
Introduction

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T HE RETURN OF EROS IN THE WEST

Without a doubt, love is something very near to us, and yet it remains a mystery. While love is clearly the most appealing of all things, it also reveals our vulnerability, which can turn the rapture of bliss quite quickly into intense sorrow and despair. As Socrates indicates, recalling the words of the Oracle at Delphi in Plato's *Symposium*, love (*eros*) is something wealthy and impoverished, something utterly needy and ultimately rich, and something that fulfills us, while remaining a consuming desire. What could be more simple, more tender and more ambiguous than love?

While the experience of love is often ecstatic, intense and ultimately transcendental, it is also, perhaps, the most common of happenings. Further, love is not only an experience between persons, but also an experience that persons have with other living things such as animals and nature. We can also love music, art, literature, philosophy, poetry, history, and mathematics, for instance, with profound intensity, turning our natural *libido* into a spiritual and deeply interior romance with these disciplines and their histories, texts and ideas. Of course, this is an elite type of love, which inevitably enkindles only a few, especially since this love begins with an intellectual apprehension and knowledge of

the other, which seems endless, and only deepens the affections of the lover. In this case, while the beloved (such as philosophy) is unmoved, it has the capacity to move the lover forever. So, the philosopher, as we know, is a “lover of wisdom” whose involvement with philosophy is always between reason and love, throwing the will into play with the intellect, making the philosopher question even *himself*. To the philosopher, it is not mere ideas that he or she loves, but something *real* in his or her relentless search for being. It might be said that the only thing that could further intensify such an experience of love would be to share it, as a teacher does with a student—that is, a real teacher with a real student, or, perhaps, with another lover of the same discipline, where two scholars can enjoy each other’s company in their common love for wisdom. Nevertheless, such a love—a scholar’s love—is always and inevitably a singular kind of love whose commitment is often unintelligible to most, yet it is this peculiar love, and these lovers in particular, that constitute the hope of their disciplines, preserving them and helping them to endure the neglect of generations and the contempt of a materialistic society.

Another intense, and much overlooked love today, is the love of friendship, termed “*philia*” in ancient Greek. As Aristotle writes in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, true friendship is a rare experience since there are so few good men. True or perfect friendship, for Aristotle, is a state of blessedness, a gift from the gods, reserved for serious men of virtue. Following Socrates’ lead in Plato’s *Symposium*, where the old sage denies the advances of the lovely Alcibiades, Aristotle purifies the *philia* between men, preferring the intellectual bond of their souls instead of one that might also include the love of bodies, which was common in Ancient Greece, as exemplified by the relationship between the great warrior, Achilles, and his lover, Patroclus. In Classical Latin literature, too, we can also cite Cicero’s *De Amicitia*, his captivating treatise in praise of friendship, which describes in great detail the romance and spiritual depth of this profound love between men of virtue. Yet, even this noble love, as unique as it may be, can also turn for the worse, as St. Augustine forlornly warns us, “How often do we mistake a friend for an enemy, and an enemy for a friend.”

So profound is this experience that the Evangelist St. John finds no word more apt to describe God than love (*agape*). Needless to say, in the *Gospel of St. John*, the teaching of Jesus is focused on the two-fold meaning of love: *agape* is the love of God *and* the love of one's neighbor. Jesus himself taught, "What you do for the least among you, you do for me," which reveals the imperative of love in the Christian community in addition to the notion that love of others is a divine act. And, as for terminology, we find that the Johannine *agape* is translated into the Latin "*caritas*" by St. Jerome, which develops and even converts, one might say, the old pagan Roman term into a new Christian one that will reign over all other kinds of love for the entire history of the Church in the West.

Probably because of the Latinization of the Church and its liturgy on the Italian peninsula beginning around the fourth century, the Ancient Greek loves of *eros*, *philia* and *agape* were abandoned in the West in favor of Latin terms like *amor*, *caritas*, *cupiditas*, *amicitia*, etc. But, what of *eros*? What happened to erotic love? In the Augustinian tradition, which has dominated the Latin Church ever since the fifth century, *eros* is essentially confused with lust (*concupiscentia*) and doomed in its association with the biblical fall of Adam and Eve; and therefore, conceived as evil desire. Aside from mention in some of the Greek tradition of the Church, such as Origen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius and the Medieval mystics, in the West *eros* becomes associated more with paganism until a brief revival in Florence during the Italian Renaissance, with figures like Marsilio Ficino, commenting on Plato's great dialogue on love. In point of fact, however, the experience of *eros* has never left us. One can easily see it in the monastic ideal throughout the Middle Ages; and of course, in the scholar's love that moved Scholasticism into being. Nevertheless, the term *eros* was lost in Western discussion in favor of the Latin and seemingly more noble and grace-filled *caritas*, something perhaps akin to what happened to philosophy in its subjugation to theology during the centuries between Albertus Magnus and someone like the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner. Ironically, it appears that *eros* has been rehabilitated by none other than a pope—Benedict XVI, in fact, has restored the ecclesiastical credibility of

Greek *eros* in his first Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*.¹ In this work, in his apparent desire to reconcile the disparity between the Greek and Latin traditions, the pontiff argues that God is *eros* as much as *caritas*.² Thus, *eros* returns to the West not only as a divine love, but as God Himself.

EROS, AMBIGUITY AND CHRISTIANITY

Now any classical scholar would affirm that the term *eros* is certainly an equivocal term, which can be used for divine love, friendship and sexual love. The ambiguity of *eros* is certainly intriguing, which makes this ancient term particularly appealing in a postmodern context. Thus, our retrieval of *eros*—and particularly within theology—is definitely controversial. It was Anders Nygren, in his well-known work, *Agape and Eros: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love*, who in 1932, had argued that *eros* was essentially a pagan love.³ More recently, the Dominican theologian Fergus Kerr has also argued that (platonic) eroticism “has had fateful effects in the development of Christian spirituality and asceticism.”⁴ Without doubt, the restoration of *eros* reveals one of the central tensions in the Western Mind—that is, the convergence of Jewish and Greek thought that appears in the New Testament Gospels, the Letters of St. Paul and in theological themes and concepts further developed by the great Augustine of Hippo. Further, since the term “*eros*” is not used explicitly by the evangelists to describe God or divine love, some scholars may well argue that the restoration of this term might return us to a pre-Christian context. As such, in ancient Greek, pagan literature and philosophy, *eros* can describe everything from the sacred to the profane, from the love of wine to the divine, heterosexual, homosexual or bi-sexual love. In fact, the term could also be viewed as an attempt to return to the pagan orgiastic. Thus, the use of *eros* in Western discourse remains ambiguous; and therefore, an intriguing problem for Christianity, especially with regard to the Augustinian tradition and its fundamental dichotomy of love: with *caritas*, on the one hand, and *concupiscentia*, on the other. Thus, the question remains: can the Western mind ever reconcile these two ancient loves, Greek *eros* and Latin *caritas*?

EASTERN (BYZANTINE) EROS

There is no doubt, however, that our recent retrieval of the term *eros* has been imported to the West from the East—that is, as we have already seen, from the ancient Greek tradition. Yet, this time, with Benedict XVI's retrieval of *eros*, we must focus primarily on the early Greek Christian heritage and its place within Byzantine Christianity. Here, we find in Christian orthodoxy and in Greek Christianity in general a greater openness and appreciation for the term *eros* simply because it belongs to this cultural and linguistic heritage. Whereas, in the Western Latin tradition, *eros* experiences a definite fall from grace, so to speak, translating it almost exclusively with terms like *libido*, *concupiscentia*, and even *perversio* without any mention of its more divine, elusive and mysterious origins. Aside from philosophical and artistic attempts during the Italian Renaissance to rehabilitate it, *eros* has almost always been confused with sensual sin in the Western Church. Perhaps, *eros* was simply too erotic for the West and especially for our beloved Augustine, who struggled so much with it in his own spiritual journey? And, without *eros*, the West has long contended that our loves seem to be more pure and more neatly divided up into intelligible parts, good love and bad love. Unfortunately, this division in love may also neglect to capture the existential connection between our own human longings and our divine aspirations for a love greater than ourselves, which leads us to question whether our own capacity for love, even when it is fallen, can be converted to something better? Or, is it rather that our love is simply doomed for failure, for pride and perversity, and we require a higher love and divine assistance to turn our fallen love away from ourselves and to the other? But, the ancient Greek philosophers would certainly reply, "What love could be higher than *eros*?" And, so, we must now question again if these loves are, indeed, so completely different, belonging to two different worlds and arising from two fundamentally different desires and aspirations, as Augustine powerfully describes by his use of the two cities—the city of God and the city of man? But, is there any connection between these two cities and these two

loves? Where would *eros* be in this Augustinian schema of love? Is it simply condemned to the perverse love of the city of man? Or, can it somehow be conceived as a bridge between these two worlds and their two loves, as Benedict seems to suggest? Again, Greek *eros* is equivocal; and therefore, it is an ambiguous experience. It can be everyday love and it certainly has the potential for divine love, as Plato, Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa will affirm. Nevertheless, terms have histories and they belong to their own cultural, philosophical and historical contexts so when we employ a Greek term like *eros* within the Western (i.e. Latin) tradition we are inevitably left with ambiguity. And, since we cannot change history, this current retrieval of *eros* points us toward the future and a new direction for philosophical speculation requiring a new synthesis of Greek thought and Christianity, which we already see bearing fruit within Catholic moral theology and also in the recent development of the theology of the body and specifically with regard to the contemporary theology of marriage and conjugal love and its newfound appreciation for pleasure. Needless to say, however, this development is a departure from the ancient apostolic and patristic tradition that associated pleasure with paganism. Yet, in this new synthesis, we find that the sensual pleasure associated with conjugal love belongs to that *eros* that connects us, and specifically the married couple, to God, who is love itself. However, Augustine along with many of the Fathers of the Church would certainly question whether this pleasure is a fruit from above or below despite its noble association? Thus, our retrieval of *eros* provides us with a new kind of methodology whereby in our turning back to the Greek term, we may also be retrieving some of the ancient Hebrew assumptions about love and marriage. Again, we find ourselves surrounded by ambiguity since the Hebrew idea of conjugal love is, to a great extent, abandoned by the Apostle St. Paul, who greatly inspires the Christian patristic tradition.

So, in the end, the question of *eros* appears to be a problem for the West *again*, and Western philosophers and theologians will have to continue to wrestle with it. And, despite modern attempts to import *eros* into Western discourse by philosophy, psychoanalysis, art, music and literature, *eros* remains very Eastern and

exotic to us in the West. *Eros* is attractive *and* elusive. It opens up old wounds and ancient controversies, and it throws us face to face with our fundamental assumptions and provokes us to question the mysterious realm of love in all of its ambiguity. Ultimately, it seems, any attempt to define *eros* inevitably leads us to the experience of mysticism, which has also been a great problem for the West in its insatiable desire to grasp all things with the *mind*. Nevertheless, in a word, *eros* leaves us breathless and speechless in our desire to love, and fully content with the experience of beauty in our pursuit of the truth.

REVISITING ANCIENT EROS AND ITS LITERARY AND MYTHOLOGICAL GENEALOGY

EROS AND THANATOS

"Agnosco veteris vestigia flammae" – "I recognize the vestiges of an old flame." These words uttered by Aeneas to Dido upon their initial encounter, reveal the powerful, primeval force of *eros* and its connection with *libido*. Aeneas senses, or rather recognizes the unquestionable, all-consuming power of love which leaves an indelible imprint on the human soul and which is intrinsically intertwined with sexual attraction. The reference to flame is, of course, of special significance; it is both a reminder of a past consuming erotic encounter as well as a foreshadowing of Dido's ultimate demise through immolation. Thus, *eros* and *thanatos* are often inextricably linked together forming a special dimension to human love and sexuality.

This relationship between love and death and its ultimate consummation in fire is found in many literary works. In his mystical period, Goethe set it a lasting monument in his poetry, especially in the two ballads, written partially in praise of the old pagan religion and as a condemnation of excessive Christian asceticism: *"Die Braut von Korinth"* and *"Der Gott und die Bajadere,"* in which the flames bring about the end of life, the promise of ultimate salvation and, in the latter, divinity. The ubiquitous *Liebestod* motif popularized by Wagner in his operas, is another example of the

love-death connection, which, *mutatis mutandis*, in a more vulgar version, is found in the French expression for orgasm: “*le petit mort*.” But perhaps the most poignant poetic capturing of the love-death relationship and its intrinsic connection to beauty has been achieved by Goethe’s epigone, August Count von Platen-Hallermünde (1796-1835). Von Platen was an ardent admirer of the Greeks, especially of Pindar, and a lover of classical literature, whose own poetic oeuvre is characterized by remarkable lucidity, restraint and harmony. His poem “Tristan” (1825), of which we offer here the first stanza in the original as well as in a rather prosaic translation, is a good example of semiotic encoding in the *eros-thanatos* relationship:

Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen
Ist dem Tode schon anheimgegeben,
Wird für keinen Dienst auf Erden taugen,
Und doch wird er vor dem Tode beben,
Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen!
He who beheld Beauty with his eyes
Is already doomed to death.
No longer will he be of any use on this earth,
And yet he will tremble in the face of death,
He who beheld Beauty with his eyes!

EROS AND ECSTASY

Of course, not all manifestations of love in European letters have this deathlike Dionysian nature as first expostulated by Friedrich Nietzsche. Sometimes the Apollonian view, initially conceived by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) in his dictum that underlying all of Greek art is “a noble simplicity and a quiet grandeur,” takes the upper hand. The Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929) in his brief yet incomparably powerful poem “*Die Beiden*” (“The Two”), offered here in a plain prose translation taken from *The Penguin Book of German Verse* (first published in 1957), is an excellent example of this Apollonian attribute of *eros*:

She carried the cup in her hand – her chin and mouth were like its
rim –

Her gait was so light and assured, not a drop spilled out of the cup.
 His hand was equally light and firm; he rode on a young horse,
 And with a careless movement he made it stand still, quivering.
 But when he was to take the light cup from her hand,
 it was too heavy for both of them; for both trembled so much that
 no hand
 found the other hand, and dark wine flowed on the ground.

Another example of the Apollonian nature of *eros* is found in Boris Pasternak's Nobel prize winning novel *Dr. Zhivago* (1957). Here *eros* enables the two lovers, Zhivago and Lara, to escape, albeit momentarily, the sufferings and ravages of war which is destroying their world. In a typically romantic manner (and *eros*, lest we forget, finds in Romanticism its most popular expression), the two lovers experience fleeting moments of peace and tranquility. They become a part of the cosmos, a link in the great chain of being, which makes them impervious to the violence and ugliness surrounding them. *Eros*, in its Apollonian incarnation, is not simply unbridled passion that robs people of tranquility driving them to destruction; rather it is the source of beauty and salvation:

They loved each other, not driven by necessity, by the 'blaze of passion' often falsely ascribed to love. They loved each other because everything around them willed it, the trees and the clouds and the sky over their heads and the earth at their feet. Perhaps their surrounding world, the strangers they met in the street, the wide expanses they saw on their walks, the rooms in which they lived or met, took more delight in their love than they themselves did. Ah, that was just what had united them and had made them so akin! Never, never even in their moments of richest and wildest happiness, were they unaware of a sublime joy in the total design of the universe, a feeling that they themselves were a part of that whole, an element in the beauty of the cosmos.⁵

Eros becomes a powerful antidote to the evils of ideological depravity that attempt to restructure the world. Love is the inner sanctum of lovers, a fortress in which they become unassailable: "Their love was great. Most people experience love without becoming aware of the extraordinary nature of this emotion. But to them – and this made them exceptional – the moments when passion visited their doomed human existence like a breath of eter-

nity were moments of revelation, of continually new discoveries about themselves and life.”⁶

This power of *eros* to change the individual and his world is also fittingly captured by Mario Puzo in his bestseller *The Godfather* when Michael Corleone first encounters Apollonia:

he found himself standing, his heart pounding in his chest; he felt a little dizzy. The blood was surging through his body, through all its extremities and pounding against the tips of his fingers, the tips of his toes. All the perfumes of the island came rushing in on the wind, orange, lemon blossoms, grapes, flowers. It seemed as if his body had sprung away from him out of himself.⁷

Eros often strikes like a thunderbolt (a word used by the Puzo himself in describing this event, p. 334) and its effects are life-changing and ever-lasting. Indeed, the two quoted passages, taken from authors from two different worlds, demonstrate this power of *eros* not only to change human beings, but also to change their perception of their surroundings, indeed to change the nature surrounding them and the world in which they live.

SOME ANCIENT TALES OF *EROS*

While these selected passages provide us with revealing glimpses into the power of *eros*, its beguiling ambiguity and its ubiquity in literature, they offer little information on its genesis and origins. And indeed, the origins of *eros* are shrouded in mystery. Born of Chaos, *Eros* in his primal and primeval incarnation is the Greek god of love. He is not mentioned in Homer, but Hesiod refers to him as the fairest of divine entities whose allure is irresistible to both gods and humans. According to Hesiod, *Eros* is not merely a god who evokes deep passion and unbridled sexual frenzy, but a primordial force, which forms and reforms the world by uniting its disparate inner elements. There are also a number of other tales in later Greek lore which present him as a son of Aphrodite by Ares or Hermes, the youngest among the gods, willful, capricious and often cruel. However, perhaps the best known story about him appears in “*Eros and Psyche*” found in Apuleius’ book *Metamorphoses*, which dates to the second century.

Briefly told, this story begins with *Psyche*, the youngest of three daughters of a royal couple. Her beauty is such that people believe her to be an incarnation of Aphrodite. However, her beauty is also a curse; it inhibits suitors from asking for her hand in marriage and invokes the wrath of the gods upon her. Her father consults the oracle of Apollo and is told that she must be placed on a mountaintop as a sacrifice to a horrifying monster-serpent. She is saved from this terrible fate by a gentle wind that carries her to safety. Walking in the woods she finds a magnificent, magic palace. A voice tells her that she is to be married. A magic wedding feast is held, and her bridegroom, *Eros*, whom she cannot see but only feel, visits her after midnight. Following a passionate night, he leaves her before sunrise. *Psyche* lives in the castle enjoying the moments of love but longing for human companionship. Her husband continues his nocturnal visits but never reveals himself to her. She begs him to allow her to see her sisters. He relents but orders her never to tell them anything about him, informing her that she is pregnant and that their child will be a god if she keeps their secret. She enjoys the subsequent visit of her sisters, tells them of her happiness and gives them precious gifts but, in responding to their prying, tells them contradictory stories about her husband. They become suspicious and envious suspecting that she has never seen him and that he may be a god. On their third visit they convince her that, as predicted by the oracle, her husband is a monster who will devour her and her child. The following night, *Psyche* does look at her husband when he is asleep and is overwhelmed by his beauty. She suffers terrible pangs of remorse and attempts unsuccessfully to kill herself. *Eros* awakens and tries to fly away. She clings to him; they soar into the sky but eventually his strength ebbs and they come down to earth. *Eros* informs *Psyche* that he has disobeyed Aphrodite's command by marrying her instead of making her fall in love with an unworthy mortal man. He tells her that he will leave her and punish her sisters for what they have done. *Psyche* is terribly distraught, she attempts suicide but is saved by Pan, who urges her to live and to try to regain *Eros*' love. She tricks her sisters into believing that they have a chance of marrying *Eros*, and both sisters die in their respective attempts to get to his magical palace.

Psyche continues her search for *Eros*, but is captured and brought before Aphrodite who, having found out about her liaison with *Eros*, wants to punish her. She orders *Psyche* to perform four impossible tasks that would defy the strength of Hercules. With the help of her own ingenuity and that of some kindly natural forces, as well as Zeus, who is beholden to *Eros*, *Psyche* is able to pass Aphrodite's first three tests. The fourth and most demanding task sends her to Hades to get some of Persephone's beauty salve. Once again, *Psyche* is ready to commit suicide. She mounts the tower from which she intends to leap to her death. But the friendly tower instructs her how to enter the underworld safely and get the box containing the precious ointments. The tower also warns her not to look into the box. *Psyche* follows the instructions and manages to get the required item. However, once again, overcome by curiosity, she opens it and, as a result, falls into a deadly sleep. This time *Eros* himself comes to her rescue by awakening her from the lethal slumber.

The story has a happy ending. Zeus allows the wedding of *Eros* and *Psyche* to take place. Aphrodite grudgingly approves of the match, and *Psyche* by marrying *Eros* becomes a goddess. The result of their union is a daughter called *Voluptas*.

There are numerous variants of this tale. *Psyche* and *Eros* motifs flower during the age of Romanticism. It has fueled the imagination of hundreds (if not thousands of poets, dramatists and novelists.) The tale has also a great significance on modern psychology. Numerous literary scholars, philosophers, theologians, social thinkers and psychologists, among them Freud and Jung, have offered diverse and challenging interpretations of its meaning in trying to delve more deeply into the vagaries of the human soul. *Eros* in its innumerable *hypostases*, incarnations and disguises will forever remain a fascinating and inexhaustible subject for scholars of all disciplines. Our present volume is but a modest contribution to a better understanding of human love and its transcendent dimensions.

A HERMENEUTICS OF AMBIGUITY IN SEARCH OF SENSUALITY AND EROTICISM

As our previously published volume, *Ambiguity in the Western Mind*, pointed out the significance of the *concept of ambiguity* as a hermeneutical means back into some of the great books throughout the ages, this volume also uses the concept of ambiguity in its focus on love and specifically in its retrieval of the Greek term *eros* and the Latin term *caritas*. While our English term “love” may be more ambiguous than the ancient Greek term and the ancient Latin term, English love may also have become meaningless. By contrast, *eros* and *caritas* both have rich traditions; and as we have seen, through our hermeneutics of ambiguity in both our volumes, *eros* was not left to die in antiquity, but continues to exist not only in the Christian terms *agape* and *caritas*, but also in our art, music, poetry and literature. Ambiguity is not only inescapable, but philosophically very significant since it reflects the human condition.

In this volume, we have also attempted to retrieve the elements of sensuality and eroticism from the disciplines and topics in our contributor’s essays. For, the retrieval of *eros* is vital, since it is a love that both points us to ourselves and to our need for transcendence.

WHENCE OUR CONFESSIONS OF LOVE?

Although our interest in this work began with our fascination with love itself, it was in fact Benedict XVI’s use of the term *eros* in his first encyclical that intrigued us and moved us to pursue our present volume. Despite the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s pronouncement, that “Christianity had killed *eros*,” the pontiff has decided to resurrect it from its intellectual slumber. Perhaps, the reason for Benedict’s interest in *eros* was to bridge the West to the East again and to reconnect the Latin and the Greek traditions in our experience of love and in our endless aspirations for God.

Our use of the term “confessions” in our discussion of love in this volume was inspired by St. Augustine, who rightly recognized that all confession is, indeed, a confession of love *and* that love is always a confession. For Augustine, the act of confessing (*confiteor*) is a profound profession of one’s interior desire for the truth; it is an act that unites the mind and the heart of the lover with the Beloved. Thus, one’s confession of praise to God, the confession of one’s sin before God and others, and ultimately one’s confession of faith is always a confession of one’s love for God. Likewise, love itself is also a confession in its desire for the other and in its longing for the truth. As such, Augustinian confession is always a disclosure of personhood and one’s true self as standing in the Divine presence. In confession, the individual discovers him or herself, as a creature, for God: he and she says, “I confess.” Thus, the confession reveals our humanity, our finitude and ultimately our longing for transcendent solicitude.

In this volume, all of the scholars have focused their attention on the topic of love and its ambiguities with regard to their respective historical and literary texts. Most of the essays deal with either the use of Greek *eros* or Latin *caritas* in our pursuit of these two profound “confessions” of love that have dominated Western philosophy and literature throughout the ages.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN CONFESSION OF LOVE

Indeed, our volume suggests that there are many “confessions” of love; in fact, perhaps there are as many confessions as there are individuals in love. Historically speaking, however, the Western world seems to be focused upon the apparent conflict between Greek *eros* and Latin *caritas*, and their respective traditions. Despite the fact that *eros* is employed by some in the Greek patristic tradition of the Church, the fact remains that it is not used by the New Testament writers in their reference to God as love. Nevertheless, many scholars like Roland Teske, have suggested that *eros* was used in the development of the Latin term *caritas*, transforming its ordinary antique Roman usage into its Christian formulation. The experience of *eros* was merged, so to

speak, with *agape*, which perhaps seemed more acceptable to the Early Christian Church. Thus, perhaps, we can say that *eros* was not lost in the West, but absorbed by *caritas*, the Christian Latin translation of *agape*. Truly, what would Christian *agape* and *caritas* be like without *eros*? While the term *eros* does not appear in the New Testament for God's love, it exists within (and perhaps, beneath) the Christian use of *agape*. In this sense, then, the experience of *eros* permeates the *Gospels*. It is the love that moved Mary to clean the feet of Jesus with the precious, perfumed oil and wipe his feet with her long hair. It is the love that moved the beloved disciple, John, to rest his head upon the chest of Jesus. It is also the love that was felt by the many lepers, the blind and all of the sick who were healed by Jesus's hands and words. Indeed, *eros* is present in *agape*; and it reveals itself in all of the tears, sighs, touches and kisses that appear in the *Gospels*, revealing the flesh and blood of Jesus. What love could better express the profound Christian mystery of the incarnation than *eros*?

Notes

¹ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006.)

² *Deus Caritas Est*, 9, where the pontiff cites Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite in his treatise *The Divine Names* (IV, 12-14; PG 3, 709-713), in calling God both *eros* and *agape*. Also, cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 10.1.

³ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love*, Part I, trans. A. G. Herbert. (London: SPCK, 1932, 23-27.)

⁴ Fergus Ferr, OP, "Charity as Friendship," in *Language Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe*, OP, ed. Brian Davies, OP. (London: Chapman, 1987) 7.

⁵ Boris Pasternak, *Dr. Zhivago*, Pantheon Books, Inc., New York, 1958. p. 501.

⁶ *Dr. Zhivago*, p. 395.

⁷ *The Godfather*, (Putnam Edition, New York, 1969) 334.