* is the sum of the message entrusted to us. Divine *Agape* is the power whose presence in the heart is the promise of success to those of us whose IQ is quite moderate; whose absence from the heart would, however, stamp as failures those whose IQ rating hits the bell.

When we think of *agape*, our minds soon turn to St. John, the Apostle of Love. And particularly we think of his First Epistle. In his *Exposition* of this letter, Augustine says: *Locuturus est multa et prope omnia de caritate*. Luther repeats the thought: “The main substance of this Epistle is love.” And recently Albrecht Oepke said of John: “Er sucht nicht neue Lichter, sondern sieht vielmehr die *eine* Sonne in Myriaden von Tropfen sich spiegeln. Er will nicht neue Toene anschlagen, sondern den *einen* Ton, den Gott angeschlagen hat, zur vollen Resonanz bringen. Dieser Ton heiszt aber vor allem und ueber allem: Liebe.” (Kittel, *Theol. Woerterbuch*, III, 592.)

If we count the verses that treat expressly of love in the First Epistle, these statements just quoted seem a bit exaggerated. 44 of the 105 verses — that's a little over 40 per cent — deal directly with the theme. But viewing the matter theologically and not arithmetically, we find that the quoted words are correct — “Love” is the great theme of John.

1 John 4:7-21 is the last of three sections which deal expressly with love. Here John gathers up and expands what he has said in the two previous passages (2:7-17; 3:10-24). This passage,

perhaps, is the crowning peak in the New Testament revelation of *agape*. It is easily the peer in grandeur and content of Paul's "hymn of love" in 1 Corinthians 13. A. T. Robertson says somewhere that "Paul's chapter is a perfect prose poem, while John's is like a diamond turned round and round for different angles of light to flash upon it."

This comparison of our passage to a diamond turned round and round to the light applies to all of John's thought, and it indicates the unique charm of this Apostolic writer. But it also hints at the greater difficulty facing the reader of John than, say, the reader of Paul. John's mode of thinking and expression stands in sharpest contrast to most of the writing of Paul, with his logical progression of thought. John's sentences and paragraphs at first look like a miscellaneous collection of perfect aphorisms or like so many polished jewels lying in a confused heap. Only closer study shows that there is order and progression also in his thought. This progression, however, is *spiral* in nature, like an ascending progression of ever-widening circles. I am reminded of the coils of the mainspring of my first short-lived Ingersoll watch which with boyish fascination I would draw out into conical form. That's like John's style. The development of his theme often brings us back almost to the starting point; almost, but not quite, for there is a slight shift which provides a transition and advance to a fresh theme or a new consideration of one already treated, but viewed from a different angle.

John's language is simplicity itself, and the range of his vocabulary is meager. But his thought is profundity itself. *Volat avis sine meta*. We poor fledglings hesitate to follow the soaring eagle in his lofty flight. But this revelation is here for us to use. Let each take as much as he can. Tomorrow he shall return and find still more.

The passage which we propose to examine may be summarized in a single sentence: *Love is the mark of the children of God, who is Love*, or, using John's own words: "*We love because He loved us first*" (v. 19).

Any outline of John's Epistle, both as a whole and in its parts, is more or less artificial. We may, however, risk a division of our passage in three sections: 1. *The Ground of Love* (vv. 7-10);

2. *The Unity of Love and Belief* (vv. 11-16); 3. *The Activity of Love* (vv. 17-21).

The treatment of the different phases of this passage will be somewhat unequal, stress being laid on those points which seem to bear most directly upon the theme heading this paper.

I

THE GROUND OF LOVE (Vv. 7-10)

"Beloved, let us constantly be loving one another; for Love is of God, and he who loves has been born of God and gets to know God. He who does not love didn't ever get to know God, for God is Love. In this was manifested among us the Love of God, that His Son, the Only-Begotten, God has commissioned into the world that we might find life through Him. In this is Love, not that we have come to love God, but that He loved us and commissioned His Son as the Propitiation for our sins" (a literal translation).

Eighteen hundred years before A. Harnack delivered his lectures entitled *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*What is Christianity?*), the Apostle John wrote his First Letter on precisely that theme, with an answer to the question that differs *toto coelo* from the answer of the Berlin savant. John states the essence of Christianity in two theses, one doctrinal and one ethical. On its doctrinal side, Christianity is the belief in the reality of the incarnation of the Son of God for the purpose of effecting the atonement for the sins of the world. On its ethical side, Christianity is a life of love in response to God's redeeming love. The doctrinal and the ethical go hand in hand. True belief results in love and therefore finds its test in love; and, again, there is no true love (*agape*) apart from true belief. All are agreed that John's reiteration of this Christological and this ethical thesis is a veiled polemic against the Gnostic heresy of his days, which, on the one hand, denied a genuine Incarnation while making pretension to union with God through an esoteric knowledge (*gnosis*), open only to the initiate, and through associated mystical experiences; a heresy which, on the other hand, was thoroughly antinomian in character. The superior "Gnostic" felt himself at liberty to flout the precepts of the Moral Law, these being binding only on the ignorant and the inferior. The Gnostic spirit was selfish and loveless to the core. Paul's words in 2 Tim.

3:2, 3 fit the Gnostics as they are described by early writers: "lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers," etc. Ignatius says: "They give no heed to love, caring not for the widow, the orphan, or the afflicted, neither for those in bonds nor for those released from bonds, neither for the hungry nor the thirsty" (*Ad Smyrnam* 6, 2). We are reminded of what Stanley Jones tells about the kindred spirit in the modern "Gnostics" of India. Once when an epidemic swept his district, and people, suddenly smitten by it, kept pitching forward on the road, and few would lend a hand to aid them, he ran with relief to two "saints" brooding in meditation by the wayside and cried, "Come! Come! People are dying for lack of a little help." In hurt and offended dignity they answered: "We are holy men. We do not help anyone."

Let us do far otherwise, says John in his *Das Wesen des Christentums*: ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστίν. The very exhortation of John is an act of the *agape* which is of God. John has never ceased reclining at the breast of *Agape* Incarnate, and to his dying breath he invites his beloved children to join him at this Fountain of love and life and joy.

"Let us be constantly loving one another; for love is of God" — not in the sense in which "every good and perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father" (James 1:17), but in the sense that "love is an expression of the very nature of God and, if we have it, it flows from Him and that in such a way that its connection with the source remains unbroken" (Westcott, *The Epistles of John*, p. 147). The love which John inculcates is not ordinary human love: not *eros*, the love of desire, not *storge*, the love of family affection, not *philia*, the sharing love of friendship, not *philanthropia*, a sentimental humanitarianism — all of which may be nourished from contaminated sources. *Agape* is grounded in God Himself, and where it is found in man, it is a sign of regeneration. "Love is of God, and everyone who loves [who practices *agape*] has been born of God and remains His child [for so we may express the exact force of the perfect γεγέννηται] and, by the practice of love, gets to know God more and more [γινώσκει, a progressive present]." Conversely (v. 8): "He who does not love

didn't ever get to know God [οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν θεόν], for God is Love." To be a stranger to *agape* is to be a stranger to God. The reason for this fact is that God is *Agape*. Only the child of God, who is begotten of God and in love "partakes of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), is a true "Gnostic" who really knows God.

Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν. Note the absence of the article with ἀγάπη. The terms, therefore, are not convertible (cf. Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 768). It is not: *Love* is God; but *God* is Love. The first would be idolatry. The second is the sum of revealed theology. As Augustine says: "If nothing were said in praise of love throughout the pages of this Epistle, if nothing whatever throughout the other pages of Scripture, and this one thing only were all we were told by the voice of the Spirit of God, 'for God is Love,' nothing more ought we to require." God *is* love. Love isn't simply a quality that He possesses, but love embraces all that He *is*. I cannot resist quoting Luther's comment: "What more can one add to this? If one talks at length to the effect that love is a high and noble quality of the soul and the most precious and perfect virtue, as we find it stated in the disquisitions of philosophers — that is as nothing compared with what John pours forth from his lips as he says: 'God Himself is Love, His essence is nothing but pure love.' Hence, if we should desire to paint a picture or carve an image to represent God, it would have to be a picture of pure love, to bring out the fact that the divine nature is, as it were, a furnace aglow with love that fills heaven and earth. Again, if one could paint a picture or carve a representation of love, true love, it would have to be a representation not of man and his working, nor even of angels and heaven, but a representation of God Himself. Behold, thus John depicts God that he makes of God and love one thing. His aim with this entrancing and artistic picture is to inspire and entice us to strive after true love toward one another." (St. Louis Edition, IX:1682 f.)

If, then, God is Love, who can *know* God except one who loves? Like is discerned by like. A theologian may spout forth much that is true about God, but if he lacks love, in spite of all his knowledge about God, he doesn't know God. This knowledge involves practical sympathy and results in increasing assimilation to its Divine Object (cf. 2:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

John's great statement "God is Love" is not the conclusion of metaphysical speculation, nor does it rise from an unambiguous reading of God's nature in His created works or in His providence; it is based on a special act of God in the sphere of human history. Vv. 9, 10: "In this was manifested among us the love of God, that His Son, the Only-Begotten, God has commissioned into the world that we might find life through Him. In this is love, not that we have come to love God, but that He loved us and commissioned His Son as the Propitiation for our sins." The Love which "*was*" eternally was *made known* in time — in the Incarnation. Indeed, the entire *Heilsgeschichte* reveals this love, but it bursts into fullest bloom in the coming of Him who is the only-begotten Son. Here is the supreme audio-visual education (see 1:1-3; 4:14) on the nature of God and the essence of His love. As John writes of this love, he reaches his sublimest height. Vv. 9 and 10 are gold pure and unadorned, enshrining the very heart of Christianity. Already in the previous chapter (3:16) the golden trumpet has announced this theme: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He [Christ] laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (cf. 2:2). In the present verses this theme is carried out in words that are the summit of all revelation. Every syllable is charged with meaning. V. 9 *emphasizes the fact* that God is Love and *exhibits the proof of it*; v. 10 lays stress on the *nature of love itself*, so manifested, viz., as being absolutely spontaneous and self-determined. We may take both verses together and see five factors that contribute to the full conception of Divine *Agape*. In this analysis we follow the lead of Robert Law in his brilliant study of the theology of John's First Epistle, *The Tests of Life*, a book that can hardly be recommended too highly to the student of John, the substance of which is reproduced in Law's two articles in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* ("Johannine Theology" and "John, the First Epistle").

First, *the magnitude of God's Gift of Love* is set forth: τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, "His Son, the Only-Begotten." The essence of the manifestation of God's love "among us" (taking ἐν ἡμῖν with the verb ἐφανερώθη, in the sense of "among us human beings," matching the εἰς τὸν κόσμον in the next clause, although it could be connected, in several meanings, with ἀγάπη) is the fact, not that

God has commissioned Jesus, but that Jesus the Commissioned One is God's Son, aye, the Son Only-Begotten. The Church has correctly seen in μονογενής, as applied to God's Son, deep metaphysical meaning. The special emphasis, however, in this connection is to show the surpassing value of God's Gift. To use F. Buechsel's words (in his *Die Johannesbriefe*, 1933): "It designates Jesus as the One who stands in a fellowship with God which is absolutely unique, who possesses all the glory of God and therefore has for God incomparable value." All other gifts of God to man are *tokens* of His love. When He gives Jesus, He gives us His *all*. When God spared not His own, only Son, He laid His own bleeding heart on Love's altar. That Gift is ours today (ἀπέσταλκεν, "He has commissioned," should be taken as a true perfect, emphasizing that the blessings of this commission are not transient but permanent).

Secondly, the magnitude of the love is exhibited in the *Person of the Giver*. It was a Father who commissioned His only Son, and that Father was God. In the Incarnation and its issue all the wealth of God was poured out.

Thirdly, the love of God is manifested in the *purpose* of this commissioning of His Son. The purpose is: "ἵνα ζήσωμεν δι' αὐτοῦ, "that we might find life [or come to life] through Him" (ζήσωμεν is an ingressive aorist). Apart from Him we belong to the "world" (κόσμος), are members of a race alienated from God, the Source of true life, and therefore we are dead while we live, facing an appalling doom of deathless death. Salvation from that doom and "a *metabasis* from death to life" (3:14), not merely in the future, but already here and now: that is the purpose of Love's commission.

Fourthly, the love of God is manifested in the *means* by which such purpose is achieved. "He loved us and commissioned His Son as the Propitiation for our sins" (ἀπέστειλεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἱλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, v. 10 b). God, the absolutely Holy One, cannot treat sin as if it were no sin. His holy wrath must be placated. The offensive thing must be removed. But God, whose righteous wrath because of sin must be placated, is eminently placable. Yes, such is the love of God that He Himself provided the ἱλασμὸς, the covering for sin, the expiatory Sacrifice. "He of His own free will [such is the force of the emphatic αὐτός] loved

us and commissioned His Son as a ἱλασμός for *our* sins," and, as John states earlier, "not only for ours, but for *the whole world*" (2:2). *Quam late patet peccatum tam late propitiatio* (Bengel). Christian orthodoxy does not say with Liberalism: "God is Love. Why atone?" It says with John: "God hath atoned. What Love!" Robert Law has this striking remark: "Almighty God, in the person of His Son, humbles Himself and suffers unto blood for the sins of His creatures. Such is the love of God to man; and what can be said of it, except that it is at once *incredible* that the fact should be so, and *impossible* that it should be otherwise? It is what never did, never could, flit within the horizon of man's most daring dream; it is that which, when it is revealed, shines with self-evidencing light. It needs no argument. Apologetic is superfluous. Such love is divine. The Being whose nature this is, is God."

Finally, the nature of divine love is exhibited in the statement of its *object*. Its object is the world of sinners whom God commissioned His incarnate Son to redeem. To this fact add what is said in v. 10: "In this is love, *not that we have come to love God* [reading ἠγαπήκαμεν, with Codex B, instead of ἠγαπήσαμεν, with *sigma* in place of *kappa*, very likely a later assimilation to the following aorists], *but that God loved us.*" Usually this is understood to mean: "In this is love, that *although* we did *not* love God, God loved us." True though this is of us before *Agape* found us and won our hearts (Rom. 5:6-10), the words here don't say that. What is said is, *not* that we did not love God, but that the true nature of love is revealed, *not* in *our* love to God, but in *God's* love to us. John occupies the ground of the regenerate Christian. Christians *have come to love God*. But the mystery of *Agape* is not revealed in our love to God. This love has its sufficient explanation in grateful response to God's giving. The mystery of love is revealed in this, that God has loved us who were, and still are, so unworthy of His love. God's love is wholly *self-created* and *self-determined*. The world has never been without "love." It has known love like that of Jacob for Rachel, like that of David and Jonathan, the devotion of the patriots and the martyrs. But this human love always is a flame that must be kindled and fed by some quality in its object. It is, in the first place, a *passive emotion*, evoked by some external attraction. But God's love is an ever-

springing fountain. Its fires are self-enkindled. It is love that shows its true character by being lavished upon the unattractive, the unworthy, the repellent, and the rebellious. Yes, "in this is love [in its purest essence and its highest potency], not that we have come to love God, but [in this] that He loved us."

Putting these five factors together, the greatness of Love's Gift, the greatness of the Giver, the greatness of His purpose in giving, the greatness of the propitiation which achieved the purpose, and ourselves, the un-great, the absolutely undeserving recipients of all, we arrive at John's conception of the love of God. "In this entirely spontaneous, self-determined devotion of God to sinful men, the divine passion to rescue them from sin, the supreme evil, and to bestow on them the supreme good, Eternal Life: in this, which is evoked by their need, not by their worthiness, which goes to the uttermost length of sacrifice, and bears the uttermost burden of their self-inflicted doom—in this, which is forever revealed in the mission of Jesus Christ, God's Only-Begotten Son—in this) is Love" (R. Law). Here, indeed, is a secure, immutable refuge for souls that are lost. "Alles Ding waehrt seine Zeit, Gottes Lieb' in Ewigkeit." God's love does not depend upon any merit or even any response in its object, though it were devilish not to respond with love. Our goodness did not call it forth, and neither can our badness make it cease.

*Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.*

The sun is not extinguished if we hide in a dark cellar at midday. We may shut God from our hearts. But no man can by any means shut himself out from the great heart of God. God is Love.

II

The next section is quite complex and difficult to analyze. For want of a better caption we give it this heading:

THE UNITY OF LOVE AND BELIEF (Vv. 11-16)

Once more we give a literal translation: "*Beloved, if so God did love us, we also are bound to love one another. God—no one has ever yet beheld Him; if we practice love to one another, God*

abides in us, and His love is consummated in us. In this we get to know that we abide in Him and He in us, that of His Spirit He has given us. And we have beheld, and we bear witness that the Father has commissioned His Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have come to know and to believe the love which God has [ἐν ἡμῖν, "resting on," hence] toward us. God is Love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."

This passage cannot be understood fully apart from John's polemical aim. The Gnostics laid claim to a fellowship with God that practically amounted to deification, and this, not through the *katabasis* of Divine *Agape*, but through the *anabasis* of superior *gnosis*. Here is a sample of this *gnosis* as quoted by C. H. Dodd (*The Johannine Epistles*, p. 30) from the *Corpus Hermeticum*: "Not yet are we able to open the eyes of the mind and to behold the beauty, the imperishable, inconceivable beauty of the Good. For you will see it when you cannot say anything about it. For the knowledge of it is divine silence and annihilation of all senses. . . . Irradiating the whole mind, it shines upon the soul and draws it up from the body and changes it all into divine essence." Though this passage was written later than John, such ideas must have been current in his days, and they are still current in modern theosophical systems. You will grant without envy that such *gnosis* is beyond your reach.

With bold strokes John, the anti-Gnostic, drives home the truth that there is indeed the possibility of union with God, a union which is not *absorption* into God's being, but a *fellowship* of the personal God with us human persons. This fellowship is potentially established in the propitiation achieved by *Agape* and is actualized through *knowledge* of, and *belief* in, the love which God has manifested in Christ (v. 16 a). John indicates three tests of the reality of such union: love toward the brethren (vv. 11, 12), the gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 13), and faith in the Incarnation (vv. 14, 15). It must be noted that love and faith go together, like Siamese twins: if you have the one, you have the other; or better, like a mother and daughter who are inseparable. Faith in the love that God has toward us — because it is faith in love — necessarily begets *love*

in the children of God. Faith is the channel by which God's love takes its abode in the heart and activates love in those in whom it resides. We understand, therefore, how the Apostle can say in vv. 15 and 16, first, that "God abides in him and he in God" who confesses Jesus as God's Son"; then that "he abides in God, and God in him," who "abides in love." Hence, too, the remarkable conjunction of faith and love in the one "commandment" of 3:23: "And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, even as He gave us commandment."

We now want to look a little closer at vv. 11 and 12, which resume the initial exhortation of v. 7, on the basis of the reminder of the ineffable love of God manifested in the Incarnation and Atonement: "Beloved, if so [that is, both *in such manner* and to *such high degree*] God did love us, we also are bound [by sheer moral necessity] to love." Love begets love. But we must notice the surprising statement with regard to the object of our love. John does not say, as we expect: "We are bound to love *God*"; he says: "We are bound to love *one another*." This is at once explained in v. 12: "God — no man has ever beheld Him; if we practice love toward one another, God abides in us, and His love is consummated in us."

God is invisible, "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. 6:16). We cannot directly do Him any good. We can make no sacrifice for His immediate benefit. He who "giveth to all life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25) has no need of our help. We cannot give to Him, but can only receive from Him. We cannot, in short, love God after the same fashion in which He has loved us. Some theologians seem inclined to rule out an immediate love to God. They abstract a definition of *agape* from God's love to us, correctly defining His *agape* as *uncaused* and *spontaneous*. But then they ask, "How could *our love to God* possibly be uncaused and spontaneous?" Some go so far as cavalierly to criticize John for making God the immediate Object of man's love. He certainly does that (cf. 4:10 a; 5:3). And so does Paul (cf. Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 2:9; 8:3). God Himself has commanded us to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our might (Deut. 6:5). But now this love

to God, in the very nature of the case, can be only that we let God be God; that as humble, contrite beggars we let God fill our hands; that we praise His holy name; and that we obey His will, even as John says in the next chapter (5:3): "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." But though we cannot love God in the same way in which He has loved us, yet if we are "begotten of God," we have in us the same nature of Love that He has manifested toward us in Christ. This is the precise point made from verse 7 on. And ample provision has been made by which this nature may be manifested and exercised in us. "Beloved, let us practice love toward *one another*" (v. 7). "Beloved, if God so did love us, we also are bound to love *one another*" (v. 11).

Children partake of the nature of the father. God's children partake of His *agape* nature. God's children will love not merely the lovable, but will actively seek to help men irrespective of their merit or demerit, their attractiveness or their ugliness, will seek to lead them to the God of love, will bear the other's burden, dry the other's tears, forgive injuries, overcome evil with good, help those in need of help and hope for nothing in return; will, if needs be, like Christ, lay down life itself for the brethren (3:16). "But whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (3:17.) "Beloved, let us practice love to one another," knowing this (v. 12): "God — no one has ever beheld Him. If we love one another, God [the Unseen] has His home in our heart [ἐν ἡμῖν μένει] , and His love is consummated in us [ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ τετελειωμένη ἐν ἡμῖν ἐστιν]."

There has been much discussion about the nature of the genitive in ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ (v. 12). Is it (and I think it is) the subjective genitive: *God's love to us*? Is it the objective genitive: *our love to God*? Is it the ablative genitive: the love which is *from God* or is *bestowed by God*? A plausible case may be made for any of the three. One may also argue that no distinction is to be made, that all three are meant. As Paul says (Rom. 5:5), "God's love to us is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Ghost, who has been given to us," so the *Agape*-God Himself through the Spirit dwells in our hearts, working through us and at the same time inspiring true human *agape* acts in us. I say "true *human agape*"

acts"; for does it not come close to pantheism to make God the exclusive *Subject* of our activity in love? That was the position of the Scholastic Peter of Lombard. Peter has had many successors to this day (see Viktor Warnach's recent study on *Agape*, Duesseldorf, 1951, p. 201). Is it the fear of the stigma of synergism that leads them to this position, or is it a basic pantheism, an idea of God like Hegel's God, who becomes conscious of Himself in man? However, in this debate on the nature of this particular genitive, we feel that the whole tenor of the passage suggests that it is a *subjective* genitive. "If we love one another, *God* has His home in our heart, and *His Agape* is consummated in us." The A. V. renders, "His Love is perfected in us." Accepting this rendering and understanding "perfected" in the usual meaning of "made perfect," some interpreters insist that the αὐτοῦ must be an objective genitive. So, for example, Plummer in his useful commentary on the Epistles of John says: "'His love to us' can hardly be meant: in what sense would our loving one another perfect that? . . . *Our love to God* is developed and perfected by our loving *one another*. We practice and strengthen our love of the Unseen by showing love to the seen." However, if we accept the genitive as subjective and understand John to be speaking of God's love to us, we need not interpret it like Plummer as suggesting that God's love is imperfect until made perfect by our love to the brethren, taking "perfect" in its ordinary meaning. The idea here is not that of *qualitative* perfection, but of *effective* perfection. Therefore we have rendered the word "consummated." Better still would be to translate: "His love *has reached its goal*." Compare the following passages for this force of the verb: 2 Cor. 12:9 and Luke 13:32. That is τετελειωμένον which has reached its τέλος, which has run its full course. So the τέλος of God's love toward us is attained in our loving one another. The seed has its τέλος in the fruit. So the love of God has its fulfillment in reproducing itself in the character and conduct of His children. We may think of a triangle whose points are God, self, and the brother. *Agape* proceeds from God to us, from us to our brother, and through our brother back to God. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (Matt. 25:40). Love's circuit is thus complete.

III

THE ACTIVITY OF LOVE (Vv. 19-21)

The activity of *agape* is here presented in its working upon those who respond to it — first, as it operates *negatively* by casting out fear (vv. 17, 18), then as it works *positively* by fostering love in man to man (vv. 19, 21). The first part will be only translated. The two verses require a separate study, best undertaken by gathering together the entire teaching of the Epistle on the subject of assurance (παρρησία). The last three verses need but little discussion, since they in typical Johannine fashion re-emphasize truths already stated.

Vv. 17, 18: "In this 'agape' has reached its goal in our case [on this meaning of μετά see the passages cited in Preuschen-Bauer, 2d ed., 800], that [not final, but definitive ἵνα] we possess boldness with respect to [on this use of ἐν see *ibid.*, 405] the Day of Judgment; for as He [the Christ] is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in 'agape,' but the perfect 'agape' casts out fear; because fear has [within itself] punishment, but he that fears has not been made perfect in 'agape.'"

The connection between this passage on fearless confidence toward God and the closing verses of the chapter has been well stated by C. H. Dodd (*op. cit.*, p. 123): "The grounds of confidence on [translated above "with respect to"] Judgment Day have been so stated that they might seem to place too great a burden on the conscience of the diffident Christian, who asks himself, 'But do I love God enough to put fear aside?' To correct any such impression the writer repeats what he said in v. 10. The love of which he speaks is essentially the love of God for us, and our love is only *derivative!* 'We love because He loved us first.' . . . Thus, in facing the expectation of judgment to come, we find our real ground of assurance *not in our love for God, but in His love for us* — in the sending of His Son to be the expiation for our sins (v. 10); though it would be paradoxical if, being so persuaded of His love, we did not return it in a love for Him which excludes fear."

"As for us," says John in v. 19, "we love because He loved us first." The ἀγαπῶμεν we take as indicative in contrast to ὁ φοβούμενος in v. 19, and we follow the best texts in taking the indicative absolutely without any expressed object. If we have *Agape*, it has

its source in God, and it will in its own way copy God's *agape*. We learn from Him to love with heart and mind, with soul and strength, to pour ourselves out in affection and service upon others. With the old servile fear of God cast out from the heart (v. 18), the old pride and self-seeking, too, must go. The initiative lies in the atoning love of God. There our *agape* begins.

*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior True,
No, I was found of Thee.
I find, I walk, I love; but, oh, the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee;
For Thou wast long aforehand with my soul,
Always Thou lovest me.*

From this primal source a fresh stream of life and love flows into our shrunken veins; and if they threaten to shrink again, we must return to the living Spring.

In the great indicatives aorist and perfect for the historical manifestation of God's love in its abiding meaning for us lies the indicative present of our love, ἀγαπῶμεν. And that is our new life in Christ. The indicative of Christian dogmatics becomes the imperative and hortatory subjunctive of Christian ethics, bidding and exhorting us to apply the Heaven-bestowed *agape* in all our social relations, particularly in the Christian brotherhood. The social relations are, so to speak, the arteries through which the new life of love shall flow. That John in our Epistle confines our *agape* to the "brethren" is due to his polemic against the arrogant intellectualism of the Gnostics. Lovelessness and separatism lay in the very nature of the system. To counter any such tendencies in the Christian congregations under his Apostolic supervision, John drives home the lesson that "charity begins at home." Here, in the first place, the test must be made of the genuineness of the *agape* which Christians profess. It has often been pointed out that it seems easier to rouse our people to lend their aid and support to outsiders and to distant pagans than to their needy brethren right before their eyes, so that we, too, need John's reminder: "Charity begins at home."

The case has never been put more vigorously than by John in v. 20, which repeats the argument of v. 12 with terrific force: "If anyone says, 'I love God' and hates his brother [and for John not to love means to hate], he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has before his eyes [ἐνώρακεν], he cannot love God, whom he does not have before his eyes."

"I believe in God." Is that true? Then it must meet the test of *agape*. "I love God." Is that true? Then it must meet the test of love to the brother. G. A. Findlay says in his *Fellowship in the Life Eternal* (p. 354): "Orthodoxy without charity, religious zeal barren of human affection, a love to God which leaves a man bitter and cynical or cold and full of selfish calculation toward his brethren, is amongst the most false and baneful things that can exist, amongst the things most blighting to faith and goodness and most hateful in the sight of God. This is the cardinal hypocrisy, the *feigning* of love toward God."

God has ordained our relation to our brother for the very end that he should be the medium through which our love to God, who loved us first, can be realized, and especially if this brother has *not* loved us first. This duty is not left to inference, it comes to us as a solemn injunction (v. 21): "*This commandment we have from Him, that he who loves God should love also his brother.*" (Cf. Matthew 22:36 ff.; John 13:34 f.) To quote Findlay once more: "God forbids us to love Him unless we love our brethren: all narrower love He rejects as spurious and vain."

God's commandments "are not grievous," says the aged John from long years of experience, a few verses further on (5:3). Nay, not grievous! For with God's own *Agape* that saved us before our soul, nay, flooding our hearts, we receive with the impulse also the power to love.

"Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor" (Eph. 5:1, 2).

St. Louis, Mo.