

Joseph Fletcher on Agapeic Love: An Evaluation

By William O'Meara *

Joseph Fletcher offers a Christian Situation Ethics when he affirms that belief in God and belief in God's agape' as the central value of ethics cannot be proven by natural reasoning but can only be held by a free action, chosen by the believer. He interprets 1 John, chapter 4: 16, especially v. 19: "We love because he first loved us," as establishing that humans only know agapeic love because they have first known and believed in God's agapeic love as revealed in the greatest love in the actions and teachings of Jesus. However, Bernard Haring a Catholic, 20th century German moral theologian, disagrees with that interpretation, noting that both Augustine and Aquinas hold that although God's creative love is first in the order of being, it is not first in the order of learning. They hold that humans first experience generous human love amongst humans before they even accept that God's creative love is first in the order of being. Also, even Karl Barth, the great Swiss Calvinist theologian, has a remarkably positive affirmation of human eros. Barth invents a new term 'humanity' in order to recognize the being of humans as "free, radically open, willing, spontaneous, joyful, cheerful and gregarious." This paper will build upon the positive analysis by Augustine and Aquinas of generous human love as first in the order of learning and upon the positive evaluation of human 'eros' and 'humanity' as suggested by Barth by developing three main divisions: (1) The paper will draw upon C.S. Lewis's distinction between need-love and gift-love and evaluate both Fletcher and Lewis himself as offering an inadequate conceptualization of human love as always tainted by need-love. (2) The paper will draw upon the moral philosophies of Aristotle and John Dewey who offer us a most positive evaluation of human love as transcending selfishness in their focus upon a person's self-actualization in something greater than the self. (3) Finally, the paper will draw upon the reflections of the theologian Gregory Baum who was influenced by the French thinker Maurice Blondel. Blondel and Baum, then, offer a different grasp of humanity and God than the extrinsicist theology offered by Joseph Fletcher and C. S. Lewis in which God swoops in upon human nature to save humans from their sins with the Gift-love from above. Following the lead of Blondel, Baum develops an "intrinsicist" grasp of human striving, not as:

that of the intellect seeking deeper truth; it is, according to Blondel, the dynamics of the will seeking ever greater self-realization through continued action. It is there, in their willing, that God is present to human beings, and it is in their actions that they say Yes to the divine presence.

Joseph Fletcher in his book, *Situation Ethics*, identifies a key presupposition of his Christian situational ethics when he argues that there are two kinds of theological epistemology. The first is theological naturalism in which human

*Professor, James Madison University, USA.

reason can offer both rational proof of God, for example as the First Cause and rational proof of fundamental principles in ethics in Natural Law Ethics. In both of these cases, human reason uses self-evident principles, for example, in natural theology such as "Everything that begins to be has a cause of its beginning to be," and in natural law such as "Do good and avoid evil."¹

The second kind of theological epistemology is theological positivism in which human reason cannot prove either the existence of God or ethical commands of natural law ethics. Rather, a person posits or chooses one's fundamental belief in God and one's fundamental acceptance of God's key value by which a person's life should be lived. This positing or choosing of God and God's key value for life is not a choice against reason, that is, a choice of the absurd such as that $2 + 2 = 5$, but rather a choice that is not against reason, a choice like that of St. Anselm who held that "I believe in God in order that I may understand God." So, in ethics, the fundamental choice of value is a positing and choosing of "I believe in God's love as the key value in order that I may understand how love can direct all my practical choices in living with others and myself." Both belief in God and belief in Love as the fundamental value of one's ethical life are choices, not a conclusion of reasoning.²

Fletcher points to Hume's argument that we cannot reason from "is" statements, factual statements, to "ought" statements, statements of values we ought to pursue. People have to make a leap into their values, a choice of their values, which cannot be proven as the conclusion of some reasoning process. Fletcher emphasizes that there is no step of logical reasoning, not even a step in common sense, from facts about humans to the values by which humans ought to live. For example, it may be the fact that many, many humans desire to continue living to the value judgment that these many, many people ought to continue to live. The final answer to whether or not some people ought to continue to live depends upon the full situation in which they are living and especially upon the fundamental value of their ethical way of life. If many terrorists desire to live by wreaking havoc amongst their opponents, that desire to live does not require the practical judgment that they ought to live since their opponents' fundamental value might be some principle like love of one's own people that demands revenge against their enemies.³

However, the fundamental value of Fletcher's situational ethics is that of love in the form of *agape*:

The Johannine proposition (*I John 4: 7-11*) is not that God is *love* but that *God* is love! The Christian does not understand God in terms of love; he understands love in

1. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 46-47.

2. *Ibid*, 48-49.

3. *Ibid*, 49.

terms of God as seen in Christ. "We love because he first loved us." This obviously is a faith foundation for love.⁴

A very first evaluation of Fletcher's view of agapeic love as based on a faith foundation can be quickly found in the writings of the German thinker, Bernhard Haring, perhaps the preeminent 20th century Catholic moral theologian who taught in Rome, offers us the commentary from Augustine and Aquinas on 1 John, chapter 4: 16, especially v. 19: "We love because he first loved us."

Haring notes that Aquinas calls this love referred to in verse 19, which God first gives, the ontological priority of God's love. God's love is the creative source which enables people to live and to love. However, in the psychological priority of how we learn to love, both Augustine and Aquinas say that there must first be in our human learning some experience of true love of neighbor before we can love the invisible God. Augustine, is quite clear on this, writing:

The love of God is first in the order of precept but the love of brother is the first in the order of action. ... Love, therefore, your neighbor, and look into yourself to see where this love of neighbor comes from. There you will see God insofar as you are capable. Begin, therefore, by loving your neighbour, share your bread with the hungry, open your house to the roofless, clothe the naked and despise no one of the same human race (Augustine, Tract. XVII in Jo. Ev.6ff, PL35, 1531).^{11 11}.⁵

It is clear, then, that Haring agrees with Augustine and Aquinas that generous human love is the key analogue by which we analogously conceptualize God's generous love. The experience of generous human love is first in the human order of learning.

We can find some support for this positive view of human love, affirmed by Haring, Augustine and Aquinas, in "Eros and Agape in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics," an article by David Clough. Clough notes that Barth does not totally oppose eros and agape and even "attributes to eros qualities he identifies with agape."⁶ Barth has a keen appreciation of eros, writing that eros is:

the sum of human fulfilment and exaltation of life, the experience, depicted and magnified with awe and rapture, of the end and beginning of all choice and volition, of being in transcendence of human being, of that which can take place in sensual or sexual (and thus in the narrower sense erotic) intoxication, but also in an inner spiritual encounter with the suprasensual and suprarational, with the incomprehensible yet present origin of all being and knowledge, in the encounter

4. Ibid.

5. Bernhard Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), volume I, 427.

6. David Clough, "Eros and Agape in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2, no. 2 (2000): 189.

with the Godhead and union in it. Eros is humanity as daëmonism in both the lowest and the highest sense, and as such it is a kind of divinity.⁷

Barth even considers the possibility “whether what is called agape is not really a spiritualised, idealised, sublimated, and pious form of eros.”⁸ However, having raised this possibility, Barth offers a solution to the dichotomy between *eros* and *agape* by consideration of a third term, humanity, understanding it as humans being gladly with each other. Barth writes with the highest praise of the Greek appreciation of this humanity who are gladly with each other: “The Greeks with their eros – and it was no inconsiderable but a very real achievement – grasped the fact that the being of man is free, radically open, willing, spontaneous, joyful, cheerful and gregarious.”⁹

It was most surprising to this author to discover such high words of praise of *eros* by Barth, the great Swiss Calvinist theologian, but we must note that ultimately Clough’s evaluation of Barth is that Barth ultimately does support the traditional distinction and opposition between *eros* and *agape*. Since this author does not wish to give an exhaustive consideration of Barth’s writings on this topic over 20 years, I wish to be content with the possible suggestion that at times Barth’s writing could be in support of Haring, Augustine, and Aquinas on their positive evaluation of generous human love as first in the order of learning even though the creative love of God is first in the order of being.

A Fuller Evaluation of Fletcher’s Positing of Love as the Key Value in Ethics

In this paper we now turn to an evaluation of Fletcher’s claim that there is no step of logical reasoning, not even a step in common sense, from facts about humans to the values by which humans ought to live. (1) We will develop a first evaluation based on C. S. Lewis’s book, *The Four Loves*. (2) We will develop a second evaluation based on an ethics of self-realization based in Aristotle’s and John Dewey’s ethics. (3) We will develop a further consideration of human morality at its best as Gift-love based on the writings of Gregory Baum.

(1) The Analysis of C. S. Lewis in *The Four Loves*

Lewis has famously reflected upon four forms of love from Greek culture and philosophy: (a) Affection (*Storge*), (b) Friendship (*Philia*), (c) Being in love (*Eros*) and (d) Charity or Gift-love (*Agape*). However, he notes that he had

7. Ibid, 191.

8. Ibid, 192.

9. Ibid.

originally intended to write upon Love by distinguishing two kinds of love, Gift-love and Need-love, and that it would be easy to write the highest words of praise for Gift-love. Despite his careful distinction of the four kinds of love, the very last chapter on Charity depends greatly upon his distinction between Gift-love and Need-love. He offers as typical examples of these two loves, the Gift-love of the parents who work hard, denying themselves for their children and grandchildren and even for further descendants, and the Need-love of the frightened young child who clings to a parent's arms for physical security and emotional comfort. In his Christian belief, Lewis notes, and surely Joseph Fletcher as a Christian moral theologian would agree, that God's Love is Gift-love, writing:

Divine Love is Gift-love. The Father gives all He is and has to the Son. The Son gives Himself back to the Father, and gives Himself to the world, and for the world to the Father, and thus gives the world (in Himself) back to the Father too.¹⁰

In evaluation of Lewis's argument that Gift-love, most especially Divine Gift-love in freely choosing to create the universe from nothing, is completely superior to the other three forms of love, it is the argument of this paper that even Lewis's own examples of *Storge* are analogues of Divine Gift-love because the beauty of natural human Gift-love is one of the highest ethical actions to which humans can aspire. Just as mere animals such as the grizzly bear mother and the mother lioness will risk their lives to preserve the life of their offspring, so also human parents can risk their lives, even lose their lives, for the sake of their offspring. As Lewis himself argues in the last chapter, God implants in humans Gift-loves such as the love of a devoted parent and the love of a devoted teacher who both can and do give, thereby exhibiting a likeness of unto God who is Pure Gift-love. It is quite clear then that Lewis understands human Gift-loves as analogues to Divine Gift-love. So, we may reasonably argue that Joseph Fletcher is wrong to say that there is no common sense step suggesting the possibility of understanding God as Divine Gift-love. We are not saying that we have offered proof of God by a deductive argument, but Lewis himself has offered us some inductive suggestions.

Despite our high praise for the human analogues of human gift-love for Divine gift-love, Lewis himself denigrates human Gift-love. Lewis holds that Divine Gift-love is completely generous for the sake of the best for the beloved whereas human Gift-love is fundamentally attracted to what is intrinsically lovable. Divine Gift-love can enable a human person "to love what is not naturally lovable: lepers, criminals, enemies, morons, the sulky, the superior and the sneering [Lewis, 119]."

I actually hesitated to quote Lewis exactly here since he has revealed his own prejudice here against morons. He has dated himself as locked in mid-20th century

10. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1991), 5.

stereotypes here. So, we may question his list of those who are naturally unlovable. Yes, there can be people today who would agree with Lewis's list of those who are naturally unlovable, but there are others today who are non-Christian who would treat lepers, criminals and even enemies with compassionate love. Lewis is surely mistaken to ignore Gandhi, Buddha, and Mencius who lived and taught an all-embracing compassion.

Furthermore, Daniel Day Williams has considered Reinhold Niebuhr's concept of agapeic love, affirming that Niebuhr makes too sharp a distinction between agapeic love which is sacrificial of the self and mutual love which affirms the good both of the other and the self. For the ultimate aim of God's outpouring of the love is the aim towards the Kingdom of God, as Williams writes:

The Kingdom of God, let us say, is not the negation of any self, but rather the fulfillment of it. Therefore, *agape* intends a good which does include the ultimate good of the self. In intention universal mutual love and sacrificial love are one, for what is intended is the mutual good of all, and where this is really intended the self is ready to sacrifice anything for that good except the good itself.¹¹

So, if the mutual good of all is threatened, a person may give oneself unto this goal even at the risk of loss of self. What might be lost or injured is the physical self, but what is gained is precisely the fulfillment of the moral-religious self so that the highest level of self-fulfillment in both agapeic love and mutual love is combined.

In support of our evaluation of C. S. Lewis and of Fletcher and in accord with the analysis of Daniel Day Williams, we may now turn our attention to the most beautiful metaphor offered in scripture for understanding Divine Gift-love. In the gospel according to Luke, Jesus affirms, "Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate" [CEB, Luke 6: 16]. As Elizabeth Johnson points out, the Aramaic root word for compassion is based upon the word for a woman's womb and means to feel for another person as if you are feeling for another as the child of your womb. And she further notes that the Hebrew scriptures show that both men and women can feel such compassion for another.¹² The compassion of God does not reach its fulfillment simply in Gift-love for the sinner since, as Johnson writes: "We are loved in order to love; gifted in order to gift; and befriended in order to turn to the world as sisters and brothers in redeeming, liberating friendship".¹³ Johnson even further agrees with:

11. Daniel Day Williams, *God's Grace and Man's Hope*: Chapter 3, "Man's Real Good." (New York: Harper & Bros, 1949), ch. 3.

12. Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1992), 101.

13. *Ibid*, 146.

Sally McFague's analysis of the model of God as friend [which] beautifully demonstrates that friendship (*philia*) is the most free relation known to adult human beings. Presuming a side-by-sidedness in its participants, it is characterized by mutual trust and responsibility, absorption in common interests, and inclusivity toward others, which may extend even to stranger and alien. What is relevant in speaking about Spirit in this model is that friendship entails a reciprocity of relationship that exists independently of one's place in the social order, making it possible to cross boundaries of race, sex, class, and even natures. Since the Spirit not only makes human beings friends of God but herself befriends the world, she can rightly be named friend par excellence . . . supported and energized the gracious compassion and powerfully sympathy . . .¹⁴

It is important to note that this highest praise of compassion in scripture is not to be understood as something which is above and apart from human virtue. For Aristotle has argued that just as a mother can have compassion for the child of her womb and even be willing to die to save her, so also can a friend have compassion for one's friend in the friendship of the virtuous and even be willing to die to save the life of one's friend [NE, 9, 4-8]. Whereas friendship of utility and friendship of pleasure are selfish in their foundation and last only as long as the usefulness or pleasure continues, friendship of the virtuous are generous in their foundation and can be lasting. In this friendship of the virtuous, a person seeks to aid the development of true virtue in the friend just as one seeks the development of true virtue in oneself.

In the light of, first, the scriptural usage as a model for God's compassionate love of the compassionate love of the mother for her child, and second, the Aristotelian reflections on the highest virtue of compassion which would move a mother to risk her life for her child and which would also move a person of virtue to risk one's life for the sake of the friend's life, we may again affirm that there are human analogues for understanding the highest actions of God as compassionate, that is, as Gift-love. C. S. Lewis and Joseph Fletcher are wrong to say that there is no common sense basis for understanding God as Gift-love. We may agree with them that these human analogues for God's love are not a logical proof of God, but if we had no human analogues for God's Gift-love, how could we ever begin to understand God's Gift-love?

(2) Aristotle and John Dewey on Self-realization

We have seen already in this essay that Aristotle's ethics reach their highest point in his reflections upon friendship of the virtuous as going significantly beyond friendships of pleasure and utility. In this highest friendship one loves another as one loves oneself, not for any selfish reason such as for pleasure or for

14. Ibid, 145.

money, but for the sake of developing true virtue in the other as in oneself. A true friend can transcend any selfish motive or selfish advantage by being willing to give up one's life to save the other's life.

John Dewey makes a distinction between two kinds of moral action: first, conventional or customary morality in which the individual is guided by the conventional habits of one's culture, and, second, critical morality rooted in one's examined way of life. In one's examination of habits of behavior expected by society, one's reflections may affirm those habits as the reasonable way to act or affirm a new way of acting that goes beyond one's own culture to a better way of acting [Dewey, and Tufts, 38]. In this second form of moral action, the examined way of life, Dewey notes that there is an element of self-realization. For one is forming and realizing the potential of the self to be acting at the highest moral level. However, even though the moral self is being formed and realized through one's actions, the focus of the moral consciousness is not selfish in that one's glorious moral self is being realized but that something greater than the self is being developed. As Dewey writes:

For example, the patriot who dies for his country may find in that devotion his own supreme self-realization, but none the less the aim of his act is precisely that for which he performs it: the conservation of his nation. He dies for his country, not for himself. He is what he would be in dying for his country, not in dying for himself. To say that his conscious aim is self-realization is to put the cart before the horse. That his willingness to die for his country proves that his country's good is taken by him to constitute himself and his own good is true; but his aim is his country's good as constituting his self-realization, not the self-realization. . . . The problem of morality, upon the intellectual side, is the discovery of the self, in the objective end to be striven for, and then upon the overt practical side, it is the losing of the self in the endeavor for the objective realization. This is the lasting truth in the conception of self-abnegation, self-forgetfulness, disinterested [impartial] interest.¹⁵

The conscious aim of the patriot is the conservation of one's country, not the glory of being a martyr for one's country. Yes, one could become famous in the annals of one's country, but it is not the direct goal of one's moral action. One is dying for something greater than one's mere physical self, one is dying consciously for one's community, indeed, for its ideal realization. Dewey himself points out a significant comparison here with the hedonistic paradox. If a person makes one's own happiness the direct, conscious aim of one's actions, the paradox develops that one frustrates that very development of happiness that is being sought after. So also, if one makes one's self-realization the conscious aim of one's action in dying for the sake of one's country, this conscious emphasis

15. John Dewey, and James H. Tufts, *Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), 393-394.

upon the self makes one's heroic action difficult if not impossible. As Dewey writes:

As there is a 'hedonistic paradox,' namely that the way to get happiness is to forget it, to devote ourselves to things and persons about us; so there is a 'moralistic' paradox, that the way to get goodness is to cease to think of it—as something separate—and to devote ourselves to the realization of the full value of the practical situations in which we find ourselves. Men can really think of their 'duty' only when they are thinking of specific things to be done; to think of Duty at large or in the abstract is one of the best ways of avoiding doing it, or of doing it in a partial and perverted way.¹⁶

It is both in the practical forgetting of self-realization as one's conscious aim and in the affirmation of the concrete solving of one's problem of one's risking one's life for the sake of another that we find proper self-realization in the highest level of moral action. Dewey's affirmation of the importance of living, not for oneself directly, but by transcending oneself, is affirmed also by Gregory Baum, who has "defended the view . . . that man's self-realization is a process in which sacrifice and self-abnegation have an essential role".¹⁷

The very nature of moral action for John Dewey and Gregory Baum requires then that ethical action not be primarily thought of as an action for the self, but as an action for something greater than the self. As Aristotle has affirmed about the compassion of the mother for her child and about the compassion of one friend for another in the friendship of virtue, moral action transcends selfishness by forgetting about the self and focusing upon something other than the self. Consequently, we may affirm that the Aristotelian and Deweyan concept of moral action suggests an analogue for C. S. Lewis's and Joseph Fletcher's concept of God's love as Gift-love. God's love in a sense may be understood as forgetting of Divine self-love in pouring love out concretely into creation itself, just as human moral action in our best understanding of moral action as not focused upon one's own self-love in self-realization but upon the development of something other than one's own self, something beyond oneself. Human moral action may be understood as Gift-love.

(3) Further Development of Moral Action as Gift-Love

The thought of Gregory Baum offers an even richer understanding of moral action at its best as Gift-love. Baum in a review of his life's work noted the profound impact of his reading of the French philosopher, Maurice Blondel, writing:

16. Ibid, 353.

17. Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970), 155.

Blondel had protested against theologies that presented God as the Father in heaven, the omnipotent sovereign above history, the supreme Being external to human life, whose grace descended upon humans from above. In these theologies God is seen as extrinsic to human history, intervening at times to lift people up to a higher order. Blondel named these theologies "extrinsicist."¹⁸

Blondel and Baum, then, offer a different grasp of humanity and God than the extrinsicist theology offered by Joseph Fletcher and C. S. Lewis in which God swoops in upon human nature to save humans from their sins with the Gift-love from above. Following the lead of Blondel, Baum develops an "intrinsicist" grasp of human striving, not as:

that of the intellect seeking deeper truth; it is, according to Blondel, the dynamics of the will seeking ever greater self-realization through continued action. It is there, in their willing, that God is present to human beings, and it is in their actions that they say Yes to the divine presence.¹⁹

So, we may turn with Baum to our human striving for friendship in which Baum argues that love always comes as a gift. If we thought that we could merit and earn friendship, if we submitted a list of our achievements to the person whose friendship we desired and then demanded love from the other as a reward for our efforts, there would be two negative effects: (1) we wouldn't receive love from the other as a freely given gift, and (2) in fact, we would render ourselves incapable of receiving it properly even if it were offered freely from the other because we would have thought that we had earned the love from the other. It is true that we need to work hard at being a good friend, at doing the things that friends need to do for each other, at making sacrifices for the other. But the friendship is at its best free and unmerited. Affection cannot be merited or earned.²⁰

The profound things in human life are always gifts. We may work hard at acquiring a skill, but the best levels of that skill come as a gift into our lives flowing unto others. Let us consider four examples of the experience of life as a gift:

- (a) The musician practices her skills and acquires good habits of playing the piano, but one day in a performance or competition, the spirit of music comes alive in her, and she receives the gift of music in and through her being.

18. Baum, *The Oil Has Not Run Dry: The Story of My Theological Pathway* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), 54.

19. *Ibid.*, 55.

20. Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience*, 1970, 128.

- (b) The sculptor learns his skills step by step, but one day Michelangelo takes a gigantic block of marble with which others have failed and the spirit of sculpture comes alive in him, and he is more creative than he dreamed that he could be, creating *The David*.
- (c) The quarterback learns his skills step by step, fails but relearns, and one day the spirit of quarterbacking comes alive within him in a two minute drill, no huddle offense, leading his team 80 yards to the winning touchdown. He does not praise himself at the end of game but tells how deeply indebted he is to his great linemen and his great receivers. Playing football is a gift he receives even as he practices thoroughly at it.²¹
- (d) The teacher works hard at understanding the great texts of her discipline, and she writes out her lectures carefully, reasoning out each step of argument as best she can. One day she is asked a question to which she knows that she does not know the answer. However, as she begins to reply, the spirit of philosophy comes alive in her, and she is able to answer the question surprised at her own answer. Also, she learns to let go of her carefully reasoned lectures. She reaches into her childhood, her adolescence, her love of poetry, music, and literature, and she is able to lecture from her heart and with her heart, striving to make the materials come alive in the hearts of her students. Teaching becomes the gift she receives and the gift she gives.²²

In a similar manner, the young person practices the skills of moral action, doing the good deeds of morality, thereby building the good habits of moral character, especially the general virtues of faith, hope, and generous love. She fails at times, perhaps many times, even building negative habits against those key virtues. But just as she first learned through the free gifts of faith, hope and love from others to believe in herself, hope in herself and love herself and others, she is able to relearn faith, hope, and love again from these beautiful others who believe in her and hope in her, and love her more than she does herself. Faith, hope, and love come again and again as gifts into her life. She practices these virtues faithfully, and one day she is able to give her life as a gift unto others more than she ever dreamed that she could. Morality has become the gift she receives and the gift she offers unto others.

It is best to understand the reflections of Gregory Baum on morality as occurring within the panentheistic tradition in which God and the universe are neither completely separated from each other as a distinction between supernatural and nature nor intertwined so completely that each is identical with the other as in pantheism. In a panentheistic reflection, God is present to the

21. *Ibid*, 129.

22. *Ibid*, 132.

universe in such a way that: "God acts in the universe, then, not by determining outcomes or by knowing what will occur, but rather by making all things possible and luring the freedom of the temporal agents of the universe toward the best possibility in their situations."²³ Consequently, God is always present in the human attempt to realize moral ideals with the great lure of the ideal of agapeic love and compassionate love as the best possibility to which humans are called.

As Baum summarizes himself, then, human moral behavior is not to be understood as the mere human attempt in striving to obey the natural moral laws, but as humans striving to live up to God's greatest gift of the divine lure of agapeic and compassionate love. Baum's approach here is deeply similar to the approach of John Cobb, Jr., who emphasizes both God's compassionate love and God's agapeic love.²⁴ Despite any human failures in moral behavior, agapeic love is the great ideal which is inherent in the possibilities presented by God's continuing presence in humanity in the panentheistic concept of God and nature. Baum, consequently, affirms that morality involves human transformation, transcending false self-love towards the gracious gift of self unto others as agapeic and compassionate love since "God is redemptively present in the process by which humans become more truly and ideally human."²⁵

Conclusion

Joseph Fletcher has affirmed that there is no step of logical reasoning, not even a step in common sense, from facts about humans to the values by which humans ought to live and much less any logical reasoning or common-sense step from human ethics to the concept of God as Gift-love and Compassionate-love.

We have reflected upon:

- (1) The writings of C. S. Lewis in order to find human analogues for conceptualizing God as Gift-Love, offering a common sense step towards a conceptualization of God as Gift-love. However, Lewis himself denigrates human Gift-love as attracted only to what is intrinsically

23. Thomas E. Hosinski, *Open Theology*, 2015, Volume 1 (1), "Thomas Aquinas and Alfred North Whitehead on God's Action in the World," 275.

24. John. B Cobb., Jr., "God is Compassion and Agape," in *How I Found God in Everyone and Everywhere: An Anthology of Spiritual Memoirs* (eds.) Andrew M. Davis, and Philip Clayton (New York: Monkfish, 2018).

25. Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience*, 1970, 132. See also: "If Whitehead's metaphysics is revised to think of creativity as the divine life rather than as ultimately distinct from God, then it, too, presents God as sharing the divine life with creatures by endowing them with the creativity and freedom to create themselves on the divinely-given ground of possibility." Hosinski, 2015, 269-276.

valuable, but we have offered an evaluation that other major thinkers have affirmed even the love of one's enemies.

- (2) The writings of Aristotle and John Dewey who offer a natural ethics of self-realization in which a person may offer one's life as a gift unto something greater than the self as when a mother is willing to die for her child and when a friend in the friendship of the virtuous is willing to die for one's friend. Dewey points out that it is not that one's goal is self-realization, but the realization of something greater than the self. In fact, Dewey points out that direct seeking of self-realization thwarts one's efforts in seeking a goal greater than the self in a manner quite similar to the hedonistic paradox when the direct seeking of one's happiness ruins the very pursuit of happiness. Consequently, when we understand that the ethical understanding of self-realization finds its best aim in the forgetting of the self for the sake of something greater than the self, so we find human analogues for conceptualizing God as Gift-love in human actions (a) for Aristotle, in the mother giving her life for her child, (b) for Aristotle, in a friend giving one's life for the sake of the friend, and (c) for Dewey, in a patriot risking one's life for one's country.
- (3) And, finally, the writings of Gregory Baum who has attacked the extrinsicist conceptualizing of God as "the supreme Being external to human life, whose grace descended upon humans from above" [Baum. 2017, 54]. Rather, Baum offers an intrinsicist understanding of human moral action as more than mere human moral action involved in our attempts to obey the moral law, but rather as a human participation in Divine Gift-love and Compassionate-Love.

Consequently, we can find rich suggestions in our reflections upon human morality at its best in the writings of C.S. Lewis, Daniel Day Williams, Aristotle, John Dewey, and Gregory Baum for finding common sense steps which are analogues for conceptualizing God as Gift-love.

Bibliography

- Baum, Gregory. *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1970.
- _____. *The Oil Has Not Run Dry: The Story of My Theological Pathway*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017.
- Clough, David. "Eros and Agape in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2, no. 2 (2000): 189-203.
- Cobb, John. B., Jr., "God is Compassion and Agape." In *How I Found God in Everyone and Everywhere: An Anthology of Spiritual Memoirs*, edited by Andrew M. Davis and Philip Clayton. New York: Monkfish, 2018.
- Dewey, John, and James H. Tufts. *Ethics*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914.

- Fletcher, Joseph. *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966.
- Haring, Bernhard. *Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity*. Volumes I and II. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982.
- Holy Bible: Common English Bible. Nashville, TN: Common English Bible, 2011.
- Hosinski, Thomas E. *Open Theology*, 2015, Volume 1 (1), "Thomas Aquinas and Alfred North Whitehead on God's Action in the World," 269-276.
- Johnson, Elizabeth. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1992.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Four Loves*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1991.
- Williams, Daniel Day. *God Grace and Man's Hope*: Chapter 3, "Man's Real Good." New York: Harper & Bros, 1949.