

Standing before this eucharistic Bridegroom is his ecclesial Bride, the Church. In her the particular vocation to virginity, beyond and before every possible mediation, is the vocation to radiate—as from a sacred monstrance—the “certainty of the (risen) Bridegroom’s presence.” A “certainty” which belongs to the whole Church, but that in the case of virgins becomes the burning sign of a joyous solitude which in its mystery is inscrutable to the eyes of the world. “Certainty of the Father” and “certainty of the Bridegroom” are thus the two certainties to which human love is led by revealed Love as to the bedrock of a foundation. It is from this source that Saint Augustine’s stunning formula springs: “*Gaudium Virginum Christi, de Christo, in Christo, cum Christo, post Christum, propter Christo*” (“The joy of Christ’s virgins, from Christ, in Christ, with Christ, after Christ, on account of Christ”) (*De Sancta Virginitate*, XI, 10).

Consequently, we have finally come to an understanding of the characteristic quality of love that is lived in the virginal experience in general and in consecrated life in particular. And yet at the close of these reflections it must be remembered that there exists only one Love: the Love which the Father has revealed and given to us in the Son, and which with the Son we can reciprocate with the Father, in the communion of their one Spirit and with all of creation.*—*Translated by Andrew Matt.* □

Erōs and *Agapē*: The Divine Passion of Love

Ysabel de Andia

The disciples of Christ crucify their *erōs*, but this crucifixion, far from making *erōs* die, transforms it and awakens it.

The Hebrew word *ahāba* is translated in the Greek Bible with *agapē*¹—a noun practically unknown in the secular language—rather than with the verb *agapaō*, “to welcome with affection,” especially a child or a guest. Here, the idea is one of “tender inclination toward” (which is found again in the Latin *diligere-dilectio*) or one of friendship (the Greek *phileo-philia*²). The word *erōs*,³ “passionate love,” on the other hand, is found only twice in the Septuagint, and never in the New Testament.

Love (*agapē*), in the Septuagint, is love between the bridegroom and the bride of the Song of Songs: the triumphant love of the bridegroom that lays upon the bride the standard of love or that places love (*agapē*) over her as an “emblem” (Song 2:4); the considerate love of the lover who adjoins the young girls three times: “Do not stir up, do not awaken (my) love until the hour of her good pleasure!” (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4); the love of the bride who is “sick with love” (Song 2:5), and who asks her companions to strengthen her with raisin cakes; the love

¹*agapē* (Septuagint): 2 Kgs 1:26; 13:15; Eccl 9:1; 9:6; Song 2:4, 5, 7; 5:8; 7:5; 8:4, 6, 7; Wis 3:9; 6:18; Sir 48:11; Jer 2:2.

²*philia* (Septuagint): employed only in the wisdom books (Proverbs, Wisdom, and Sirach) and in Maccabees (1-4).

³*erōs* (Septuagint): Prov 7:18; 30:16.

which binds them one to the other with a strength more formidable than death, for "love is stern as death, and its jealousy is as relentless as Hades. Deep waters cannot quench love, and floods cannot sweep it away. Were someone to offer all that he possesses in exchange for love, he would certainly be mocked" (Song 8:6-8). Sweetness of love, strength of love, the pure grace of love—it is stronger than death since it demands the gift of life and any lesser gift would either not satisfy it, or would only pervert it.

If the Song of Songs has been acknowledged as an inspired writing, it is certainly because such a love translates into passionate metaphors of human love the love God has for Israel, his beloved, his chosen people. For what characterizes the conception of divine love in the Old Testament is its quality of being unique and absolute, and its relation to election; the revelation of God's oneness, or uniqueness, is made manifest in election, which is always an election of love.

In Deuteronomy, the devouring fire of love, its jealousy, is only the passionate expression of God's uniqueness and the commandment of the uniqueness of love: "Listen Israel! The Lord our God is the One Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your strength" (Dt 6:4). This extends to the prohibition of idols: "You shall not follow other gods, such as those of the peoples surrounding you, since the Lord your God is a jealous God in your midst" (Dt 6:14-15).

The *Shema Israel!* [the prayer of Israel] continues in the following chapter with the affirmation of Israel's election: "It is you whom the Lord your God has chosen to become his own particular people among all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Dt 7:6). If the Lord has "set his heart" on Israel, if he has "chosen" her, it is because he "loves" her (Dt 7:7-8). It is always God who has the initiative: God loved her. . . . It is he who made a covenant with his people in the desert and remains faithful to it even when his people are unfaithful—like Gomer, the adulterous spouse of the prophet Hosea⁴—because the election and the covenant are the divine will.

⁴Cf. "The word of the Lord was addressed to me: 'Go shout out to the ears of Jerusalem: I remind you of your fidelity in the time of your youth, your love (*agapē*) of a new bride; you followed me in the desert in an uncultivated land'" (Hos 2:1).

But love is not only the love between spouses; it is also the love of wisdom who lets herself be found by those who love her: "The beginning of wisdom is the desire (*epithumia*) to be instructed by her; the instruction is love; love means the keeping of her laws. Observing her laws is the assurance of incorruptibility and incorruptibility brings one close to God. Thus the desire for wisdom (*epithumia sophias*) leads one to royalty" (Wis 6:17-20). The desire for wisdom is elevated to a kingly love, through love and the observance of her laws. The Book of Wisdom introduces the theme of *sophia* and of the love (*agapē* and not *philia*) of wisdom.

There is still another Greek term for love, *agapēsis*, that translates equally the love of wisdom: "Wine and music delight the heart, but better than either, the love of wisdom (*agapēsis sophias*)" (Sir 40:20)—⁵ but it can also be used for the love of women. In his lamentation over the death of Jonathan in the Second Book of Kings 1:26 (the Septuagint),⁶ David proclaims: "I have nothing but sorrow for you, Jonathan, my brother! I loved you dearly! Your friendship was for me a marvel more beautiful than the love of women!"

As for the term *erōs*, it appears only twice in the Septuagint, in Proverbs, and is used to designate erotic desire: "Come," says the adulterous woman to the young man she wishes to seduce, "let us feast ourselves in pleasure until morning. Let us delight together in love (*erōtē*)" (Prov 7:18); and later: "Three things are insatiable, four never say 'enough!': Hades, feminine *erōs*, the earth never saturated with water, and the fire that never says 'enough!'" (Prov 30:16).

The New Testament never uses the term *erōs*, and the synoptic tradition, which presents Jesus as the beloved Son (Gr. *agapētos*) of the Father, in the theophanies of the baptism and the transfiguration, does not speak of God's love for men, but of his mercy. Matthew's Gospel takes up the phrase from the prophet Hosea in which God says, "It is mercy (*eleos*) that I desire and not sacrifices" (Mt 9:13; Hos 6:6). Jesus reveals God's love by his words and actions, by the whole of his being; he repeats the commandment to love God above all things and to love one's neighbor as one's own flesh, for no one can hate

⁵It is the Septuagint that speaks of the love of wisdom, in those places where the Hebrew Bible spoke of love between spouses or friendship among friends. ⁶2 Kings 1:26 (Septuagint) = 2 Sm 1:26

his own flesh (Lv 19:18), but he goes beyond the Jewish tradition by commanding love for one's enemies (Mt 5:43; Lk 6:27, 32, 35).

God is Love (Agapē)

It is St. John who places God's love (*agapē*) at the center of his message by proclaiming that "God is love (*agapē*)" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). And within the Johannine *agapē* resounds the nuptial love between spouses, the love of wisdom and the kingly love, and in the beginning, God's creative love that "loves all that exists" (Wis 11:24).

According to John's Gospel, love (*agapē*) stands at the beginning, at the heart, and at the completion of the history of salvation which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

In the beginning, there is the act of love of the Father who "loved the Son before the creation of the world" (Jn 17:24, 26) and "who loved man so much that he sent his only Son" (Jn 3:16). At the end, there is the love of Jesus who gives his life for his friends: "Having loved his own, he loved them to the end" or "to the extreme" (Jn 13:1). Love is original and eschatological. The revelation of love is the revelation of the Trinity in the gift of Christ.

Jesus lives in the awareness of the Father's love: "The Father loved me" (Jn 15:9; 17:23-26), welcoming and abandoning himself to his love: "and I remain in his love" (Jn 15:10-13). Jesus cannot love the Father without loving those that the Father "gave" him (Jn 6:37; 10:29). "I love the Father" (Jn 14:31), and "I have loved you" (Jn 13:34; 15:9 and 12); these two loves are the same love. "As the Father loved me, so I have loved you" (Jn 15:9), and "You have loved them as you have loved me" (Jn 17:23): within this "as" lies the whole relation between the love between the Father and the Son and the love that the Father and the Son bear toward those who love Jesus.

Here, again, man's love for Jesus has its roots in the Father: it is he who attracts all to Jesus, it is he who brings one to confess Jesus. "No one can come to me," Jesus tells Peter, "unless it is granted him by the Father" (Jn 6:65). As Schlier puts it, "It is the love of God in the love of Jesus that awakens this love for Jesus."⁷ And the reason for the love of the Father is the love

for Jesus: "The Father himself loves you because you love me and because you believe that I have come from God" (Jn 16:27).

Faith in and love for Jesus here lie in the recognition of Jesus' divine origin, of his being the Son, and in the recognition of the paternity of the Father. And it is this faith in the Son that makes us sons in the Son, *filii in Filio*. Faith in, and love for, Jesus are the condition for, as well as the recognition of, our filial adoption by the Father: "If God was your Father," Jesus tells the Jews, "you would love me because I came from the Father and am here" (Jn 8:42); or of rebirth in God: "He who loves God is born of God. He who does not love God is not born of God, because God is love" (1 Jn 4:8 and 16).

The Sign of the Love of God Is Love for Our Brothers.

Love is a commandment, the new commandment, Jesus' commandment: "Here is my commandment, love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12; 13:34; 14:15, 21); and it is recognizable by a sign: "This is how we shall henceforward know love: he, Jesus, gave his life for us; we, too, must give our life for our brothers" (1 Jn 3:16). Jesus does not ask his disciples only to love one another as he loved them, but to love themselves with that very love with which he loved them: "Remain in my love" (Jn 15:9). As Jesus remains in the love of the Father, his disciples remain in his love, and it is Jesus' love—and the love of the Father in him—that becomes the unique source of the love they bear toward one another.

Love has its source in the Father and communicates itself through the Son to those whom Jesus loves and who love him, uniting them in the very love in which they remain: such is the conception of Johannine *agapē*.

As for the term *erōs*, as has been mentioned, it is never used in the New Testament. This is why A. Nygren, in his famous book *Erōs and Agapē*, sets the two terms in opposition to each other, saying that they are incompatible: *erōs* is a human passion, *agapē*, a divine love; *erōs*, pagan, *agapē*, biblical; *erōs* is

⁷H. Schlier, "Croire, connaître, aimer," 138. On love in the New Testament, see: C. Spicq, *Agapē dans le Nouveau Testament* III, in the *Études bibliques*

collection (Paris, 1959); D. Mollat, *Saint Jean, maître spirituel* (Paris, 1976), ch. 5; Aimer, 121-30; A. Feuillet, *Le Mystère de l'amour divin dans la théologie johannique*, in the *Études bibliques* collection (Paris, 1972).

contemplated in Platonic philosophy, *agapē* lies at the heart of Christian theology.

Ought we to set *erōs* and *agapē* in opposition to each other, like Nygren,⁸ or ought we rather to identify the two like Origen in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, and say that there is a divine *erōs*? And should we not speak of a divine passion of love, the passion of the crucified Christ?

But, first, what is this Platonic *erōs* that is often set in opposition to Christian *agapē*?

I. Love and Beauty

A. Platonic *Eros*⁹

A glance at a beautiful thing suffices to give birth to *erōs*, like an *élan* of the soul toward it, a desire to possess it.

Desire is simultaneously the admission of a lack that can be satisfied only by the possession of that which is missing to desire—hence the myth, in Plato's *Symposium*, of the birth of *erōs* from *Poros* and *Pénia*, resource and poverty—and the discovery that this desire is greater than the object that caused its birth—hence the dialectical ascent that carries the lover from the love of beautiful bodies to the love of beautiful spirits, and then from the love of beautiful spirits to the love of Beauty in itself and through itself. The lover-philosopher who detaches himself from the love of sensible things in order to arrive at the love of beautiful forms turns his eyes toward the vast ocean of the Beautiful and, all through this contemplation, gives birth to beautiful and noble speeches in an inexhaustible aspiration toward wisdom (*Sym.*, 210d). Strengthened by such contemplations, he ends with the perception of a certain science: the science of Beauty itself. Coming to the end of the amorous initiation, he suddenly catches a glimpse of an admirable beauty: it is Beauty itself, in itself and through itself, in the unity and eternity of its

form. Such is the *scala amoris* that Diotima leads Socrates to climb (cf. *Sym.*, 201a-212c).

Next to this beauty, no other beauty any longer has value, especially corporeal beauty. The man to whom it is given to contemplate with a pure eye the Beautiful itself in its purity, and who can become one with it, will no longer live a miserable life, but will be the friend of the gods and will be close to immortality (*Sym.*, 210d-212a). This man is a philosopher, and Socrates is the authentic lover (*erōtikos*).

The quest for the nature of love, the desire for the possession of beautiful things and the desire for the generation, in beauty, of beautiful children or beautiful speeches, leads us to see the kinship between *erōs* and the philosopher: *erōs*, like the philosopher, has an intermediary nature that lies between the gods and mortals, possession and poverty, and knowledge and ignorance.

The *Phaedrus* takes up the dialectical ascent of love with the myth of the soul—the winged team piloted by the intellect (*nous*)—which, in its celestial voyage, rises toward the higher regions. Love is no longer defined primarily by its intermediary nature, but by its driving force. *Eros* is an *élan* of the soul; it “gives the soul wings” to carry it toward the heavens. Conversely, the loss of wings entails the soul's fall to the lower regions. In the Greek there is a play on words here, between *erōs*, love, and *pteros*, wing. Love causes the soul to abandon its earthly condition in order to soar beyond bodies and beyond the world. The soul discovers that it is the source of this movement, and the fact of being the principle of its own movement, of being “auto-motive” (*autokinētos*), is proof of the soul's immortality: if nothing can stop its movement from the outside, and so cause its death, the soul is immortal. Here, immortality is no longer linked with generation, but rather with the soul's “auto-motive” character. Desire or love, as the soul's *élan* that carries it toward the heavens—that is, beyond the body and beyond the cosmos—, discovers that it is immortal in itself.

The Source of Eros Is Beauty, and Its End Is Immortality.

This *élan* of love may also be a “rapture,” an ecstasy or a folly. Love is a madness (*mania*), akin to prophetic madness, poetic inspiration, or delirium (*Pliae.*, 244a).

Now, is the *erōs* that is in our Western world filled with platonic overtones, foreign to Christian *agapē*? Or again, have not platonic strains entered into Christianity's own reflections on

⁸A. Nygren, *Eros et Agapē* (Paris, 1944). It is not a question here of mounting a critique of Nygren's book, whose thesis, setting *eros* in opposition to *agapē*, has been sufficiently refuted, but rather of taking up this theme once again within a limited framework.

⁹On love in the work of Plato, see L. Robin, *La théorie platonicienne de l'amour* (Paris, 1933); P. Hadot, *Le Traité 50 des *Ennéades** (Paris, 1992).

divine love? Do we not find this love for the "late-loved" Beauty in St. Augustine's *Confessions*? Is there not here the same desire to love, not that which fades, but that which remains, the Eternal?

B. *Christian Love*

When St. Augustine, in the tenth book of the *Confessions*, asks himself what it is to love God, his questioning first bears on "that" which he loves when he loves God:

But what is it I love when I love thee? It is not the beauty of a body, nor the charm of the seasons; it is not the brightness of the light that rejoices my earth-bound eyes, nor the sweet melodies of all songs; it is not the sweet fragrance of flowers, perfumes, or spices, nor manna or honey; nor is it the limbs of welcoming fleshly embraces: none of these are what I love when I love my God.

And yet, I love a certain light and a certain voice, a certain fragrance, a certain food, and a certain embrace when I love my God: the light, voice, fragrance, food, and embrace of my inner man, when that light shines in my soul which no space can contain, that voice resounds which greedy time cannot take, when I breathe that fragrance which no wind scatters, I eat that food which hunger does not lessen, I lie in that embrace which satiety does not slacken. These are what I love when I love my God (10, 6, 8).

What Augustine first meets are the senses through which the love of corporeal things manifests itself. Now, the detachment from sensible things and the pleasures of the senses are immediately accompanied by the acknowledgment of an analogy existing between the sensible qualities and those qualities of divine love, perceived through the spiritual senses. Even more, these qualities will acquire, when they are applied to God, that which was missing to them: song will not fade with time, fragrance will not be scattered with the wind, and the amorous embrace will not slacken with satiety. *The body is denied only in order to become the language of the spirit.*

Augustine then questions the sky and the earth and all living things, asking them if they are God:

I asked the earth and it said, "It is not me." And all that was in it replied the same. I asked the depths of the sea and all the creeping things. They replied, "We are not your God; seek above us." . . . And I said to all those things surrounding the gates of the flesh: "Tell me about my God, since you are not he; tell me something about him." They cried out with a powerful voice, "It is he himself who made us." My question was my attention; and their response, their beauty (*interrogatio mea intentio mea et responsio eorum species eorum*) (10, 6, 9).

Beauty is here the response of the creatures who make known their Creator. What is necessary is not only that they be sur-

passed in order to find God; rather, they say something about God and, far from being merely an obstacle in the search for God, they augment the desire to know God in himself.

This same quest for the Creator through his creatures returns in the commentaries on the Song of Songs in which the beloved "seeks for him whom she loves and does not find him" (Song 3:1). And, scarcely has she "surpassed" the city's watchmen, when she "finds him whom her heart loves" (Song 3:4). Finally Augustine turns to himself and says "I am man." "But neither is he God. "What is it, then, that I love when I love my God?" Augustine asks again, "What is this being that lies beyond the topmost point of my soul? By that same soul, I will ascend to him. I will surpass my vital strength . . ." "With each surpassing, he mounts beyond himself and re-enters into himself; here begins the exploration of the human soul, sensory impressions, the imagination, ideas, and the vast palaces of the memory so as to find God, who dwells in all things even as he transcends all things. The succeeding degrees of the ascent to God are here the powers of the soul and the soul itself, beyond the soul and within the soul—for spacial metaphors are as inadequate as those of time: there is no place, "Where then did I find you to learn of you, if not in yourself, above myself? There is nowhere, there is no place; we go away, we come near, and there is nowhere, there is no place" (10, 26, 37). God is not in a place, just as incorporeal things are not in a place, as Porphyry already said in his *Sentences* (1 and 2). Book 10 of the *Confessions* thus concludes with a prayer to divine Beauty:

Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved you! And behold! you were within me and I was outside; I sought you outside, and in my disgrace I fell upon the grace of those things that you made! You were with me and I was not with you; these things held me far from you, and yet they would not exist if they did not exist in you!

You called, you cried out and you broke open my deafness; you were resplendent and shone forth and scattered my blindness; you breathed forth fragrance, I inhaled it, and I panted for you; I tasted, and now I hunger and thirst for you; you touched me, and I burned for your peace (10, 26, 38).

Augustine distinguishes two paths, the path of exteriority and the path of interiority: the first is a path of distraction; the second, the path upon which God is with him even when he is not with God, but lost among those things that are not God.

The initiative for conversion comes back again to God, whose activity is spoken of in terms of the senses: he cries

out, he shines forth, he breathes forth fragrance, he gives to taste, and he touches—and his voice, his light, his fragrance, his taste, and his touch reach Augustine's spiritual senses.

Here is a difference with Neoplatonism: *divine love expresses itself in the language of the body, for it is no longer a matter of the carnal body*—and the commentators on the Song of Songs take care to forewarn those who would read it in a carnal rather than spiritual manner—but of spiritual senses. The transposition from the sensible to the spiritual is not a simple poetic metaphor, as some heedlessly affirm it to be, but an interior spiritual experience, the experience of the transfiguration of the body by the Spirit, founded on the faith in the resurrection of the body which will be transformed into a body of glory.

Of course, we discover these same metaphors in Plotinus's *Enneads*, or in Proclus, to express the union of the soul with the Good, especially the metaphor of light,—however, in Christianity, the use of the language of love is founded on the Incarnation of the Word and his Resurrection. God has assumed flesh, and it is the holy humanity of Christ, the divine Person, that forms the object of love. From the perspective of this faith in the Incarnation and the Resurrection, a new reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in particular the Song of Songs, becomes possible: such is Origen's approach. Not only do the spiritual senses open themselves up, but a new meaning of Scripture opens up as well: we now have an allegorical reading of the love of the bridegroom and bride in the Song of Songs.

II. Love and Passion

A. Erōs and Agapē in the Commentaries on the Song of Songs by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa

1) *Divine agapē*. In the Prologue to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Origen questions himself about the difference in meaning between the words love (*erōs*), which is used for carnal love, and *caritas* or *dilectio* (*agapē*), which designates primarily spiritual love. This distinction is not a rigid one; nevertheless, *agapē* receives the dignity of defining the divine essence in Johannine theology:

In several passages, divine Scripture turns away from the word for love (*amor*) in order to use those for charity (*caritas*) and tenderness (*dilectio*).¹⁰

¹⁰On Jerome's use of the term *amor* to translate Origen, see H. Pétré, *Caritas. Étude sur le vocabulaire latin de la charité chrétienne* (Louvain, 1948), especially

Nevertheless at times, though they are rare, Scripture names love with its proper word, it invites and exhorts souls to love, as when it says of wisdom in the Proverbs, "Love her passionately, and she will preserve you; embrace her, and she will raise you up; honor her in order that she kiss you." Moreover, in the little book called the *Wisdom of Solomon*, it is written on the subject of Wisdom herself: "I have become a passionate lover of her beauty . . ."

But it is also quite clear, in this little book we find between our hands, that the name of love is replaced with the word charity in this passage (*amoris nomen caritatis vocabulo permittantur est*): "I assure you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, announce to him that I am wounded with charity," clearly instead of saying: "I have been struck by the arrow of his love (*amoris eius telo percussa sum*).

It is without importance that, in the holy Scriptures, we say love, or charity, or tenderness (*utrum amor dicatur an caritas an dilectio*), if it is not that the name of charity is of such an elevation that even God himself is called charity, as John says: *My beloved brothers, let us love one another, for charity is God, and whoever loves is born of God and knows God. But he who does not love does not know God, for God is charity.* (22, 24, 25)

"God is love"—Christ too is charity; it is even, with Origen, one of Christ's denominations (*epinoia*). He is also called *amor* or *erōs*. The essential subject of the Song of Songs, according to Origen, is the love of the Bridegroom, Christ, and of his Bride, the Church, who desires to be fruitful through him.

This is the beauty of the Word, manifesting itself through the beauty of creatures, which arouses love in the one he loves; but Origen's originality with respect to the Neoplatonic philosophers is his uniting the mystical theme of the arrow or the wound of love—following Isaiah 49:2 (Septuagint), "He made of me a sharp arrow, and concealed me in his quiver"—with Song 2:5: "I have been wounded by charity." The Father is the Archer, the Son, the arrow; and through the wound that he inflicts on the soul, the Son is present in her and elicits her desire.

2) *Erōs*: the passion of love or the excess of charity. Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, explains why *erōs* translates better than *agapē* the excess of love:

Human nature cannot express this surplus (that is divine love). Thus has it taken as a symbol, in order to make us understand its teaching, what

85-90; and T. Bolelli, "Caritas. Storia di una parola," *Rivista di Filologia e di Insegnamento classica* (1950): 116-41.

there is that is most violent in the passions that act upon us—I am talking about the passion of love (*erōtikōn pathos*)—so that we come to understand through it that the soul that has its eyes fixed upon the inaccessible Beauty of the divine nature is in love (*eran*) with it, so much so that the body inclines toward that which is connatural (*suggenes*) to it, changing passion to impossibility such that every carnal disposition thus embraced, our soul burns amorously (*erōtikōs*) in us with the sole flame of the Spirit (*Oratio* 1, 773b-c).¹¹

The choice of the term *erōs* to express divine love presupposes the inadequacy of human language to express that which surpasses human nature, so that the symbolic character of the term chosen expresses the excess itself as violence. But just as there exists a connaturality between carnal erotic passion and the body desired, so does there exist a connaturality between *erōs* and the inaccessible Beauty of the divine nature that it loves, the Beauty having given this *erōs* its impassible character.

Desire for divine Beauty is at once violent and impassible, burning with the single flame of the Spirit. The metaphors of the burning fire or of the arrow that wounds the soul in its depths have been repeated throughout all mystical literature, from the great Alexandrine or the Bishop of Nyssa to Carmel. "Catching sight of the inexpressible beauty of the Spouse, the soul is wounded with the incorporeal and burning arrow of love (*tou erōtos*). In effect, we call *erōs* the excess of charity" (*Oratio* 13, 1048c).¹² The term *erōs*, far from being opposed to charity, expresses the intensity of charity, which burns like passion.

3) Carnal love and spiritual love. Origen, like Gregory of Nyssa, does not establish an opposition between *erōs* and *agapē*, but rather between spiritual love and carnal love. The erotic language of the Song of Songs which is used to translate the nuptial love of God will escape the one who does not love God with a spiritual love. In his *First Homily on the Song of Songs* Origen writes:

He who knows how to listen to the Scriptures spiritually—or at least who desires to learn—must thus strain all of his powers not to live according to the flesh and blood; that he may become worthy of spiritual secrets and to make use of a more audacious expression, that he may burn with spiritual passion, with spiritual love, for there also exists a spiritual love. . . .

No one can be possessed by two loves. If you love the flesh you will not understand the love of the spirit (1, 2).

The fundamental opposition is that between the two loves, the love of God and the love of self, spiritual love and carnal love. Only the spiritual man, whose love is a spiritual and not a carnal love, can understand the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures. Only the soul who "is in communion, like the Bride, with the feelings of the Bridegroom," can grasp the Bride's feelings, can say: "May he kiss me with kisses of his mouth" (Song 1:2) and can rest, like St. John, "upon the bosom of the Bridegroom" (Song 1:10).

The application of nuptial love to the ecclesial soul—"O you, Spouse, o you, ecclesial soul"¹³—calls for another reading of the text of the Song, namely a topological or moral reading required by the commandment of divine love which must be loved above all things. An order exists in love: love of God, love of neighbor, and, finally, love of one's enemies. "Love God too; love him not like flesh and blood but like spirit: *He who adheres to the Lord is one spirit with him* (1 Cor 6:17). Charity is so ordered in those who are perfect."¹⁴

Thus, not only is love spiritual, but he who loves God becomes but one spirit with him: the *unus spiritus* from 1 Corinthians 6:17 will become the very expression of union with God in the Cistercian mysticism of St. Bernard and William of Saint-Thierry, commentators on the Song of Songs.

In his *Second Homily on the Song of Songs*, Origen again takes up the theme of the soul's two loves according to their objects: God or that which is not him:

One of the soul's movements is love. We make use of the soul in order to love, when we love wisdom and truth; but when our love lowers itself to things less good, it is the flesh and blood that we love. Thus, you who are spiritual, listen spiritually to the singing of these words of love, and learn to rise toward that which is better, as well with the movement of your soul as with the burning of your natural love, according to this teaching: "Love her (Wisdom) and she will preserve you; embrace her and she will exalt you" (Prv 4:6) (2, 1).

The Platonic or Neoplatonic idea of love as the soul's movement toward the higher region (the Good) or toward the lower region (evil or matter) is here applied to the love of Wisdom or the love

¹¹Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum Canticoorum*, ed. H. Langerbeck, in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera VI* (= GNO), *Hom. Cant. I*, 6-13.

¹²Gregory Nyssa, *Hom. Cant. XIII* (GNO, VI), 383, 6-9.

¹³Origen, *Homily 1*, 10.

¹⁴Origen, *Homily 2*, 18.

of carnal things. But if God or Wisdom must be the unique object of spiritual love, the love that bears itself toward her can carry along natural love, raising it up with the spiritual love and bringing the two into union.

A whole conception of asceticism is at play here: it is not only a matter of removing bad passions, but of spiritualizing the passionate movement of love by ordering it to God. It is thus Wisdom who will *preserve* the soul and will *exalt* it in this movement toward the higher region.

Gregory of Nyssa takes up Origen's notion about the utilization of natural passion in divine love in his *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, with respect to the same citation from Proverbs (4:6-8) concerning Wisdom:

"Love her passionately, and she will preserve you; forsake her not and she will raise you up, honor her so that she embrace you"; because it is Wisdom who tells you this, love (*agapēson*) as much as you are able, with all your heart, with all your strength, desire as much as you can. But I will audaciously add these words: *Love passionately (erasthēti)*, for passion is blameless and impassible when it applies to incorporeal beings. (1, 7-10)

Divine love is an impassible passion: everything that has to do with the divine, like the luminous Night, is spoken of in oxymorons or paradoxical expressions.

B. *Divine Erōs* (theios erōs) in the Divine Names of *Denys the Areopagite*

We again find this citation from Proverbs in the passage of *Divine Names*¹⁵ in which Denys the Areopagite justifies, against those who adhere to words without considering their meaning, his choice of the term *erōs* to signify divine love:

And may one not go thinking that by setting the denomination *erōs* in a place of honor, we contradict the *Oracles*?¹⁶ Indeed, it is absurd and crass in my opinion not to pay attention to the meaning of that which is intended, but to the words. And this characterizes not those who wish to have knowledge of divine things, but those who receive sounds in their crude state, keeping them in the exterior without allowing them to penetrate deeper than the ear, and refusing to understand what such a word signifies. . . .

¹⁵Denys the Areopagite, *The Divine Names* 4, 11-12, 708c-709c.

¹⁶*Oracles* (*logia* in Greek) denotes the words of Holy Scripture.

But in order that, by speaking thus, we not seem to disturb the divine *Oracles*, may they listen, those who criticize the denomination *erōs*: "Be you amorous of her," they say, "and she will preserve you, surround her with a fence and she will raise you up, honor her so that she embrace you" (Prov 4:6-8), and all the other passages in which God is celebrated with the language of love.

But Denys does not content himself with the words of holy Scripture; he likewise cites Ignatius of Antioch, which shows that he has read Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*:

So, well has it seemed to certain of our sacred writers¹⁷ that the word *erōs* was more divine than the word *agapē*.¹⁸ Thus the divine Ignatius also writes: "My love has been crucified."¹⁹ And in the preliminary writings of the divine *Oracles*, you will find someone who says, on the subject of divine Wisdom, "I have become amorous of her beauty" (Wis 8:22). Thus, do not fear this name *erōs* and let no discourse trouble us by causing us to fear in this regard. It seems to me that the theologians judge the names *erōs* and *agapē* to be synonyms, yet they have instead attributed authentic love to divine things because of the displaced prejudice of such men.

In effect, when, in a manner suitable to God, authentic love is celebrated not only by us, but again by the *Oracles* themselves; when the multitude does not understand the character, true to the One, of the denomination *erōs* given to God, it allows itself to go, in conformity with its nature, toward *partial love*, appropriate to the body and divided. This love is not the *true love*, but an idol or rather a degeneration of authentic love. For the oneness²⁰ of divine and unique love is, for the multitude, incomprehensible. That is why a name which appears rather awkward for the majority is applied to divine Wisdom, in order to elevate them and make them strain toward the knowledge of authentic love, in such a way that they become liberated from any awkwardness in this regard.

For us, on the other hand, here where down-to-earth people would run a strong risk of thinking something unsuitable, it is an apparently more reserved expression to say: *His 'dilection' swept over me like the 'dilection' of women*.²¹ With respect to those who uprightly hear divine things, the word

¹⁷It is necessary to distinguish sacred writers (*hierologoi*). Like Ignatius of Antioch, from "theologians" (*theologoi*), that is, the authors of the books of Scripture, like the author of the Book of Wisdom.

¹⁸On the distinction between "erōs" and "agapē" see: J.M. Rist, "A note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius," *Vig. Christ.* 20 (1966): 235-43.

¹⁹Ignatius of Antioch, *Rom.* 7, 2. Cf. Gal 5:24; 6:14; and Origen, *Cant.* 71, 25.
²⁰The character, true to the One (*Divine Names* [= DN] 709b), of the denomination "erōs" corresponds to "the oneness of the divine and unique love" (DN, 709c) and to its "unifying power" (DN, 709d).

²¹2 Sm 1:26: "Your love is more wonderful than the love of women." This passage is speaking of Jonathan's friendship for David. The term used here is *agapēs*.

agapē and the word *erōs* are applied to the same power by the holy theologians when it is a matter of divine manifestations.

Denys makes a distinction between “partial love,” which adheres to the body alone, and “the true love,” which is one. Now, it is love’s character of oneness that the multitude does not comprehend. Denys is here defending, of course, the demands of the unique love expressed in Deuteronomy 6:4; however, his understanding is colored by the Neoplatonic concept of the One.

Origen and Gregory attributed the term *erōs* to God’s love; Denys takes a step further by setting forward a Neoplatonic analysis of *erōs* in the *Divine Names*. Not only does Denys adopt the pagan vocabulary of love adopted here, but he also introduces the Neoplatonic understanding of *erōs* into Christian theology.

1) *Erōs* is cyclical.

Let us dare to say again, in all truth: He himself who is the cause of all things by the superabundance of goodness loves all things, makes all things, perfects all things, maintains all things, and converts all things. And he is also the divine, good Love from the Good, because of the Good.²² For he himself, the Love that is beneficent towards those beings that pre-exist in a superabundant fashion in the Good, has not permitted his Love to remain sterile in himself, but has set it in motion in order that it act according to the superabundance of his universal fecundity. (DN 4, 10, 708b)

Love is the power of generation in the bosom of the Good. Plotinus does not say that the power that moves the Good to come out of himself is love, but he says that every being that attains its perfection generates and that it is the nature of the Good to be “self-diffusive” itself or to communicate itself.

The ultimate audacity of Denys is to show that the “divine love” is interior to the Good. It is not only the Good that is the object of aspiration (*epitheton*), love (*eraston*) and dilection (*agapeton*), and it is not only because of the Good that all beings are loving of each other; we must go so far as to say that the Cause of everything is “the divine, good Love” (*ho theios erōs agathos*). It is *erōs* that sets the Good in motion and moves it to generate.

²²Cf. DN, 708b2. This affirmation from the *Divine Names* could come from *Enn.* 6, 7 [38], 23: “If one desires to live and continuously to be and to act, it is not at all because what one desires is intellect, but because it is Good and comes from the Good and goes toward the Good.”

Later, Denys speaks of a “circle of love, which proceeds from the Good and returns to the Good” in the great movement of procession-conversion that characterizes Neoplatonic thought:

In this the divine Love (*ho theios erōs*) shows itself, in a singular fashion, without end or beginning, as a perpetual circle which, because of the Good, from the Good, in the Good and toward the Good,²³ travels an impeccable orbit; and in the same and according to the same, it does not cease to proceed from, to remain in, and to return to the same point. (DN IV, 14, 712d-713a)

The “circle of love” embraces the whole universe with its loving power.

2) *Erōs* is anagogical. As for Denys, he chose the name *erōs* which translates God’s loving passion, as it is often said, not only because dissimilar symbols better relate the reality that lies beyond the similar and the dissimilar—thus because of negative theology—, but because there is in the violence of *erōs* an irrationality that can be understood, “by the lower,” as bestial passion, or, “by the higher,” as angelic passion, and thus as something beyond the intellect.

Indeed, wishing to show how we can speak of angelic passions as analogous to human or bestial passions, Denys says that—with respect to concupiscence which is “the irrational empire of corporeal desire which precipitates the entire animal toward objects that sensation makes him desire”—when we attribute concupiscence to the angels, “we must understand by this a *divine love of immateriality which is above reason and the spirit*, the stable and constant *desire* for super-essentially pure and impassible contemplation and for truly eternal and intelligible *communion* with the pure and sublime transparency of heaven above, and with the invisible splendor which is the source of beauty.”²⁴

Divine Love of immateriality which is above reason and the spirit, and desire for contemplation and communion are three characteristics of the love of intelligent beings; angelic love possesses the same circular,²⁵ ecstatic,²⁶ and unitive character as human love. There is thus in these angelic essences a love

²³Cf. DN 4, 10, 705c, 12, 709d.

²⁴*Celestial Hierarchies* 2 (= CH), 144a-b.

²⁵Cf. DN 4, 17, 713d; CH 7, 4, 209d; 15, 4, 333a.

²⁶Cf. DN 4, 13, 712a.

beyond reason and human sensation, a love by which they "strive toward heaven, in a tension of divine and indefectible love."²⁷

Love is *amagical*, ordered toward heaven, *circular*, embracing all things, and *converting*, causing all things to return to God.

If love is the force by which the universe returns to God, its source and its end, the beings that are closest to God are those that are most inflamed with his love—like the Seraphim—and, consequently, are those that most carry the universe toward God.

Angels are all the more inflamed with divine love since they are close to divine Beauty, the first circle of Seraphims, Cherubims, and the Thrones forming a dance around God, like Fra Angelico's angels and saints of heaven.

3) *Erōs* is ecstatic. As for the true lover, it is no longer Socrates, but St. Paul, the "truly divine man" (*ho theios aner*) and the "true lover" (*alēthēs erastēs*), and the object of his love is Christ. In the two passages in which Denys speaks of St. Paul, he underscores the supra-rational character of St. Paul's love:

This is why the great Paul, possessed by divine love and having received a participation in its ecstatic power, says with an inspired mouth: "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me," as a true lover "outside of himself", as he says of himself, "for God," no longer living his own life, but that of Him whom he loves, as the dear beloved.²⁸

Ecstasy is at once a standing outside of self of the lover who lives the life of the beloved, as well as a dispossession of self, insofar as the lover no longer possesses himself, but belongs entirely to the beloved. The lover is "outside of self", he "no longer possesses himself"; ecstasy is also a madness or folly.²⁹

²⁷CH 4, 180a.

²⁸DN 4, 13, 712a; cf. Gal 2:20 and 2 Cor 5:13, 15.

²⁹The theme of foolish Love will be taken up in the fourteenth century by Nicholas Cabasilas in his *Life in Christ*: "He who has ever conceived for some beauty a foolish love (*erōta manikōn*), and in the name of this love comes to be wounded by the very one he loves, not only does he bear it, not only does he still preserve his love for the ungrateful one, but he places these wounds above all else" (Nicholas Cabasilas, *Life in Christ*, Bk 6, 16, 1.4, trans. M.-H. Congourdeau [Paris, 1990], 52-53). See also P. Evdokimov, *L'amour fou de Dieu* (Paris, 1973).

This is what this truly divine man, at once the sun of our master and of us, had wonderfully understood when he said, "The folly of God is wiser than men," not only because all human discursive thought is a sort of wandering compared to the permanence of divine and perfect intellects, but also because it is the exercise, when it concerns God, of denying the private expositions by overturning them. It is thus that now again the divine Apostle is said to have celebrated the *Folly of God*, when he elevates in this folly that which appears paradoxical and absurd to the *unsayable Truth, anterior to all reason*.³⁰

Divine *erōs*, according to the Areopagite, a disciple of St. Paul, is an ecstasy or folly.

What we ought to retain is the use of the citation from the Letter to the Galatians, "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (2:20), as a definition of ecstasy. *Dionysian ecstasy is Christological, and therefore, Christian*, contrary to what has constantly been suggested. And if ecstasy is proper to love, then love itself is not absent from the pages of the *Mystical Theology* in which Denys tells us that, following Moses ascending Sinai, we must "come out of all things and ourselves," a phrase which will become the leitmotif of the writings of St. John of the Cross, in order to enter into the "dark night of unknowing."

III. Crucified Love

In attributing *erōs* to God, Origen and Denys the Areopagite claim to draw inspiration from Ignatius of Antioch who, as the first, had the ultimate intuition of crucified *erōs*.

In his *Letter to the Romans* written from Smyrna, Ignatius of Antioch asks them not to oppose his martyrdom: "Allow me to be the fodder of wild beasts: by this it will be possible for me to find God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts to be found a pure loaf for Christ" (1, 1).

Martyrdom has a eucharistic meaning: the body that is surrendered and the blood that is shed is given in communion. It is the perfect *agapē* of the Son for the Father and for men, the perfect *agapē* of men for God and among themselves. In this pure oblation, faith and charity find their fulfillment, for the fulfillment of faith is the vision of God, and fulfillment of charity is martyrdom. In a startling insight, Ignatius relates both faith and charity on one side, and the body and blood of Christ on the other, giving to charity an immediately sacrificial meaning: "Be recreated

³⁰DN 7, 1, 865b; cf. 1 Cor 1:25.

in faith which is the flesh of the Lord and in the *charity which is the blood of Jesus Christ*," he says to the Thallians (8, 1).

As the fulfillment of charity, martyrdom is the fulfillment of the *sequela Christi*: "It is thus," continues Ignatius, "that I will truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world no longer sees my body" (Rom. 4, 2). He thus makes himself a suppliant:

Forgive me, brothers; do not keep me from living, do not wish me to die. Do not give back to the world one who wishes to belong to God, do not seduce him with material things. Let me receive pure light; when I will have arrived, then I will be a man. Allow me to imitate the passion of my God. If someone has God in him, may he understand what it is I desire, and may he have compassion for me, and understand what it is that grips me (Rom. 4, 2-3).

Through martyrdom, Ignatius is going to be born into life, into the pure light; he will be "a man," the "new man" of the Letter to the Ephesians (4:24) and an imitator of the passion of God (*tou pathous tou theou*).³¹ And to explain his request, he adds:

Though I am alive writing to you, I desire death. My earthly desire has been crucified, and I no longer burn with a love for material things; rather, I have in me a living water that murmurs and says within me: "Come to the Father." I no longer take delight in the food of corruption, nor in this life's pleasures; it is the bread of God that I desire, and the flesh of Jesus Christ, from David's line; and to drink, I desire his blood, which is incorruptible love (Rom. 7, 2-3).

Here, the first meaning of *eros* is the carnal love which is a love of earthly life or a "burning love for material things." It is the crucifixion with Christ of which St. Paul speaks in reference to Christians: "Those who are of Christ have *crucified their flesh* with its passions and *its desires*" (Gal 5:24)—or in reference to himself: "The world has been *crucified* to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14). The disciple of Christ crucifies his flesh and its desires. But by the crucifixion of all that is corruptible in him, he has the grace to imitate the crucifixion of him whose love is incorruptible. By the crucifixion of *eros*, he imitates the crucifixion of him who is *agape*.

But we can also understand another meaning of *eros*, and it is thus that Origen and, following him, Denys the Areopagite,³² who both cite this passage from Ignatius of Anti-

³¹Note the first usage in Christian literature of the expression "passion of God" with respect to the passion of Christ.

³²Origen, *Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 3, and Denys the Areopagite, DN 4, 12, 710.

och, have understood it: the crucified *eros* is Jesus. When Ignatius says "my love has been crucified," he is speaking of Jesus. Generally speaking, what does this crucifixion of *eros* mean?

The disciples of Christ crucify their *eros*, but this crucifixion, far from making *eros* die, transforms it and awakens it: the desire of the martyr is an insatiable desire. Although Ignatius no longer experiences a thirst for the things of this world, his desire for incorruptible things increases with force. And this desire passes through death, which is no longer something dreaded, but desired as the condition for obtaining the goods desired.

The disciple of Christ understands that the death and the crucifixion of desire are desirable in order to attain higher goods which are even more desirable. And even more than this, he understands that *his most pure and most true love is his love for the Cross and that the crucifixion of desire is a freedom from desire* which surpasses the limits of space and time in order immediately to fall upon that which has neither limit nor measure. Desire is no longer able to fall upon mortal or corruptible things, but upon immortal or incorruptible things. And death, far from being the limit of the love of lovers who absolutize their love by fixing it in the moment of death, is at once the sign of a greater love and the victory over death.

The desire for death, and for death on a Cross, is based on the certitude of faith in the Resurrection as the triumph over death. It is faith that nails the Christian, body and soul, upon the Cross of Christ, and it is the Cross that gathers together the believers, forming a unity of those who were far and those who were near. As Ignatius tells the Smyrnaeans,

I detected that you were fitted out with an unshakable faith, as if you were nailed flesh and spirit to the Cross of Jesus Christ, and solidly established in charity through the blood of Christ. . . . He was in truth nailed in his flesh for us under Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch—it is because of the fruit of his Cross and of his divinely blessed passion that we exist—in order, through his Resurrection, to *raise a standard* (cf. Is 5:26) through the centuries and to (gather together) his saints and faithful, whether Jews or Gentiles, into the one body of his Church. (1, 1-2)

Once again, *agape* is tied to the blood of Christ; love is sacrificial and eucharistic, and the fruit of the Cross is the eucharistic communion and unity of those who take part in it.

Conclusion: The Path, the Sign, and the Fruits of Love

That love may always be sacrificial is what St. Paul recalls in his Letter to the Ephesians, saying: "Yes, strive to imitate

God, as his beloved children, and follow the path of love (*hodos tēs agapēs*), by the example of Christ whom you have loved and who gave himself up for you, *offering himself to God as a sacrifice of pleasant fragrance* [cf. Ps 40:7]” (Eph 5:1). And later, with respect to nuptial love, he repeats, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church: he gave himself up for her . . . ” (Eph 5:25).

The sign of recognition of love is the gift of self—if a sign is necessary for recognizing love, it is because there are many illusions concerning the nature of love and many lies in the declarations of love. This poses the question of the truth of love. The criterion for discerning true love is the total gift of self, which is nothing else but ecstasy or sacrifice. *The sign of recognition of love is the sign of the Cross, and the fruit of the Cross is communion and unity.*

If the sign of love is the gift of self, the fruits of love are kindness, patience, long-suffering, joy, and peace. Charity is intrinsic to all the virtues as their form and, without it, nothing has any worth, as St. Paul explains in the hymn to charity (1 Cor 13). These fruits of love are the fruits of the Spirit who “has poured charity into our hearts” (Rom 5:5), for it is the Spirit who causes the birth, growth, and blossoming of charity in our hearts; and charity makes the heart expand, for it is in loving that one’s heart expands.

These fruits of the Spirit are the fruits of the love of the Bridegroom and Bride, Christ and the Church or the soul, in the paradisiacal Garden of their love. Everything here becomes the language of love: the Garden with its fruits, the pomegranate and the vine, with its flowers, and the narcissus and the lily of the valley, with its perfumes, spikenard, myrrh, and aloë. And in this symbolic story of spiritual love, whose commentators merely follow the spiritual meaning of the Song of Songs,³³ the lover’s body itself, as well as its parts—the neck, the stomach, the mouth, or the eyes—, symbolize one of the aspects of the love that is unique like the Unique One, unique like the dove. *—
Translated by David Louis Schneider, Jr. □

³³The book by C. Yannaras, *Variations sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (Paris, 1992) represents a modern Orthodox perspective. He insists upon the central character of *eros*: “Metaphysics of the body and flesh of metaphysics, *eros*” (p. 107).

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The Chastity of Jesus

Xavier Tilliette

Christ alone knows what is inside of people and that they do not know what they do.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, who enjoined his disciples to imitate to the extent possible the purity of the angels, was certainly not ignorant of human weaknesses, but he wished to show by this hyperbolic expression that there exists, for us, the possibility of catching a glimpse by analogy of the perfect purity of Christ, which is not substantially different from that of his Mother, conceived without sin. In Christianity, contrary to Kantianism, the model precedes or anticipates the ideal.

But is there any room to mention chastity in speaking about Jesus, whose flesh is wholly sanctified and whose soul is preserved from any shadow of concupiscence and without sin? Of what use would the virtue of chastity be in the perfect immunity of innocence? Wouldn’t it be more worthwhile to search among the saints, especially the holy young men and women, for examples of preserved or heroic purity to inspire and teach us? Perhaps to mitigate this lack of reference to Christ, certain theologians of today would be prepared, in the name of the “human weaknesses” he has assumed, to attribute carnal temptations to Christ, to which he obviously did not succumb, and which we might imagine as extremely attenuated. Motivated by praiseworthy intentions, they assert that sexuality belongs to the human condition and that it manifests itself through desire. Certain passages from the Letter to the Hebrews seem to suggest this: “He has been tempted like us in all things [*kata πάντα*], without sinning” (Heb 4:15); and further, “he was made like his brethren in every respect . . . for because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted” (Heb 2: 17-18).