



## LOVE OF GOD, LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR. THEOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS\*

\* Conference held at the Catholic-Muslim Forum, Rome, 4th-6th November 2008.

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In tackling this subject, and before taking any other consideration into account, it is necessary to affirm that from a Christian perspective one cannot speak of love from a theological point of view without bearing in mind that love does not spring from ourselves, but solely from God. The absolute priority of the love of God finds its fullest expression in a well-known text in the first Letter of John, which will constitute not only our starting point, but also the map and reference point for the whole of this paper:

7 My dear people, let us love one another since love comes from God: everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. 8 Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is love. 9 God's love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him. 10 This is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away. 11 My dear people, since God has loved us so much, we too should love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God, but as long as we love one another, God will live in us and his love will be complete in us. 13 We can know that we are living in him and that he is living in us because he lets us share his Spirit. 14 We ourselves saw and we testify that the Father sent his Son as saviour of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him, and he in God. 16 We ourselves have known and put our faith in God's love towards ourselves. God is love and anyone who lives in love lives in God, and God lives in him. 17 Love will come to its perfection in us when we can face the Day of Judgment without fear; because even in this world we have become as he is. 18 In love there can be no fear, but fear is driven out by perfect love: because to fear is to expect punishment, and anyone who is afraid is still imperfect in love. 19 We are to love, then, because he loved us first. 20 Anyone who says: 'I love God' and hates his brother is a liar, since a man who does not love the brother whom he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen. 21 So that this is the commandment that he has given us, that anyone who loves God must also love his brother. (1 Jn. 4, 7-21).

This fundamental text speaks of God's love for us and our love for God and our neighbour and offers us a starting point for articulating our interpretation in four steps: 1) God's love as manifested in the missions of the Son and the Spirit (*He has loved us*). 2) The premise and root of this love in the life of God Himself (*God is love*). 3) The human response to this love in love of God and in love of neighbour, necessarily united and entwined, even if this cannot always be identified (*Anyone who loves God must also love his brother*). 4) Love comes from God; man is capable of loving solely because God himself has given him this capacity (*Love is of God*).

## 1. 'He loved us'

«He loved us and sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away». The starting point of love is found in God himself and in the love He has shown us in sending us Jesus. When talking about love from a Christian point of view we must

inevitably start from this point. This is the foundation of everything which merits by right the name of love, and can never be discounted without risking disfiguring the meaning of every Christian love. One must always go back to the source. The whole work of salvation which Christ fulfilled and which requires our loving response arises solely from this love of God. The text from the first Letter of John which we have cited is an echo of Jesus' own words in the fourth Gospel: «Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost, but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved» (Jn 3,16-17)<sup>1</sup>. The salvation of the world, that is, of all men and women, is the purpose of Jesus' mission in the world and originates in the love of the Father.

«The love of God» is an expression used by both Paul and John (cf. Rom 5,5; 2 Cor 13,13; 1 Jn 2,5; 13,17). Every moment of Jesus' life shows the love of God the Father for us, but the death of Jesus on the cross manifests it in a very special way:

«God proved his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us... if in fact, while we were still his enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, now that we are reconciled, surely we may count on being saved by the life of his Son» (Rom 5,8.10; cf. 1,7; 8,39)<sup>2</sup>. For Paul, God is also «the God of love» (2 Cor 13,12), in as much as he not only asks for and reawakens love, but above all in the love that he gives in his Son Jesus<sup>3</sup>. For us Jesus was obedient unto death, death on the cross (cf. Phil 2,8) and his whole life, from beginning to end, had as its single aim that of fulfilling the will of the Father who had sent him (cf. Jn 4,32- 34; 5,30; Heb 10,5-8, etc). In this obedience to the will of the Father, Jesus makes known: «No one has ever seen God: it is only the Son, who is nearest the Father's heart, who has made him known» (Jn 1,18; cf. Jn 14,7-9). His whole life was making known the Father's love for us; this revelation happens in a very intense way when Jesus shows his love for us by giving up his life for us.

In fact, we cannot speak of God the Father's love for us without remembering the love which Christ himself showed. Christ's love for us is given prominence many times in the New Testament. A few examples will suffice here: «...knowing that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was» (Jn 13,1; cf. 14,21; 15,9). Paul has also emphasized Jesus' love for us in relation to his total giving of himself on the cross: «The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake» (Gal 2,20); «...and follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God» (Eph 5,2: cf. 5,25). It is this love of Christ finalised in his death on the cross that makes us truly aware of just how much God the Father loves us<sup>4</sup>. This same love of Jesus also shows that he was obedient to the will of God, making this obedience the very essence of his being. There is an evident link between the Father's love for us and that of his Son. Can we define it more precisely?

We can certainly find the elements for doing so in the New Testament. We can begin by recalling the Gospel text: «As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love» (Jn 15,9). Jesus' love for us arises therefore from the love the Father has for him. In fact, a constant confirmation of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ is the Beloved of the Father. The voice from heaven proclaims it at the moment of baptism in the River Jordan (cf. Mt 4,17; Mk 1,11; Lk 3,22), and again on Mount Tabor at the Transfiguration (cf. Mt 17,5; Mk 9,7); the idea appears yet again in the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants: «He still had someone left, his beloved son» (Mk 12,5;

cf. Lk 20,13). The Father «has transferred us to the kingdom of the Son that he loves» (Col 1,13; cf. Eph 1,6, 'his free gift to us in the beloved). In the Gospel of John the idea of God's love for his Son, Jesus, recurs frequently (cf. Jn 3,35; 5,20; 10,17; 15,9; 17,23.24.26; cf. also 14,21)<sup>5</sup>. This love was perfectly reciprocated in Jesus, demonstrated by his obedience to that which the Father had commanded him to do: «... the world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that I am doing exactly what the Father told me to do.» (Jn 14,31)<sup>6</sup>. It is in Christ, the Beloved, that the father has blessed us, chosen us and given us his grace through all eternity (cf. Eph 1,3-6). The Father's love for mankind is based upon, and finds its paradigm in the love which He has for the Son: «... may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you loved me» (Jn 17,23). God's love for us is therefore to be found within a divine exchange of love between the Father and the Son which preceded the creation of the world (cf. Jn 17,24). Reflections on God's love and on the exchange of love between the Father and the Son, above all in John's Gospel, open the door for us to approach the mystery of the One and Triune God in his eternal, immanent existence.

“God is love”

In fact, these last points have already pointed us in the direction of this second stage in our considerations; the fact that God first loved us and that he showed this love by sending his Son carries us to the most ardent and profound 'definition' of God to be found in the New Testament: «God is love» (1 Jn 4.8.16)<sup>7</sup>. This solemn statement from the first Letter of John surprises us with its strength. We might ask ourselves in fact why it does not simply state that God loves mankind, or that he has love, but instead it says that god *is* love. We could say that with these words John wanted to teach us that in everything God does for us, there is something of God himself. We have, without doubt, arrived at one of the most enlightened, and at the same time, most mysterious, theological affirmations of the new Testament<sup>8</sup>. It is this that has stimulated reflection on the Christian tradition of the One and Triune God, which, based on the New Testament, has sought to approach the mystery of God. Love is not a reality in God solely since the moment of creation, nor did divine love begin to exist solely at this moment. From the very earliest times, Christian thinking has seen creation as something that originated, freely, from the internal fecundity of divine being, that is from divine 'procession'<sup>9</sup>.

The origin of the Eternal father, beginning and source of all that is divine, the Son and the Holy Spirit cannot be explained without the initial love of the Father which communicates to the Son and to the Spirit, in total giving, everything that the Father is and has<sup>10</sup>. Paternity and love can be said to be identified in each other<sup>11</sup>: the divine being, the essence of God, communes with the three persons in virtue of the full communication of divinity which the Father makes to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, was often defined in tradition, even if not unanimously, simply, as love; this is that which, in a more profound way, unites the three divine 'persons'. Gregory of Nyssa noted that «love is the nature of heavenly life, divine life is accomplished through love»<sup>12</sup>. For his part, Augustine stated: «The same love is the substance, and the same substance in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit»<sup>13</sup>. And Pope Leo the Great in his turn stated that: «love comes from God in such a way that God himself is love (*ut Deus ipse sit caritas*)»<sup>14</sup>. This line of thinking was developed further through later history; according to St Bernard, love binds and maintains the unity of the Trinity<sup>15</sup>. Richard of St Victor said that there was nothing more perfect, more joyful or better than love; this perfection cannot therefore be missing in God and thus it must also be in the plurality of the persons<sup>16</sup>; otherwise love would not be possible. For St Bonaventure, divine unity is the most perfect unity in as much as it has intrinsic plurality, that is, the natural unity is found within the unity of love<sup>17</sup>. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* brings together these and other writings from Christian tradition when it affirms:

God's very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret. God himself is an eternal exchange of love: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange<sup>18</sup>.

Love is, therefore, the most proper name for God, the unity of the divine essence can be specified as the unity of love<sup>19</sup>. It is this fundamental characteristic of the divine being which constitutes the premise for the manifestation of God's love for us and which is singularly revealed in the exchange of love between the Father and his Son, Jesus. The Gospel, as we have already seen, speaks to us of this exchange, and these affirmations brought St Augustine to reflect on the nature of the Father who is the Lover, the Son who is the Loved One and the Holy Spirit, who is Love<sup>20</sup>, the love which proceeds from the Father and the Son and in which they love each other<sup>21</sup>. In Christian understanding, therefore, love is the fundamental characteristic of the One and Triune God. St Augustine expressed this truth with a formulation which has since become famous: «but you see the Trinity if you see love (*vides Trinitatem si caritatem vides*)»<sup>22</sup>.

The love which is God himself is the premise for the love of the Father and the Son for us, just as the latter is the premise for our love for God and our neighbour, as we will now see.

“Anyone who loves God must also love his brother”

We now arrive at the third point of our exposition, the one which will occupy us most, but which cannot be correctly understood without the two preceding points nor those which follow. All man's love for God and for his neighbour is a response to the initial love of God manifested in Christ. It must always, of course, take second place. The Christian discourse on love only makes sense with this premise.

The passage from the first Letter of John which is quoted at the beginning of these pages reminds us of the double commandment of Jesus, although with a greater emphasis on love for one's brother. But it is clear that we cannot separate these two dimensions of love, which we find already linked in these words of Jesus:

One of them, a Doctor of the Law, put a question in order to disconcert him: «Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?» He replied: «*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul* <sup>23</sup> and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: *You must love your neighbour as yourself* <sup>24</sup>. On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets. » (Mt 22,35-40; cf. Mk 12,28-31; Lk 10,25-27; Rom 13,8-10).

These two commandments are certainly to be found in the Old Testament<sup>25</sup>. And it is also equally clear here that worship of God and the requirement to love one's neighbour cannot be separated (cf. e.g. Am 5, 7-17.21-27; Hos 4,1-2; Is 58,1-14; Jer 22,16, etc.). But the explicit union of the two commandments in this evidently clear way is found for the first time in these words of Jesus. The Synoptic gospels also have other references to love of God and love of neighbour. Love for God must be shown in serving Him exclusively, which makes it consequently impossible to live for riches: «No one can serve two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or treat the first with respect and the second with scorn: you cannot be the slave both of God and of money» (Mt 6,24). God requires that He is loved exclusively, but this only in relation to the universality of love for one's neighbour. Our love, in fact, as an image of God's love, must not carry any discrimination because of the condition of mankind; in the response to the universal love of God the Father, love of neighbour must extend even to loving one's enemies:

You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy; but I say this to you: love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of

your Father in heaven, for He causes the sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greeting for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5,43-48; cf. Lk 6,27- 28.32-36).

From Jesus own lips we also have 'The golden rule' in its positive formulation: «So always treat others as you would like them to treat you » (Mt 7,12; cf. Lk 6,31). These and other similar words of Jesus cannot be separated from his life. Jesus loved God and his neighbour and commands that we must do the same. According to the Gospels love towards God only arrives at its full realisation when He is loved as Jesus preached and loved Him; and love of neighbour in his diversity arrives at full realisation when other men are contemplated and loved as Jesus loved others<sup>26</sup>. Jesus' words were never detached from all his actions, and his commandments always reflect his behaviour and his attitudes. It is not strange, therefore, that he himself should be the fundamental reference point for our love.

In almost all the New Testament texts we find the commandment to love God and our neighbour frequently repeated, even if the emphasis is placed differently. Paul speaks of love towards God (cf. Rom 8,28; 1 Cor 2,9; 8,3), and, more explicitly, will say again that the fulfilment of the Law is love (cf. Rom 8,12; Gal 6,14). Love is the chain of perfection: «As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom He loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility... Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond» (Col 3,12- 14); in Christ Jesus neither circumcised nor uncircumcised counts, «only faith working through love» (Gal 5,6). Love (avga,ph) is the greatest charisma and the best way for everything; and it is this which gives meaning to everything we do, and virtue which never ends, according to the well-known text in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 12,31-13,13). This love for others is founded explicitly on the fact that Christ died for all mankind: we must walk in love, in the way in which Christ loved us (cf. Eph 5,2) because the brother for whom Christ died merits the greatest respect (cf. Rom 14,15; 1 Cor 8,11). The love of God and the love of Jesus for us is also in the Johannine texts both the motive and the measure and the norm of love for our neighbour. We have already made reference to some essential texts, but in other places the 'novelty' of Jesus' commandment is emphasised, linking it with the novelty of Christ's own love: «I give you a new commandment: love one another; you must love one another as I have loved you. It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognise you as my disciples» (Jn 13,34-35; cf. 15,12, 1 Jn 2,7-11). In this way mutual love becomes the essential distinguishing feature of the disciples of Christ (cf. also Acts 2,44-45; 4.32.34-35). And for John, as for Paul, the fact that Jesus gave his life for us is that which exhorts us to fraternal love: «This is the proof of love: He laid down his life for us, and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers» (1 Jn 3,16; cf. see the rest of the passage, 3,10-24). It is true that in contrast to the texts from the Synoptic gospels on love for all mankind cited earlier, the passages from John tend to stress love among the brethren and among the believers. But this does not mean that an extended interpretation is excluded, and the fundamental relationship between love for God and love for one's neighbour is the same in both cases.

In order to establish the right relationship between love for God and love for neighbour according to the New Testament we must not forget that love for Jesus is essential: if love for God must be above all other loves and exclude everything else, one can say the same thing about love for Jesus: «No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. ...» (Mt 10,37; cf. Lk 14,26). Paul also felt the need to respond to the love of Christ for us with a personal love for him, in which he loved Christians: «If there is anyone who does not love the Lord, a curse on such a one ... My love is with you all in Christ Jesus» (1 Cor 16,22; cf. Ef 6,24). Our love for Christ must correspond to his love for us (cf. Jn 14,28; 15,10). If God's love for us is revealed to us and finds its truest expression in the love of Christ, who gave himself up to death for us, our response of love towards Jesus makes

us also objects of the Father's love: «Whoever loves me will be loved by my father and I shall love him and reveal myself to him... Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make a home in him» (Jn 14,21.23; cf. Jn 16,27). Our response to the love of Jesus arrives therefore also to the beloved Father who loves Jesus. On the one hand, it demonstrates the unity of the love of the Father and the Son. There is no love of the Father for us without the love of Christ and it is not possible for us on our part to love God without loving Christ. The mystery of the Trinity, which is the mystery of the unity of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, is shown in the relationship which God has with us and in our relationship with God. Our love for God implies love for Christ and *vice versa*, just as God's love for us implies the love of Christ and *vice versa*.

But within the subject we are studying, beside the mystery of the Trinity we find also the mystery of the incarnation. The Son of God became man for us and for our salvation and with his incarnation he became united in a particular way with every living human being<sup>27</sup>. If the love of God and the love of Christ are always part one of the other, so also are the love of Christ and the love of neighbour: «In truth I tell you: in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me... In so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me» (Mt 25,40.45). Love for Jesus is inextricably wrapped up with love for neighbour in virtue of this mysterious union between Christ and mankind and especially with the weakest and most abandoned of his brethren. The eschatological context of these affirmations gives them a very great weight.

We cannot, therefore, leave Christ out of consideration when we seek to reflect on the inseparability of love of God and of neighbour as it is presented in the new Testament. It is because Jesus is both God and man that love of God and of neighbour become necessarily one. Christian tradition has continued to reflect on this. Hilary of Poitiers said that love of neighbour can truly be love of Christ, since he, in the bodily form he assumed, which is that which we all share, became everyone's neighbour<sup>28</sup>. The same bishop, in a consideration that can certainly arouse perplexity, but on which it is worthwhile to meditate a bit, also suggests that only this identification of one's neighbour with Christ can justify the parity of love of God and love of neighbour, since in the latter we see the Son of God, true God like the Father, and therefore equally worthy of love<sup>29</sup>. St Augustine stated that in the love which unites us we become members of the body of Christ, our Head: «For this reason then he has loved us, that we also might love one another. With love he has given us help so that with mutual love drawing us close to one another and, the members bound by such a tender link, we are the body of the Head »<sup>30</sup>. Augustine later developed further this intertwining of the love of the Father, the love of the Son and the love of the sons of God who are members of the body of Christ:

John follows by saying : In this we know that we love the sons of God. (1 Jn 5,2) What is this, brethren? Just now he was speaking of the Son of God, not of sons of God: lo, here one Christ was set before us to contemplate, and we were told, "Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loves Him that begat," *i.e.* the Father, "loves Him also that is begotten of Him," *i.e.* the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And he goes on: "In this we know that we love the sons of God;" as if he had been about to say, "In this we know that we love the Son of God." He has said, "the sons of God," whereas he was speaking just before of the Son of God—because the sons of God are the Body of the Only Son of God, and when He is the Head, we the members, it is one Son of God. Therefore, he that loves the sons of God, loves the Son of God, and he that loves the Son of God, loves the Father; nor can any love the Father except he love the Son, and he that loves the sons, loves also the Son of God. What sons of God? The members of the Son of God. And by loving he becomes himself a member, and comes through love to be in the frame of the body of Christ, so there shall be one Christ, loving Himself. For when the members love one another, the body loves itself (*erit unus Christus amans seipsum*)<sup>31</sup>.

Evidently one cannot in these reflections diminish the dignity of one's neighbour by making him a merely like Christ in external appearance. On the contrary, human dignity increases when the other is contemplated as someone whom God loved so much that He gave His only Son to die for him; and at the same time he is loved by Christ so much that these must be considered as those destined to receive the good or the evil we do to the person. The personality of the other is neither absorbed nor dissolved in Christ, just as in Jesus human nature did not just disappear, but became elevated to a sublime dignity<sup>32</sup>. Thus, in this and other patristic texts consideration is turned to humanity as a whole, since it is the entire human family that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, carries upon his shoulders as a lost sheep<sup>33</sup>; in other passages it is the Church as the body of Christ which is aimed at more directly, but the basic statement<sup>34</sup> does not change. In Christian thinking on the love of God and love of neighbour one can never put Jesus, the Son of God made man, in parenthesis. In him heaven and earth were united once and for all, in him we have the new and definitive covenant between God and mankind. He is the one who, uniting us with God, unites us all with one another: «Christ is the link which unites, being himself both God and man»<sup>35</sup>. Pope Benedict XVI also states in a Christological frame: «Love of God and love of neighbour share the same foundation: in the smallest thing we encounter Jesus himself and in Jesus we encounter God»<sup>36</sup>.

But we can always ask ourselves: in this quasi identification, does the love of God not disappear, is it not simply love of neighbour which makes us love God and nothing else? In other words, one loves God simply by loving one's neighbour or is God always the direct and immediate object of our love? Does the distinction need to be maintained between the first and the second commandment, even though they are so similar? The New Testament texts do not seem to leave much room for doubt. To love God is the *first* commandment, according to the words of Jesus which have come down to us in the synoptic gospels, even though the *second* is similar to the first. According to the Letter of John we have received the commandment that whoever loves God must also love his brother. God, and also Christ, must be the direct object of our love. St Augustine has defined very precisely the primacy which must always be given to love for God:

The love of God comes first in the order of enjoying; but in the order of doing, the love of our neighbour comes first (*Dei dilectio prior est ordine praecipendi, proximi autem dilectio prior est ordine faciendi*). For He who commanded this love in two precepts did not charge you to love your neighbour first, and then God, but first God, afterwards your neighbour. You, however, as you do not yet see God can earn to see Him by loving your neighbour; by loving your neighbour you purge your eyes for seeing God, [...] Therefore love your neighbour; look at the source of your love for your neighbour; there you will see, as you may, God. [...]

By loving your neighbour, by caring for your neighbour, you make your way. Where does this way go, but to the Lord God, whom we ought to love with the whole heart, and with the whole soul, and with the whole mind? For we are not yet come to the Lord, but we have our neighbour with us. Bear him, then, when you walk, that you may come to Him with whom you desire to abide forever.<sup>37</sup>

The priority for love of God is demonstrated by the fact that only God is the goal, even though without following the path of loving one's neighbour this is hard to understand. Benedict XVI has written on this something which well merits our attention: «Only my willingness to go to meet my neighbour, to show him love, renders me also able to appreciate God. Only service of my neighbour opens my eyes to that which God does for me and how much He loves me»<sup>38</sup>.

There is no doubt on the priority to be given to our love for God in as much as it is the first commandment. Love for God cannot exist without love for neighbour, certainly, and on this point the words of the first letter of John leave no room for doubt. Love for God implies love of one's neighbour and cannot be achieved without being put into real practice. According to Aquinas, love for God is included in love for one's neighbour, when one's neighbour is loved because of God<sup>39</sup>.

But it is God, in as much as He is the greatest good, the ultimate end of mankind, towards whom love for our neighbour leads us. Loving our neighbour whom we can see carries us closer to God, whom we cannot see, but who we can just make out with love. The priority of love for God in the order of the precept has to do with the ultimate destiny of man which is none other than God Himself. Only God, and never his creature, is absolutely worthy of loving for His own sake. The inseparability of loving God and one's neighbour and the fact that without this last love for God cannot exist cannot but carry us to an identification of God or Christ with man. Both pantheism and pan-Christianity must be avoided. On the other hand it is clear that God, unlike one's neighbour, does not need our love. However, if we can or have to love only those who need our love, we take away from that love its ultimate meaning of being freely given. When we love someone who needs our love, perhaps it becomes difficult for us to eliminate the temptation to self-sufficiency in everything; furthermore, the most subtle egoisms can be hidden beneath the apparent cover of love, those defects that want to hold others obliged to us, dependent on us. When our love is shown in service rendered to someone, the intention of someone who really loves must be that, wherever possible, the service will in future no longer be needed, and that the situation of need which made our neighbour dependent on our help is overcome. Again, St Augustine has written on this in an illuminating paragraph:

The benevolence, the wishing well, is sufficient itself for him who loves. For we ought not to wish men to be wretched, that we may be enabled to practise works of mercy. You give bread to the hungry: but it would be better if none hungered, and you had no one to give to. You clothe the naked: oh, that all were clothed, and this need did not exist! You bury the dead: oh, that it were come at last, that life where none shall die! You reconcile the quarrelling: oh, that it were here at last, that eternal peace of Jerusalem, where none shall disagree! For all these are offices done to necessities. Take away the wretched; there will be an end to works of mercy. The works of mercy will be at an end: shall the ardour of charity be quenched? With a truer touch of love you love the happy man, for whom there is no good office you can do; purer will that love be, and far more unalloyed. For if you have done a kindness to the wretched, perchance you desired to lift yourself up over him, and wished him to be subject to you, who did him the kindness. He was in need, you gave; you seem to yourself greater because you gave, than he to whom you gave. Wish him your equal, that you both may be under the One Lord, to whom nothing can be given.<sup>40</sup>

If this is true of love for man, how much more true it is of love for God, «to whom nothing can be given». To love someone is to desire their fulfillment and to rejoice in the good that befalls them as if it were your own. God possesses this fulfillment. Love of God, the greatest Good, leads us thus to praise him in gratitude, and to rejoice in the fact that He is God. If the ultimate end of our life and our salvation consists in being admitted, with all our brothers and sisters into communion of life with the One and Triune God, and in being fulfilled as sons of the Father through His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, it would be absurd if our response to love was not directed in the first place to God Himself. An attitude of love for God as the greatest good and the highest love, capable of being loved at the highest level, which renders us participants in His eternal life, must be the absolute essential in our Christian life. Throughout the centuries the great spiritual masters have made this clear<sup>41</sup>. Only with love can we reply to his beneficence in full measure. The primacy of the commandment to love God was also reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council: «The first and most necessary gift is love, with which we love God above all other things and our neighbour for love of God»<sup>42</sup> Love of God and love of neighbour can neither be separated in any way, nor can they be confused. The Christian vision of God and of man prevents this:

The inseparability and reciprocal inclusion of love for God and love for one's neighbour does not mean that they are identical, but united yet distinct. Love for one's neighbour cannot be identified with love for God for the decisive reason that God is neither man nor simply a name for immanent transcendence in man, but the personal basis of this transcendence. Whoever believes in the God of

Christian revelation, in the personal God and in his personal self-giving to Christ and in Christ for all mankind, cannot but admit the absolute primacy of the commandment to love God. Diversely, it puts into question the very divinity of God and his supreme value for man. If love for one's neighbour implies love for God, it is precisely because the intrinsic value of the human person is sustained and concluded by the personal absolute and its self-communication in Christ. Not reduction in love for God in love for neighbour, nor absorption of love for God in love for neighbour. In the intrinsic character of his being made in the image of God and a brother of Christ, every man and woman carries [...] a dignity which renders him or her worthy of the respect and the love of others<sup>43</sup>.

The God who loves us personally must be loved equally personally by us. Only in love for Him can we respond in a manner which is worthy of His goodness to us. And on the other hand, love for one's neighbour only acquires a pressing urgency when one's eyes are turned towards God: is worthy of all our love he who from all eternity was loved by the Father and for whom Christ gave his life. Only by avoiding confusion between love for God and love for one's neighbour do the two keep all their meaning and appear in their inseparability and their reciprocal implications. We cannot 'untie' God in man nor man in God, nor divide Christ who loved us in the Father's love: «The form of Christian love in the sign of Christ is absolutely indivisible; One cannot say that some Christian thinkers have specialised in the transcendent aspect (which is called 'eschatological' or contemplative) whilst others have concentrated on the immanent aspect (as active and 'directed towards the world'). This would mean to lacerate Christ and make his image incomprehensible from both points of view »<sup>44</sup>. Whoever loves God must also love his brothers. The Christological formula of the Council of Chalcedon is reflected here: the two natures in Christ cannot be separated, but at the same time they are distinct. By way of analogue, love of God and love of neighbour are inseparable, but they cannot be singled out apart. In Christian tradition the unity and inseparability of love for God and love for neighbour has always been insisted upon above everything else. Aquinas states that in reality there is only a single rule,

and that they are called two rules only in order not to confuse the less well-educated<sup>45</sup>. But at the same time, Aquinas himself indicates that every act of true love towards one's neighbour includes love for God in as much as it is the cause and purpose, but if the friend is loved solely for himself the true reason for loving friendship, which is God, is missing <sup>46</sup>. The two inseparable aspects of the single mandate, therefore, cannot be confused. Furthermore, one can also make note of acts of love towards God which are not directly acts of love towards a neighbour although they might include another person in some way <sup>47</sup>. Among theologians of the past, as much as among those of our own day, alongside emphasis on the unity between love for God and love for neighbour, there arose a preoccupation with avoiding confusion and the simple identification of the one with the other. And it also needs to be said that the repeated affirmation of the primacy of love for God emerging from our study of the sources does not in any way diminish the importance of love for one's neighbour; on the contrary: the more God, the Father of Jesus and all mankind, becomes the centre of our existence, as He was for Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the more decisive and real will be our commitment to the well-being of all mankind called to be sons and brothers of Jesus.

“Love comes from God”.

Love comes from God in a double sense. On the one hand, God was the first to love, and love exists in the world because divine Trinitarian love is the beginning of everything that exists. All human love must be a response to the initial love of God. But besides this aspect, which we have already discussed, there is another no less important: this human response is only possible because God himself makes us love and moves us to love. Love does not come from ourselves. «The love of

God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us» (Rom 5,5). Love being the divine nature, in giving us love God is giving us something of his very self, that is his Spirit, which is the way the love of God is poured into us<sup>48</sup>. The love of God, that is God Himself, has entered us to the very core of our being. In a certain sense, the love of God which we will define, is made our own. Only because we have the love of God in us, a love made real in the gift of the Holy Spirit, are we men able to love in our own turn<sup>49</sup>. The Spirit and love are repeatedly found united. When he speaks of the fruits of the Spirit, St Paul placed love first (cf. Gal 5,22). «Love of the Spirit» is referred to in Rom 15,30. This is probably the love that the Holy Spirit pours into us, but it can also be that which the Spirit nourishes towards us<sup>50</sup>. There is in every case a priority given to the Holy Spirit with respect to our love (cf. also Col 1,8). We need always to confirm the primacy of the God of love:

The principle cannot be related with man as the dominant centre, but God remains the centre, and man is found in relation outside himself in the Absolute that is revealed. Man has love only in so far as love has him, he never has it as if it could be considered something at his disposal. Naturally he does not possess love externally, but only because love possess him internally, as *interior intimo meo*. Love 'organises man, not the reverse; it makes man – his constant opposition – his instrument<sup>51</sup>.

In fact, in the words of Jesus to which we have already referred, we find the expression «remain in my love» (cf. Jn 15,9-10). These verses constitute the end of the Parable of the True Vine. Only by remaining in Jesus, that is to say in his love, the love into which Jesus had gathered them, can the disciples bear fruit. The greatest fertility that one can possibly contemplate is that of love. This is the gift of love of Jesus, and its sole fruit is love<sup>52</sup>. Thus this is not an initiative of the disciples of Jesus: not only in general, but even in the most particular realisation<sup>53</sup>.

«Love comes from God» always. «Whoever keeps his word, in such a one God's love truly reaches perfection» (1 Jn 2,5; cf. 1,15). It is not simply a matter of the love which we have towards God, but of that which he has for us<sup>54</sup>. This love becomes perfect when one keeps the commandments: the love of God finds fulfillment in us and in some way reaches its conclusion when we keep the commandments of Jesus.

«Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God» (1 Jn 4,7). The idea of being born of God, of being His child, is repeated in 1 Jn in relation to faith in Christ and with our own doing good (cf. 1 Jn 2,29; 3,9; 5,1.4.18). It is God who works in us to give us the intention and the will to act (cf. Phil 2,13), who works in us in love, and who generates in us the love that comes from him. Without Christ, who is the True Vine of which we are the branches and through which we receive divine life, we cannot do anything (cf. Jn 15,4-5), and therefore *a fortiori* we cannot do anything without him that involves the highest quality of divinity, that is, love. Only in as much as we are born of God in this freely given and mysterious way, can we follow in the footsteps of the Only Son. Pope Benedict XVI has written concerning the commandment to love, «it is possible only because it is not just need: love can be 'controlled' because first it is given»<sup>55</sup>. Above all in the Eucharist does the love of God «come to us corporally in order to continue its work in us and through us»<sup>56</sup>.

In us and through us. Love is from God, but this does not mean to say that, being the gift of God, it is not also truly ours. In the Middle Ages the problem of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and our love was much debated. If the Holy Spirit which is love has been poured into our hearts, it would seem that the Spirit itself is the love with which we love God and our neighbour. Peter Lombard expressed this as follows in his *Sentences*:

It has indeed been said above and shown by sacred authorities,<sup>2</sup> that the Holy Spirit is the Love [amor] of the Father and the Son, by which They love [amant] one another and us. Moreover, it must be added to these, that the very same Holy Spirit is the Love or Charity, by which we love [diligimus] God and neighbour. When this Charity is so great in us, that it makes us love God and neighbor, the Holy Spirit is then said to be sent and/or to be given<sup>3</sup> to us; and he who loves the very love [dilectionem], by which he loves (his) neighbour, in this very (thing) loves God, because *Love itself is God*,<sup>4</sup> that is, the Holy Spirit.<sup>57</sup>

Naturally we then come to the problem of who is the subject of our love. Can one can say that we are truly ourselves? As is well recorded the great scholastics reacted to this idea of the Bishop of Paris. Certainly not to diminish the action of the Holy Spirit in us, but rather to show how this presence is also effected through human cooperation; our will, moved by the Spirit is capable of cooperating with God. In this sense, St Bonaventure says, connecting the Holy Spirit with our love, the Master of the Sentences is not mistaken: only he did not say all that there was to say<sup>58</sup>. It is in fact opportune to add to the uncreated gift of the Spirit in us, said the great Franciscan master, the presence of a created gift: that which allows us to better explain our freedom, and, at the same time, permits us to see more clearly the greatness of the work of grace in us. The created gift, in fact, renders it even more clear that grace must transform us interiorly so that we are able to become capable of doing good, and this leads us away us from the presumption of believing that we can do any good which is based exclusively on our own strengths:

When something is removed from grace, and that which is of grace is attributed to nature, dangers can emerge. This position, therefore, which places created grace alongside uncreated grace, seems more safe and more consonant with both piety and humility, because it attributes more to grace and places a greater poverty on our own natures [...] However, this opinion is to be preferred to the first, as it leads to a safer and more distant position from the error of Pelagius<sup>59</sup>.

Following a similar line of thought, Aquinas affirms that loving is a voluntary act and that the will, therefore, is moved by the Holy Spirit to love in such a way that it is the cause which effects the act of love<sup>60</sup>. But the possibility of this causality must be the fact that God alone can transform and deify man<sup>61</sup>. God and man are not in competition. St Augustine has already indicated that when God rewards our merits, he is doing no more than rewarding us for his own gifts<sup>62</sup>. This profound idea has passed into the decree on justification formulated at the Council of Trent: «God's goodness towards all men is so great that He wants to reward them for that which is His own gift»<sup>63</sup>.

## Epilogue

The saving initiative of God who showed us His love by sending His Only- Begotten Son is the only valid starting point for understanding the Christian concept of love. This fact allows us to catch a glimpse of the love which God Himself is. The double commandment to love God and one's neighbour is based upon the love which God has shown in Christ, and the love which Jesus has for God and for us. God being love, love comes from God; loving is always a gift and a grace, even if, thanks to this divine gift, it is we who are doing the loving. By loving we can try out best to resemble God, since love for God in its inseparability from love for neighbour cannot be the means for achieving anything else. Love is in itself the reward. Nothing greater will be given to us as a prize for our love: «*nulla maior expetenda est remuneratio quam ipsa dilectio*»<sup>64</sup>. True love cannot have a utilitarian purpose, as the greatest good we are capable of exists in it: «Love requires no other motive beyond itself, and neither does it need to profit; its fruit is its own practice. I love because I love, I love in order to love»<sup>65</sup>. There is nothing more perfect than love for the simple reason that God is love. Our participation in the life of the divine is and will always be participation in the love between the divine Persons. The final lines of St Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (The City

of God) which turns the gaze towards eternal life, tell us of the love which has no end: «There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the kingdom of which there is no end? 66».

And this kingdom that will have no end is none other than the kingdom of love which will not pass away, as Paul said: «Love never comes to an end» (1 Cor 13,8).

1 Other texts in the Johannine writings also speak of God's love for us: cf. Jn 14,21.23; 16,27; 17,23; 1 Jn 3,1.

2 The Easter *Exsultet* which, as we know, dates back to St Ambrose, seems to re-echo this Pauline phrase: «Father, how wonderful your love for us! How boundless your merciful goodness! To ransom a slave you gave away your Son! O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer! ».

3 Cf. Th. SÖDING, “Gott is Liebe”. *1 Joh 4.8.16 als Spitzensatz biblischer Theologie*, in TH. SÖDING (Hg), *Der lebendige Gott. Studien zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Festschrift für Wilhelm Thüsing*, Münster 1996, 306-357, 335-336.

4 COMMISSIONE TEOLOGICA INTERNAZIONALE, *Alcune questioni riguardanti la cristologia*, 3.5 (*Documenti 1969-2004*, Bologna 2006, 186) : «...il gesto del Padre che consegna e dona il proprio Figlio (Rm 4.25; 8,32; cf. Gv 3,16; 1 Gv 4,9) è ripreso esemplarmente realmente nel Cristo che dona se stesso, consegnando e dando se stesso con perfetta carità (cf. Ef 5,2.15; 1 Tm 2,6; Tt 2,4)».

5 There was much development of the idea of the Beloved Son of the Father in early Christian tradition, especially St Augustine; cf. p. e.g. *Trin.* VIII 10,14 (CCL 50.290-201); the reciprocal love of the Son is to be found in ib. VI 5,7 (236); XV 19,37 (513), ATANASIO DI ALESSANDRIA, *C. Arianos III* 6 (PG 26,464); ILARIO DI POITIERS, *Tr. Ps.* 91,6 (CCL 61,327). RICCARDO DI SAN VITTORE, *Trin.*

III 7 (SCh 63,180-182), the Son is the il “summe dilectus”.

6 S. GREGORIO MAGNO, *Hom. in ev.* 14,4 (PL 76,1129): «...ea caritate qua pro ovibus morior, quantum Patrem diligam ostendo».

7 BENEDETTO XVI, *Deus caritas est* 1: ‘ “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 Jn 4,16). These words from the *First Letter of John* express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, Saint John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us”.

8 Cf. TH. SÖDING, o. c. (n. 3), 351, se l'essenza di Dio è caratterizzata come amore, si sta dicendo che Dio è se stesso nella più grande misura quando agisce mediante il suo Figlio come colui che ama. Consegnando il suo Figlio rivela la sua essenza e il suo modo di agire.

9 Cf. e.g. S. THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh* I 45, 6-7, Now the processions of the divine Persons are referred to the acts of intellect and will; cf. also id. *In I Sent*, prologue, so the temporal procession of creatures is derived from the eternal procession of persons.

10 In identifying one with the other, S. AGOSTINO, *De civ. Dei* XI 10 (CCL 48,332): «Quae habet [Deus], haec et est».

11 Hilary of POITIERS, *Trin.* IX 61 (CCL 62A,440): «Nescit autem Deus aliud aliquando quam dilectio esse, neque aliud quam pater esse. Et qui diligit non invidet, et qui pater est non etiam non pater totus est»; only the Father, therefore, is the Father, only the Father is the total donation. *ib* II 6 (CCL 62,43) ; *ib*. III 3 (CCL 62,74) : «From uncreated substance which is in him (the Father) he created the Only Son, communicating to this birth the fullness of divinity through his power and his love ».

12 *De anima et resurrectione* (PG 46,96).

13 *Trin.* XV 17,29 (CCL 50,504); cf. *ib*. XV 6,10 (472).

14 *Sermon* 92,3 (PL 54,454).

15 We can also recall S. BERNARDO, *De diligendo Deo* 12,35 (SCh 393,150): «Cosa è che conserva l'unità somma e ineffabile in quella somma e beata Trinità se non la carità? Dunque sarà una legge, e legge del Signore, la carità, che mantiene e collega in un certo modo la Trinità nell'unità nel vincolo della pace». Pietro Lombardo considererà anche che l'amore è l'essenza divina, *Sent.* I 32,5: «Nella Trinità c'è l'amore (*dilectio*), che è il Padre, il Figlio e lo Spirito Santo, che è l'essenza della divinità».

16 *Trin.* III 2.3 (SCh 63,168-172): «Nihil caritate melius, nihil caritate perfectius», «Nihil caritate melius, nihil caritate iucundius». Perciò Dio da sempre ha il Figlio come diletto e lo Spirito come condiletto, cf. *ib*. III 19 (208).

17 Cf. S. BONAVENTURA, *Quaes. Dis. de Trinitate* 22,2; *Breviloquium* I 2,3, Dio si comunica eternamente avendo un diletto e un condiletto, il Figlio e lo Spirito. S. GIOVANNI DELLA CROCE, *Romances sobre el evangelio «In principio erat Verbum», acerca de la santísima Trinidad*: «Tres personas y un amado / entre todas tres había, / y un amor en todas ellas / y un amante las hacía: / y el amante es el amado / en que cada cual vivía... Este ser es cada una, / y éste solo las unía / en un inefable nudo / que decir no se sabía; / por lo cual era infinito / el amor que las unía, / porque un solo amor tres tienen / que su esencia se decía... ».

18 CCC n. 221; CCC *Compendio*, 42: «Mandando il suo Figlio e lo Spirito Santo Dio rivela che egli stesso è eterno scambio d'amore».

19 Cf. W. KASPER, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Mainz 1982, 365; 372.

20 S. AGOSTINO, *Trin.* IX 2,2 (CCL 50,294-295); XV 3,5 (465); XV 6,10 (472), a partire dalla carità si illumina la Trinità, l'amante, l'amato e l'amore.

21 Cf. S. AGOSTINO, *Trin.* VI 5,7 (235); XV 6,10 (473); XV 17,27 (501); XV 19,37 (513); S.

TOMMASO, *STh* I 36,4; I 37,2. For a deeper analysis, see L.F. LADARIA, *La Trinità, mistero di comunione*, Milano 22008, 304-309.

22 *Trin.* VIII 8,12 (CCL 50, 287).

23 Dt 6,5.

24 Lv 19,18.

25 Cf. also on the love of God, Ex 20,6; Dt 5,10, 7,9; 10,12; 11,1, etc. On love of neighbour, Lv 19,34, and the many concrete precepts which they imply.

26 Cf. TH. SÖDING, *Das Hauptgebot in der Verkündigung Jesu. Beobachtungen bei den Synoptikern*, in G. AUGUSTIN – K. KRÄMER (Hg.), *Gott denken und bezeugen. Festschrift für Walter Kardinal Kasper*, Freiburg i. Br. 2008, 250-273,266.

27 Cf. Conc. VATICANO II, *Gaudium et Spes* 22.

28 Cf. *In Matt.* 19,5 (Sch 258,94): «unicuique nostrum adsumpti corporis condicione fit proximus».

29 Cf. *ib.* 23,7 (160-162): «Per quanto riguarda il prossimo, abbiamo spesso fatto osservare che con esso non bisogna intendere nessun altro che Cristo. Poiché, infatti, ci è proibito di anteporre all'amore di Dio padre, madre, figli, in che modo il comandamento dell'amore del prossimo è simile all'amore di Dio [...] se non perché la somiglianza del comandamento esige un'uguale carità nel- l'amore verso il Padre e verso il Figlio?» (prendo la traduzione da L. Longobardo, ILARIO DI POITIERS, *Commentario a Matteo* (Testi patristici 74), Roma 1999, 246-247.30 S. AGOSTINO, *In Io. Ev.* tr. 65,2 (Opere di S. Agostino XXIV), 1144-1145.

31 S. AGOSTINO, *In Io. ep.* tr 10,2 (Opere XXIV, 1838-1838) *Ib.* : «Se ami le membra di Cristo ami Cristo; quando ami Cristo ami il Figlio di Dio; ami perciò anche il Padre. L'amore non può esse- re diviso. Scegli pure ciò che vuoi amare: il resto seguirà da se... Sí, tu dici, amo il Padre ed il figlio e basta: amo Dio Padre e Iddio Figlio, Gesù Cristo nostro Signore, che accese al cielo e siede alla des- tra del Padre... Tu menti: se ami il capo, ami anche le membra; se poi non ami le membra, non ami neppure il capo. Non senti spavento alla voce del capo parla anche per le membra? *Saulo, Saulo, per- ché mi perseguiti?* (At 9,4). Quella voce ha definito suo persecutore il persecutore delle sue membra; ha invece chiamato suo amico l'amico delle sua membra. Voi già sapete quali sono le mia membra, o fratelli: sono la Chiesa stessa di Dio». *Ib.* tr. 9,10 (1830-1831): «Necessariamente, amando il fra- tello, ami l'amore stesso. *L'amore infatti è Dio*; e chi ama il proprio fratello necessariamente ama Dio»; *Trin.* VIII 8,12 (CCL 50,288): «Deum certe diligit qui diligit dilectionem».

32 VATICANO II. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22: «Since human nature as He [Christ] assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too.». S. LEONE MAGNO, *Tomus ad Flavianum* (DH 293): «humana augens, divina non minuens»

33 Cf. S. IRENEO DI LIONE, *Adv. Haereses*, III 19,3 (Sch 211,380); V 12,3 (Sch 153,150); *Demonstr.* 33 (FP 2), S. ILARIO DI POITIERS, *In Mt.* 18,6 (Sch 258,80-82): S. GREGORIO DI NISSA, *Adv. Apolinarium* 16 (Opera, ed. W. Jaeger, 3/1, 152).

34 The Church in fact has a universal vocation. All men and women are called to become members of the body of Christ, which will reach its definitive fullness only when a single Christ will love himself.

35 S. CIRILLO DI ALESSANDRIA, *In Joh. Ev.* XI 11 (PG 74, 560-561).

36 BENEDETTO XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 15; *ib.* 18: «Amore di Dio e amore del prossimo sono inseparabili, sono un unico comandamento. Entrambi però vivono dell'amore proveniente di Dio che ci ha amati per primo. Così non si tratta più di un "comandamento" dall'esterno che ci impone l'im-

possibile, bensì di un'esperienza dell'amore donata dall'interno, un amore che, per sua natura, deve essere ulteriormente partecipato ad altri. L'amore cresce attraverso l'amore. L'amore è "divino" perché viene da Dio e ci unisce a Dio e, mediante questo processo unificante, ci trasforma in un Noi che supera le nostre divisioni e ci fa diventare una cosa sola, fino a che, alla fine, Dio sia "tutto in tutti" (1 Cor 15,28)».

37 S. AGOSTINO, *In Io ev.* trac. 17, 8-9 (Opere di S. Agostino XXIV, 400-401). *In Io ep.* trac. 5,7 (Opere XXIV, 1736-1737): « Potresti dirmi che non hai mai visto Dio; non potrai mai dirmi che non hai visto gli uomini. Ama dunque il tuo fratello. Se amerai il fratello che tu vedi, potrai contemporaneamente vedere Dio, perché vedrai la carità stessa, e nella carità abita Dio».

38 *Deus caritas est*, 18.

40 *In ep. Io.* trac. 8, 5 (Opere XXIV, 1794-1795).

41 Cf. S. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi Spirituali*, nn. 230ss; S. TERESA DI GESÙ, *Libro della Vita*, 8,5; S. GIOVANNI DELLA CROCE, *Cantico Spirituale* 19: « ... que ya solo en amar es mi ejerci- cio». Forse il più eloquente di tutti S. BERNARDO, *Serm. In Cant.* 83,4.6 (Sch 511,346-348.352):

«Fra tutte le mozioni, affetti e sentimenti dell'anima, l'amore è l'unico col quale la creatura possa corrispondere al suo Creatore, anche se non da uguale a uguale, almeno in una simile reciprocità [...] Dio amando non desidera altro che essere amato; se egli ama è perché noi amiamo lui, sapendo che con questo stesso amore saranno felici coloro che lo amano [...] [La sposa] si da tutta intera al solo amore, perché deve rispondere all'amore ridando l'amore [...] Certamente non fluiscono con la stessa abbondanza l'amante e l'amore, l'anima e il Verbo, la sposa e lo Sposo, il Creatore e la creatura, come colui che ha sete e la sorgente [...] Ma anche se la creatura, poiché è inferiore, ama di meno, se ama con tutto il suo essere, niente manca dove c'è la totalità».

42 LG 42; LG 44: «God loved above everything else»; cf. anche GS 24; PC 8.

39 Cf. *STh* I-II