



# Love, Reason, & God's Story

An Introduction to Catholic Sexual Ethics

David Cloutier

Saint Mary's Press®

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# Contents

## Part 1

### Sexuality and Catholicism: Telling the Stories

<b>1 Love and Reason</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Your Heart or Your Head? .....	14
Two Descriptions of Romantic Love: Completion and Sickness. ....	15
Romantic Love among the Loves .....	16
<b>For Discussion</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Avoiding Ranking: Practicing the Loves in Everyday Life .....	23
Friendship and Romance: How Do You Decide? .....	24
Reason .....	24
Actions Have Purposes .....	26
Actions and Desires .....	27
<b>For Discussion</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Ordering Multiple Desires: Narratives and the Ultimate End .....	29
<b>For Discussion</b> .....	<b>32</b>
One Last Piece: Virtues and Vices .....	32
Conclusion .....	34

**2 Love Stories . . . . . 36**

Ingredients of a Love Story . . . . . 37

**For Discussion . . . . . 39**

Scholarly Love Stories: Biology, Psychology, Society . . . . . 39

    Biology . . . . . 40

**For Discussion . . . . . 44**

    Psychology . . . . . 44

**For Discussion . . . . . 46**

    Society . . . . . 46

**For Discussion . . . . . 50**

Fisher, Freud, Foucault, and Our Everyday Lives . . . . . 51

    Challenging Stories? . . . . . 54

Conclusion . . . . . 55

**3 God's Story . . . . . 57**

What Is a God Story? . . . . . 58

**For Discussion . . . . . 61**

The Bible as God's Story . . . . . 61

    God's Story, Plotline 1: Idolatry . . . . . 62

    God's Story, Plotline 2: Jesus . . . . . 68

    God's Story, Plotline 3: Rejection and Conversion . . . . . 70

    God's Story, Plotline 4: Reconciliation . . . . . 76

**For Discussion . . . . . 79**

God's Story and Love Stories:

Some Preliminary Observations . . . . . 79

**For Discussion . . . . . 85**

Conclusion . . . . . 85

<b>4</b>	<b>God's Story and Sexuality</b> . . . . .	<b>86</b>
	Some Initial Controversies. . . . .	86
	Men and Women. . . . .	87
	Men and Women: Different or Not? . . . . .	87
	Gender Today . . . . .	89
	Practical Consequences? . . . . .	92
	<b>For Discussion</b> . . . . .	<b>95</b>
	Gender and Sexual Attraction . . . . .	95
	What Is Sexual Orientation? . . . . .	96
	The Bible and Homosexuality . . . . .	100
	Homosexuality and the Christian Tradition Today . . . . .	102
	Reflection for Debate on Sexual Orientation . . . . .	105
	<b>For Discussion</b> . . . . .	<b>107</b>
	Conclusion and Transition . . . . .	108

## *Part 2*

### **Sexuality and Catholicism: Exploring the Practices**

<b>5</b>	<b>Practices of Sexuality:</b>	
	<b>The Purposes of Dating</b> . . . . .	<b>110</b>
	Dating in Historical Context . . . . .	111
	Explaining the Contemporary Scene . . . . .	115
	Getting Theological: The Christian Dating Debate. . . . .	117
	<b>For Discussion</b> . . . . .	<b>120</b>
	Dating and Ethics: Reason and God's Story . . . . .	120
	Purposes for Dating: Only Marriage or Also Intimacy? . . . . .	121
	<b>For Discussion</b> . . . . .	<b>125</b>

Practicing Dating: Latitude, Anarchy, or Chastity? .....	125
<i>For Discussion</i> .....	<b>131</b>
Conclusion .....	131

## 6

### Rules of the Practice:

<b>Sexual Activity in Dating</b> .....	<b>132</b>
Absolute Norms: A Primer .....	133
<i>For Discussion</i> .....	<b>137</b>
Evaluating Sexual Actions: Relationship Sex .....	137
<i>For Discussion</i> .....	<b>142</b>
Evaluating Sexual Actions: Sex and Procreation .....	143
Not-Quite-Sex Sexual Actions .....	147
<i>For Discussion</i> .....	<b>151</b>
Masturbation .....	151
<i>For Discussion</i> .....	<b>155</b>
Conclusion .....	155

## 7

### Practices of Sexuality:

<b>The Purposes of Marriage</b> .....	<b>157</b>
Marriage and Contemporary American Society .....	158
<i>For Discussion</i> .....	<b>162</b>
The Two Purposes of Marriage .....	162
Marriage in History: The Primacy of Procreation .....	163
<i>For Discussion</i> .....	<b>165</b>
Love (Communion) in Ancient Marriage .....	166
<i>For Discussion</i> .....	<b>168</b>

Contemporary Reflection and Discussion on the Purposes of Marriage . . . . .	169
Debating the Purposes of Marriage . . . . .	171
Married Love . . . . .	172
Vowed Love: Permanence and Exclusivity . . . . .	173
Building Love: Mutuality, Intimacy, Companionship, and Conversion . . . . .	176
Sharing Love: Moving beyond Each Other . . . . .	179
<b>For Discussion</b> . . . . .	<b>180</b>
Why Have and Raise Children? . . . . .	180
<b>For Discussion</b> . . . . .	<b>184</b>
Conclusion . . . . .	185



<b>Rules of the Practice:</b>	
<b>Sexual Activity in Marriage . . . . .</b>	<b>186</b>
Marriage, Quasi-Marriage, and Cohabitation . . . . .	187
The Purposes of Marriage and Moral Norms . . . . .	191
Adultery . . . . .	191
<b>For Discussion</b> . . . . .	<b>193</b>
Contraception . . . . .	193
<b>For Discussion</b> . . . . .	<b>204</b>
A Brief Reflection on Temperance . . . . .	204
Conclusion . . . . .	208



**9 Practices of Sexuality: The Purposes of Sacramental or Vocational Marriage . . . . . 209**

Marriage and Family in the City:  
The Problem of Locating Love . . . . . 211

Marriage and Family within the Horizontal God Story . . . . . 214  
    Jesus, Israel, and the Kingdom of God . . . . . 214  
    The Kingdom and Marriage in Scripture . . . . . 216

Celibacy . . . . . 219  
    *For Discussion* . . . . . 221

Recovering Marriage as a Vocation for the Kingdom . . . . . 222  
    *For Discussion* . . . . . 225

The Kingdom and the Sacraments . . . . . 225  
    *For Discussion* . . . . . 227

Sacramental Marriage in the Kingdom-Household:  
New Families in the New Family . . . . . 228  
    *For Discussion* . . . . . 230

Conclusion . . . . . 230

**10 Rules of the Practice: Society and Sacramental Marriage. . . . . 232**

The External Transformations of Vocational Marriage . . . . . 233  
    Definition and Description of Closed Household . . . . . 235  
    Is There an Alternative? . . . . . 236

The Interior Transformation of Vocational Marriage:  
Natural Marriage Transfigured . . . . . 237

<b>Love Transformed: Indestructible and Sanctifying</b> . . . . .	<b>238</b>
Sanctification . . . . .	239
Indestructibility . . . . .	241
Debating Divorce . . . . .	244
<b><i>For Discussion</i></b> . . . . .	<b>252</b>
<b>Parenting Transformed: Children as Sacrifice</b> . . . . .	<b>252</b>
The Catholic Family: Questions of Structure, Questions of Purpose . . . . .	253
Work, Home, and Sacrifice as a Parent . . . . .	254
The Purposes of Catholic Parenting . . . . .	256
<b><i>For Discussion</i></b> . . . . .	<b>259</b>
<b>Special Issues: Vocation and Mixed Marriages</b> . . . . .	<b>259</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> . . . . .	<b>262</b>

## *11 Epilogue*

<b>Forgiveness and Reconciliation:</b>	
<b>The Final Word of Ethics</b> . . . . .	<b>264</b>
Forgiveness, Guilt, and Righteousness . . . . .	266
The Process of Reconciliation . . . . .	269
Sex, Confession, and Forgiveness . . . . .	273
Conclusion . . . . .	274

<b>Endnotes and Further Reading</b> . . . . .	<b>275</b>
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# Introduction and Acknowledgments

Why is it that students today, on the one hand, universally regard issues of sexuality and marriage as central concerns for their lives, yet on the other hand, will conclude ten minutes into a discussion of such issues that everyone has different, irreconcilable “opinions,” about which we can make no judgments? Why is something so apparently important to human happiness so unclear and undiscussable?

Some people have a ready answer to this apparent contradiction. When it comes to human sexuality, they will argue, “It’s all relative, so do whatever feels right to you.” Their response ends all discussion. But others argue against such relativism, claiming to defend moral truth. Yet asserting absolute truth also ends all discussion. So on one side, we have people walking around in a fog, unable to make distinctions, and on the other are people for whom moral issues are black and white and foginess is strictly forbidden.

The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has suggested that these two positions—moral relativism and moral dogmatism—are really two sides of the same coin, which he calls “moral thoughtlessness.”

We attempt in this textbook to move beyond the inadequacies of both positions, paying particular attention to navigating moral language that can send us into the rocks of either extreme. Our primary objective here is *moral thoughtfulness* about sexuality and marriage. We attempt to cultivate this moral thoughtfulness in two ways.

First, we recognize that when we are talking about sex and marriage, we are first and foremost talking about *social practices*. Historically, and especially in the Catholic tradition, discussion of sexual ethics has tended to focus on *individual acts*. Many in contemporary Catholic moral theology have rejected this act-centered approach in favor of a person-centered one, but especially in the area of sexual ethics, a person-centered approach runs us near if not directly into the rocks of moral relativism.

Rather than take the sharp turn back to act-centered moral theology, we take here a practice-centered approach. We inquire extensively into the central practice of marriage, but we do not neglect the practice of pre-

marital relationships (dating or whatever it is called these days!). Individual acts as well as the classic controversial issues such as premarital sex and divorce are then examined within these broader social practices. Moreover, we emphasize that even these individual acts are social practices—that the organization of sexuality is invariably a communal concern and remains so even in a supposedly relativistic and individualistic age. For this reason, sexual practices can be subjected to communal reason.

However public such practices may be, can we really subject them to *normative* considerations? Can we say there are *good* and *bad* forms of sexual and marital practices? It seems to me that we do this all the time. Popular, quite secular books, TV talk shows, and Internet sites give “advice” about sex and relationships—that advice is surely a form of normative guidance. Virtually no one in our society, wherever they fall on the political or religious spectrum, imagines that a system of sex and marriage centered on maintaining hereditary privilege or on the complete power of males to define and make choices is “better” than the one we have now. Try suggesting arranged marriage in a class and see how quickly students conclude that such a practice would be terrible (in their view), thus indicating how our current system of practices is indeed strongly “good.”

Here we come to the second primary aspect of cultivating thoughtfulness: it is not merely *practices*, but also the *stories* we tell about sex and marriage that are already normative. We are already engaged in making judgments about what forms of relationships are good and bad, even if we are more likely to apply the terms “healthy” and “unhealthy.” In other words, whatever slogans people might use, they are not functioning in an actual fog, but with an often under-articulated roadmap. Besides explaining that roadmap a bit (the concern of the first three chapters of this text), we must also ask if the map is any good in the first place.

To do this, we must learn how to integrate our feelings and judgments about sex and marriage within a larger (“cosmic”) whole. In our society, sex and marriage are compartmentalized, forming their own little drama, but any sense that our sexual choices and our marriages—our practices—have a meaning larger than ourselves is painfully lacking. Rejection of this “cosmic meaninglessness” is what makes this textbook “Catholic.” More than any allegiance to a set of particular rules, more even than an allegiance to certain sources of knowledge such as the Bible and tradition, Catho-

lic sexual ethics possesses the conviction that sex and marriage do exist within a larger whole, within the larger story of creation and salvation, in which God and God's creation enact a relationship. This conviction places Catholic sexual ethics in a camp that includes virtually every other great religious tradition and every so-called pagan society as well—in other words, virtually every human being ever, *except* for many born since the turn of the twentieth century in the industrialized West, has shared this view that sex and marriage are part of something very big indeed! While these cosmic stories may have important differences, they have all regarded the normative claims of sexuality to be rooted in something larger than the individual or the changing conventions of society.

But even the twentieth-century West is not exactly free of sexual mythology. Quite to the contrary, the mythology of the twentieth century offers a pretty comprehensive story—a story about sexual happiness as the ultimate form of self-expression. The larger drama of self-expression and self-fulfillment (which, we are told, should be the central preoccupation of our lives) gives a high priority to sexual choices. Whether offering the image of a “soul mate” or selling drugs that keep us sexually energized and active quite apart from any natural cycles of fertility or maturity, the story remains. It is often a story that shipwrecks on the rocks of disappointment, even of chaos, because of its bizarre promises and inattention to any sort of discipline or formation. But it is a story.

Catholicism offers quite a different “larger” story. In the first half of this textbook, we try to get at that story, often by comparing it to dominant cultural stories. Catholicism and popular culture also provide quite different frames for thinking through the social practices of sex, dating, and marriage, practices we explore in the second half of the book.

Finally, our ultimate allegiance to *either* story is rooted in the same thing: faith. Either story of life is a pilgrimage of faith. But they are decidedly different stories.

# Part 1

**Sexuality and Catholicism**  
Telling the Stories



# Love and Reason

## Your Heart or Your Head?

We've all had to ask this question, particularly when we face choices about romantic relationships. What do we mean by "heart" and "head"? What exactly are we asking here?

This is a good place to begin our study of Catholic sexual ethics. In a sense, the heart/head problem helps us begin to understand the terms "sexual" and "ethics" in our subject. We'll get to "Catholic" later: it's probably the most complicated. For now we can start by simply reflecting on our experiences of the heart, the question of love.

## Two Descriptions of Romantic Love: Completion and Sickness

Is this love? The fact that we ask this question points us to certain assumptions we make about falling in love. Most importantly, we take it as a fundamental, almost uncontrollable human experience. We “fall” into it. Something happens, and we are drawn to another person. Yet students of Western culture have, for some time, reminded us that our experience of romantic love is shaped by the language and cultural expectations of our time. For us, in a world where practically every movie, TV show, and song has at least a romantic subplot, it is no wonder that we “fall in love.”

So let’s look at two descriptions of romantic love that do not come from modern culture. These descriptions should help us name our own experiences with more attention to detail.

The first is drawn from the discussion of love in one of Plato’s dialogues. Aristophanes, one of the characters, suggests that romantic love happens because lovers are two parts of an original whole that has been separated. The human race was originally created as large, four-armed, four-legged creatures with faces in both directions. However, these creatures proved extremely powerful, so much so that they sought to assault the gods. Yet Zeus and the gods did not want to kill off the humans, for that would mean no one would honor and make sacrifices to the gods. So Zeus devised a plan to weaken them: cut them in half, and then turn their faces around to face the cut (an explanation of the belly button), so that they would not forget the gods’ power.

This did in fact weaken the humans considerably, but caused them a lot of trauma. They went around searching for their “other half,” and when their other half was found, they would throw their arms around each other in a tight embrace and refuse to let go. Indeed, the embrace was so total that they began to die of hunger, since they would not leave each other. What to do? Zeus devised the perfect solution: turn their genitals around. That way, when they embraced, it would lead to new generations, and the race would not die off. And so it came to pass that romantic love, which was the force that arose from their sense of being incomplete and separated from themselves, would also function for human regeneration.



Compare this story to the attitudes and practice of the Fulbe, a people who live in the northern part of Cameroun, in West Africa. Helen Regis writes, “The ability to control emotions lies at the heart of the Fulbe construction of personhood” (“The Madness of Excess,” 142). The highest value is placed on poise and on one’s general availability to fellow villagers. The people show a remarkable generosity and attentiveness. However, this spirit of solidarity is threatened by the “madness” of love. Hence the Fulbe, along with other African peoples, regard romantic love as the result of being possessed by spirits. In one example a man who refuses to find a second wife after his first wife is found to be infertile is constantly criticized: “Her charms are too much for him. He has lost his head completely!” (p. 144). Men who spend too much time at home with their wives, and not enough in public, are said to be “sick” and “under the power of a spell” (p. 145). The Fulbe tell a story in which a man falls in love while traveling, only to find that the woman is a member of a tribe who can turn into hyenas and eat humans. The story illustrates the fate of those who are unable to control their emotions, and instead give in to them. As Regis writes, “It would be difficult to construct a more frightening scenario. Her kin, as hyenas, literally tried to eat him alive” (p. 146). Only a madman would seek such a fate.

## Romantic Love among the Loves

It is evident from both these stories that whatever “falling in love” is, it is understood in descriptive contrast to certain other kinds of feelings and experiences. For example, love is somehow different from lust. The love of which we are speaking is not the same as a practical relationship of usefulness. It is not a love bestowed on everyone. It coexists with friendship relationships, but is not necessarily the same. Indeed, it is potentially a threat to friendly relations in the community . . . or even with the gods! These contrasts invite us to develop our description by considering how this experience fits into the entire web of human relationships in our lives.

That phrase—*romantic* love—suggests that more is going on here than what the word “love” alone conveys. Surely we love a great many people: our parents, for example, or friends or roommates. You may love a favorite teacher or a celebrity. So what makes romantic relationships distinct? What

makes them “romantic”? And why do we feel this way toward some people but not others?

The immediate reaction to this question is predictable: sex. I would suggest that that conclusion is premature. Are romantic relationships just about sex? Are the best romantic relationships simply the ones with the best sex? Most people are likely to think that there is more involved. But what?

The best way to approach describing the distinctiveness of romantic relationships is to compare them with other sorts of relationships. To do so, I will enlist the aid of the famous writer C. S. Lewis, whose classic book, *The Four Loves*, offers us extensive descriptions of four types of loves: storge, philia, eros, and agape. These Greek words cover some of the different meanings we intend when we say we love someone. Lewis didn't make up these distinctions—they have been around at least since ancient Greece—but by following him, we may grasp more clearly how romantic love (eros) compares and contrasts with other loves in our lives.

The first love Lewis discusses is *storge* (pronounced STORE-gay). He describes storge as “the humblest and most widely diffused” of all the loves (p. 31). Lewis uses the English word “affection” to name this love, but we might simply describe this love as neighborliness or “being nice.” The primary characteristic of this love is that “almost anyone can become an object of affection” (p. 32). There is no need to match age or interests or personality traits. You can have this sort of friendly, neighborly relationship with just about anyone, from your parents to your distant cousins, from your next-door neighbor's grandmother to your local store clerk.

This may not sound much like love, but in fact it is immensely valuable in two ways. First, Lewis says storge is the love that leads to “the truly wide taste in humanity.” It is the sort of love that can be on good terms with anyone. Storge sets us at ease in wide gatherings and is gracious to all. The teacher who takes good care of all of his or her students might be an example, or the doctor who works with all sorts of different patients and treats them warmly. Second, these examples should help us recognize how storge is ever-present in our daily lives, and how miserable life would be without it. Imagine, by contrast, the cold and distant doctor or the rude store clerk. Imagine the driver consumed with aggression and hostility. The absence of such neighborliness makes life difficult, but its presence can transform daily life into something good. College campuses are classic examples:

some schools advertise how friendly and warm their campus communities are. This doesn't mean everyone is best friends with everyone else. Rather, it means that daily life is permeated with a general friendliness: familiar smiles, courtesy, and the like.

The second love Lewis describes is *philia*, well translated as "friendship." There are some people we say are "friends with everyone." Strictly speaking, this isn't possible. You might say it demeans friendship. Following the Greek, Lewis says that to be friends with someone is to have a relationship based on a shared task and a shared love. Affection crosses over any and all lines of interest, but friendship does not. Friends have common interests, perhaps not in everything, but certainly in something.

Writing in 1960, Lewis asserted that friendship had lost its value in his culture, but we certainly cannot say that about our culture. In many ways, friendship has come to matter more as local ties of family and affection have become weaker. Take, for example, the show *Sex and the City*: we know little to nothing about the four women's families (even their parents), and yet have a sense that we know them. From high school on through marriage (a longer and longer period of time in our culture), friendship seems to reign supreme.

But is this friendship? Lewis distinguishes between "companions" and "friends." Companions are all the people with whom you share a task or an interest. Professors, for example, are naturally companions, as are members of most professions. Members of your football team or your drama group or your choir or your video gaming circle are companions. You enjoy talking shop, sharing the interest that you all have. But not all companions are friends. It is only when you discover, says Lewis, a particular shared vision, captured in the remark "I thought I was the only one!" that friendship begins to blossom (p. 66). Companionship is the matrix in which friendship develops.

Lewis is trying to describe what we mean when we say we just "click" with some people and not with others. What matters is that "you see the same thing"—or even that you passionately differ, but you care passionately about the same thing. In this way, Lewis might be a little skeptical about *Friends* or *Sex and the City*. What holds these people together? Is it really a commitment to a shared good? For friendships to be strong, they can't simply rest on getting along. That might last for a while, but resilient friendships (he

argues) are based on a commitment to the good. For example, my closest friends from college when I graduated (in 1994) are not my closest friends now. Away from the shared context of college life, personality and support came to matter less and shared interests came to matter more. This doesn't mean I no longer enjoy seeing my old friends, but those relationships have become more like storge. In a way, I know who my real friends are. Not everyone whom we might call a friend actually rises to this level; many friendships are simply a deeper version of storge.

Helpful in this regard is the Greek philosopher Aristotle's longer description of friendship. Aristotle believed that we have three types of friendships with others. One, a friendship of virtue or character, is the kind of deep connection and shared vision that Lewis describes. The other two were "partial" types of friendships. He called these "friendships of pleasure" and "friendships of utility." These are true friendships, because they involve mutuality and well-wishing for one another, but they lack the deep ground of genuine friendship. Instead, they are based on less important goods. Friendships of pleasure revolve around simply enjoying one another's company or sharing fun leisure activities. You may have completely incompatible political or religious views, but you have a great time shooting hoops together or watching *Desperate Housewives* or hanging out at the bar. Friendships of utility revolve around some useful purpose you share—for example, a good lab partner or a co-worker with whom you collaborate on a committee. Again, your overall visions of life may be different, and yet you work well together on some specific project or task. These are friendships, Aristotle says, but they do not involve the full love of a friendship in which your friend is "another self," truly sharing what means most to both of you.

We can begin to distinguish *philia* from romantic love, however, by noting that Lewis suggests that friendship is, for the most part, between persons of the same sex, because men and women lack the shared matrix necessary for real friendship. Let the men get together in the TV room and get passionate about football, and let the women hang out elsewhere and talk about clothes, he claims. He allows that when men and women do share a sphere or task (much less common in his society than in ours) friendship may happen, but "the friendship which arises between them will very easily pass—may pass in the first half-hour—into erotic love. Indeed, unless they are physically repulsive to each other or unless one or both already loves

elsewhere, it is almost certain to do so sooner or later” (p. 67). With few exceptions, relationships between men and women simply will not be friendships. They will either become eros or remain storge.

Is this true? To answer that question, we have to describe what we mean by “erotic love.” This is what we ordinarily see as sexual or romantic love. Lewis maintains that eros, fully understood, includes sex but is not all about sex. Offering an answer to our earlier question about whether sex is the only distinguishing factor of romantic attraction, he denotes specifically sexual love as *venus* and says that it is a *part* of eros, but only a part. A man acting on *venus* does not “want a woman. . . . He wants pleasure for which a woman happens to be the necessary piece of apparatus” (p. 94). By contrast, someone in eros wants “not a woman, but one particular woman” (p. 94). It is a love that is not just about sex, but about the whole person: the whole person is fascinating. It is this particularity that is the hallmark of eros. Unlike friendship, where the eyes of the friends are focused on the good they share, lovers focus on each other in their entirety. This gives birth to the well-known phenomenon where those in love completely overlook the other person’s flaws, or even consider them “endearing,” precisely because they are part of the beloved.

Lewis argues that such a love is distinctive, not merely neighborly or friendly, because it seems to come upon us suddenly, from out of nowhere, and it speaks the language of irresistibility. It is almost as if we do not choose. Rather the beloved is chosen for us—quite the opposite of friendship. Moreover, it can come with alarming speed—quite the opposite of affection, which by its nature comes gradually over time as familiarity grows.

Indeed, the suddenness and totality of eros can also be its danger. As Lewis suggests, eros speaks with a voice that demands “total commitment,” yet it is not necessarily God’s voice. In another text, he quite bluntly ascribes such love to the devil. In *The Screwtape Letters*, the master tempter writes that the devil’s bureaucracy has been at work the last few centuries “closing up” lifelong monogamy as a way to deal with sexual desire: “We have done this through the poets and novelists by persuading the humans that a curious and usually short-lived experience which they call ‘being in love’ is the only respectable ground for marriage; that marriage can, and ought to, render this excitement permanent; and that a marriage which does not do so is no longer binding” (p. 81). While eros may mark a promising beginning of a

relationship, it inevitably fades. Hence, it is best seen, according to Lewis, as a beautiful beginning, aimed ultimately at something else.

Here, Lewis introduces the fourth love, *agape*. *Agape* has traditionally been translated as “charity,” but that English word has become distorted. Charity does not mean giving to the poor. Rather it is the love that arrives when, inevitably, the other loves fail. This is the love that loves even when there is no feeling left, appearing especially as forgiveness.

This is, of course, the love God has for us in the Christian story, as well as the love we are supposed to have for God. This is what Jesus means when he calls us to love God “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). It is absolute and unconditional love. The dominant characteristic of this love is disinterestedness. To be disinterested is not, of course, to show no interest, but to ignore any sense of one’s own interests being at stake in love. For all the other loves, some degree of mutuality is necessary for love to be realized. Friendship is not one-sided, and unreciprocated eros is sad, even tragic. But *agape* is specifically about ignoring this mutuality, transcending it, and loving those who are not lovable or who do not love back.

This lack of mutuality raises the question of whether such a love is compatible with all the other “natural” loves. After all, if they are all marked by mutuality, *agape* would seem to be opposed to them. Lewis argues that *agape* and the other loves are compatible: that the other natural loves need *agape* to complete them. Ultimately the problem is that all human relationships end up being asymmetrical: the giving and receiving do not work out neatly. In some relationships, we may have to give a lot more than we receive. In other relationships we may need a lot more than we can give. It would be nice to think that overall, over the course of our lives, this would resolve into a happy equilibrium, but that’s just not the way it works. Some people may find themselves called to give much more than they receive from others. Some may have to suffer as recipients, never able to give worthy gifts to others. In our culture, which so highly values equality and so carefully calculates the cost-benefit ratio of every transaction, this asymmetry is disturbing. Shall we abandon all relationships from which we do not profit? Some might say yes, but *agape* says no. God is presented in the Jewish and Christian stories as preeminently faithful and steadfast. God’s love is often severe, disturbing, unexpected. It is not always tender and kindly. But

it is always faithful; when we fail, as people do constantly, God's love does not fail. God's love never takes the path of abandonment. That steadfast faithfulness is the essence of agape.

While agape is a completion of the natural loves, we should not forget that it can also be a challenge to them. Quoting the nineteenth-century thinker Soren Kierkegaard, theologian Amy Laura Hall notes that "although 'we human beings speak about finding the perfect person in order to love him,' Christ speaks to us of 'being the perfect person who boundlessly loves the person he sees'" (Hall, 42). Read that again carefully. It reminds us that most often, when we humans "love," what we are doing is finding a person who seems perfect to us. That means that what we love in our best friends and our families is ourselves, which is not love at all. As Hall writes, "Even when I proclaim that I love another dearly, what I am likely cherishing is some aspect of the other that relates to my own self-centered hopes and dreams" (Hall, 44). God's love, seen in Christ, challenges the preference for self inherent in our human loves. From God's point of view, God loves us not because of what we do (or fail to do) for God, but simply because we are persons. God is not self-interested. And so agape challenges us to consider whether our "falling in love" is really directed at the beauty and wonder of the other person, or whether it is a matter of using the other person—or the parts of the other person we deem acceptable and lovable—for our own fulfillment.

## *For Discussion*

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1. Why might the experience of falling in love be thought of as seeking completion? Why might it be thought of as being sick?
2. Compare Lewis's loves to the relationships in your life. Do they fit these categories?
3. Is eros = friendship + sex? If not, what are the additional qualities? Or do you not see friendship as essential to eros?
4. Do you feel that you truly love others selflessly? Is such selfless love possible? Explain how you understand the relationship of self and other in your loving relationships.

# Endnotes Appendix

## Chapter 1

The initial descriptions of love are drawn from Plato's *Symposium*, from *The Works of Plato*, ed. Irwin Edman (New York: Modern Library, 1928), pp. 353–358; and Helen A. Regis, "The Madness of Excess: Love Among the Fulbe of North Cameroun," in *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?*, ed. William Jankowiak (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 141–151. One surefire way to get students thinking about these descriptions is by watching certain movies that offer pictures of romantic love in our culture. Possible recommendations: *Jerry Maguire*, *Say Anything*, *Fatal Attraction*, *American Beauty*, *Sweet November*, *Pretty Woman*, *Little Children*, and *The Bridges of Madison County*.

The various loves are described by C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960). I have repeatedly begun my class with this text, and it always seems to work, not least because it is so well written and students can argue with it. Also mentioned, by the same author, is *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), especially letter 18, which deals with the temptations of romantic love. Aristotle's descriptions of the types of friendship are found in Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; it is another great discussion starter. The comparison of friendship and romantic relationship is a topic of much interest. Amy Laura Hall's *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (New York: Cambridge, 2002) adds a helpful voice in seeing agape not simply as completing human love, but also *challenging* it.

Most of the "Reason" discussion here is a basic Thomist/Aristotelian account of action, one which is consistent both with the Catholic tradition and with much contemporary moral philosophy. The distinction between purposes and "results" or consequences is particularly crucial from a pedagogical standpoint; Cathleen Kaveny suggests in an article that instrumentalization, not relativism, is the greatest challenge to teaching Catholic students today, and she is right. See "Young Catholics," in *Commonweal* 131, no. 20 (November 19, 2004), pp. 19–20. On human beings as human becomings, see Herbert McCabe, *God Still Matters* (New York: Continuum, 2001). Also see C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1961). The very brief treatment of virtue takes some liberty with the term

*akrasia* by using it as a catchall for the state between virtue and vice, which in fact is quite complex in Aristotle. For a nice description, see Amelie O. Rorty, "Akrasia and Pleasure: Nichomachean Ethics Book 7," in *Essays and Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie O. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 267–284.

## Chapter 2

The importance of sexuality as a category can be found in Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics (Persona Humana)*, in *Vatican Council II: Volume 2: More Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised ed., ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1998), pp. 486–499. The chapter introduces a narrative treatment by means of the movie; other movies might also be used, most importantly to help students more concretely grasp the theories presented later. I find Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1997), a reliable and readable resource for contemporary secular constructions of sexuality. On the biological view, see Helen Fisher, *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004). For an overview of this entire discussion, under the heading of "mating intelligence," see Dan Jones, "The Love Delusion," *New Scientist* 193, no. 2597 (March 31, 2007), pp. 14ff, and Lori Gottlieb, "How Do I Love Thee?" *The Atlantic* 297, no. 2 (March 2006), pp. 58–70. Foucault's masterwork is *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978). The reference to food in Judaism is from Arthur Hertzberg, *Judaism* (New York: Touchstone/Simon and Schuster, 1991). The closing comment is from Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

## Chapter 3

This chapter is an attempt to condense an introduction to Christian theology into one chapter—a nearly impossible task that demands certain decisions. The approach to theology as God's story owes debts to the "school" of narrative theology and especially to Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*, but more importantly it seems the best way for theology to be truly scriptural. Here I do not distill abstract