

HELLENISTIC TENDENCIES IN JOHN'S AGAPE? ANDERS NYGREN' SHIPWRECK ON THE ROCKS OF 1 JOHN

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The influence of the thoughts of Anders Nygren is immense in 20th century Protestantism. His major work, *Agape and Eros* (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1953), is well-known among scholars. It is difficult to even criticize Nygren without using his own terms. The words *Agape* and *Eros*, as fundamental motifs, have their own, independent existence now, separated even from their biblical use (mainly *agape*, since *eros* is not used in biblical language). Nygren stands in the Pauline-Lutheran tradition which puts heavy emphasis on God's initiative in our relationship with him. Nygren fights for an uncompromising view of unmerited grace, and a similarly uncompromising view of freely passing this grace on to others, whether they deserve it or not.

In this short essay we are going to examine the main points of Nygren's theology of love, and discuss why he gets into conflict with the Johannine writings, especially 1 John. We will see that what James was for Luther, that is 1 John for Nygren. We are going to look at the problems with Nygren's thesis in the light of 1 John. There are deformities in his theology of love to which 1 John seems to be the best antidote.

NYGREN'S THESIS

Anders Nygren was a Lutheran bishop in Lund (Sweden). His main work is *Agape and Eros* (1953). Nygren studied the fundamental religious motifs of Christianity and Hellenism. In the first volume of *Agape and Eros* he looks at the two fundamental motifs: Agape in Christianity and Eros in Hellenism (mainly Platonism). In the second volume of the book Nygren studies the history of the conflict between the two motifs. According to Nygren, the conflict in the New Testament is clearly between Christianity and Hellenism. Agape is represented by Christianity, Eros is represented by Hellenism. In the Early Church the conflict started to give place to different forms of synthesis. The completion of the synthesis was achieved by Saint Augustine. Medieval theology was basically the development of Augustine's synthesis. It was Martin Luther who destroyed the synthesis and brought Christianity back to her original Agape motif.

What does Nygren mean by these fundamental motifs, Agape and Eros? First of all, we have to point out that Nygren's terms do not necessarily correspond to the biblical use. "Eros and Agape are thus used in a highly specialized sense", says Nygren's English translator (Nygren, viii). This has particular significance in that it is John who writes most often about agape, and yet, it is his use of agape that undermines, in Nygren's view, the New Testament

Agape motif (and in my view, Nygren's thesis). How does Nygren define the two motifs?

Agape is *spontaneous and unmotivated* love. It does not seek anything in man as a motivation. It has no motivation outside itself. Agape is *indifferent to value*: God loves the sinner *despite* who he is. Agape is *creative*: "God does not love that which is already in itself worthy of love, but on the contrary, that which in itself has no worth acquires worth just by becoming the object of God's love" (Nygren, 78). Agape love creates value. Moreover, Agape is *the initiator of fellowship with God*. Agape is a descending love: it is God's way to man, not man's way to God. It is theocentric, not egocentric. The best example of agape is *the death of Christ on the cross*: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

Eros, on the other hand, is *acquisitive love*. It is a desire, a longing, a striving. As G. Simmel says, "The Greek Eros is a Will-to-possess... it must inevitably die away when the possession of its object is secured." (Nygren, 176). Nygren insists, though, that Eros is more than sensual love:

Eros, however, is not adequately defined by being simply described as acquisitive love. For there is a kind of acquisitive love that drags the soul downwards and only binds it the more firmly to things temporal; and that is sensual love. In contradistinction from this, Eros is a love that is *directed upwards*, it is the soul's upward longing and striving towards the heavenly world, the world of Ideas. (Nygren, 176-7)

Eros is *man's way to the Divine*. "Eros is the way by which man mounts up to the Divine, not the way by which the Divine stoops down to man." (Nygren, 178) Eros is *egocentric love*. "The aim of love is to gain possession of an object which is regarded as valuable and which man feels he needs." (Nygren, 180) The aim of this love is its own happiness. The best example of Eros is *a medieval mystic*, who is strikingly similar to a lover!

In the case of Eros, the object attracts the lover. The lover strives to possess the object of his love. It is a love of want, a love of need. It is an upward movement, an "ascending" (as Nygren says) to that which is valuable; it is man's movement towards the Good, the True and the Beautiful, ultimately towards God. This is a Platonic idea which infiltrated Christianity. "Plato is fundamentally unaware of any other form of love than acquisitive love." (Nygren, 176)

In the case of Agape, the object of our love is not necessarily attractive. The lover gives himself to the object; it is a love of plenty. It is a downward movement, a "descending"; it is ultimately God's movement towards the undeserved, even through us, whom He loved. Christianity is the victory of Agape over against Eros. Christianity emerged in a world that was characterised by Eros: it was natural for people to love with an acquisitive and "ascending" love, everyone was dominated by this desire. Christianity, however, introduced a very different motif. Christianity is not about man's way to God, but God's way to man. Christianity is irreconcilable with Eros, because in her true form salvation is of grace not of works.

The Christian *koinonia* is not based on Eros, but on Agape. Churches are full of sinners and difficult people. Whereas Eros is partial, agape is impartial

and therefore is able to embrace all kinds of sinners within the same community. As the Lutheran Kierkegaard put it: “Christianity has never taught that one must admire his neighbor – one shall love him” (*Works of Love*, Harper and Row, New York, 1962, p. 66f).

Unfortunately the Eros motif is very strong, says Nygren. Eros wants to “come back”, and the many syntheses of Eros and Agape in the history of the Church clearly prove this. The history of the Church is essentially a struggle between the two motifs: the New Testament opposed Eros, the Middle Ages embraced it, and Luther separated the two motifs again.

PROBLEMS WITH NYGREN’S THESIS

Nygren bases his theology of love mainly on Paul’s epistles, and their Lutheran interpretation. Nygren’s thesis sounds right, but feels wrong. Yes, Eros seems to be selfish if we compare it with Agape. Yes, God didn’t *like* us, he *loved* us, God loved his *enemies* in us. But the complete rejection of Eros doesn’t feel right. After studying Nygren’s thesis, Irving Singer, the atheistic philosopher, concluded: “the Christian view of agape is such that it excludes love between persons” (*The Nature of Love*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1984). This is the opinion of C. Stephen Evans, the evangelical philosopher, as well:

One might think then that extending any kind of preference to particular individuals is incompatible with neighbor-love, which ‘makes no distinctions’ and ‘loves all equally.’ If neighbor love demands that all people be treated strictly alike it is obviously incompatible with such special relations as marriage, romantic love, and friendship. I would hardly regard a man as a friend who made no special effort to think about my well-being, but treated me precisely as he would treat a perfect stranger. (*Kierkegaard’s Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations*, Oxford University Press, 2004)

But there are even bigger problems. The two major problems with Nygren’s thesis are: 1. it creates a dichotomy between nature and grace, 2. it makes love for God impossible.

1. *The dichotomy of nature and grace.* If love is selfish every time it is “the passion for and the pursuit of the good, the true and the beautiful”, it has serious consequences for our view of nature. The aesthetic enjoyment of created values and art is then *pagan* love, because it is determined by the object of our love, and hence it is *preferential*. A Socialist culture house and the Budapest Opera House must have the same *neutral* effect on us. We should be blind to the beauty that is in creation: we should not praise it, we should only serve it. We should not even be attracted by God’s beauty and value, because that would be man’s way to the Divine, and that is the most dangerous thing to do, for that leads to self-salvation.

We can see here that a certain view of salvation undermines the doctrine of creation. Love is interpreted from a purely Christological point of view. Beside Christ’s love and believers’ sacrificial love there is no place for an aesthetic love. According to Nygren, Agape is God’s love and the Christians’

love, true love is only acceptable from the point of view of salvation. Pagans did not know what true love was until Christ came.

One of the most important questions here is whether pagans love with a love that we can call "love" even in light of Christian agape? Is there any good in man after the fall? Christian views differ. Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox are ready to say yes. Protestants are hesitant, because they have a radical view of man's fallenness and God's grace in salvation. I believe Protestants are right, but they often create a false dichotomy between nature and grace. Nygren's thesis is such a false dichotomy. As the Italian sociologist, Gianfranco Morra, puts it: "Nygren's thesis that views eros and agape as irreconcilable, despite its merits seems to be unacceptable and the fruit of the Protestant dualism between nature and grace." ('Eros e Agape', *Tratto da Studi Cattolici*, 456 febbraio 1999)

We should not forget the dual aspect of our humanness: our *radical fallenness* on the one hand: "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Genesis 8:21), and our *nobility* on the other hand: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed: for God made man in his own image." (Genesis 9:6). Do pagans' love with real love? Jesus' opinion is clear: "even sinners love those who love them" (Luke 6:32). His point in the context is that Christian agape is superior to that love, but Jesus admits that there is a kind of love between sinners, too. And although the most common form is what Nygren calls Eros, Jesus nevertheless calls it "love" anyway. Richard Foster is right when he says that "the fall did not create eros; it only perverted it" (*Money, Sex and Power*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2000, p. 94).

Eros-love is part of our createdness: we can appreciate Agape, but we should not reject Eros. The enjoyment and appreciation of created value is not only right, but its complete rejection is close to being demonic (1 Timothy 4:1,3-5). Eros must be sanctified, but never completely rejected!

2. *The impossibility of love for God*. Pascal said: "The true religion must have as a characteristic the obligation to love God." (*Pensées*, 491) Is it true? And if it is true, how is it possible in Nygren's system? Jesus sums up the teaching of the law in the double command: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." (Luke 10:27) In medieval mysticism the command to love God got a big emphasis - often at the expense of neighbour love. A desert father said: "If I spoke with people, I could not speak with angels." Luther's answer to this was: "Love your neighbour! With these angels we are to speak!" Luther emphasised the equality of the two commands: "Jesus melts the two commandments into one and makes them the same work."; "To love God is to love one's neighbour." (Quotations are taken from Klaus Bockmuehl, "The Great Commandment" in *With Heart, Mind and Strength. The Best of CRUX - 1979-1989*. Credo, Langley, Canada, 1990, p. 17) According to Luther we cannot love God directly, we can only love Him in our neighbour. There is only a downward movement in love.

Nygren accepts Luther's teaching and contrasts it with Augustine's. For Augustine there was only one love: love for God. Even when we love our neighbour, we should love God, we should love our neighbour *in God*. For Luther there was only one love: love for the neighbour. Even when we love God, we should think of our neighbour, we should love God *in our neighbour*. Nygren emphasises that Christian love is always a downward movement, Eros therefore has no place in Christianity, not even in our love for God. We can see how Nygren's system excludes love for God. We cannot love God with Eros, since it is a pagan motif: Eros is man's way to God (salvation by works). But even if we wanted to love God with Agape, we could not. Agape does not look at the worth of the object of love, but is such love worthy of God? Agape is a descending love, but can we descend to God? Agape creates worth in its object, but can we create worth in God? We simply cannot love God with a *descending* love!

Since Eros is excluded, and Agape is impossible, we cannot love God. "Paul was bound to drop the idea of man's Agape towards God: that was simply a necessary consequence of his whole conception of Agape." (Nygren, 125) In Nygren's system the only way we can love Him is when we love Him in our neighbour. There is no direct love for God.

NYGREN'S ENCOUNTER WITH 1 JOHN

The third, and biggest problem with Nygren's thesis is that it cannot be harmonized with the theology of love in the Johannine literature, especially 1 John. John's writings are so full of love for God that Karl Barth, who had in some respects accepted Nygren's basic dichotomy between Eros and Agape, in his later years, after carefully studying the Johannines, admitted that there is indeed such a thing as love for God and love for Jesus (Bockmuehl, 11). Nygren, who also felt the threat coming from 1 John, solved this problem differently: John was already influenced by the Eros motif of Hellenism!

In Volume One, *A Study of the Christian Idea of Love*, Nygren presents the Agape motif first. He shows how God's Agape is the ground of our fellowship with Him, then he puts the cross of Christ in the centre of this Agape, and as a last point he discusses the role of the Johannines in the formulation of Agape. Nygren's evaluation of the writings of John is twofold. On the one hand, he praises John (especially in 1 John) for his brave identification of Agape with God. On the other hand, he sees a dangerous duality in the Johannines which seem to undermine the New Testament concept of Agape, as interpreted by Nygren.

1. *The final formulation of the Agape motif.* Though it is Paul who speaks most clearly about love as God's unmerited favour to men, it is John who is most radical in his wording by identifying God and Agape. "Paul often suggests their identity, and at times comes very near to putting it into words... But the step is nowhere taken by Paul" (Nygren, 147). "This final step is taken in the First Epistle of John, where the identity of God and Agape is asserted in the twice repeated formula: 'God is Agape' (1 John iv. 8, 16)." Whereas Paul "gives

the supreme description of the content" of Christian Agape, "the Johannine 'God is Agape' gives the supreme formal statement of it" (Nygren, 147). "Nothing greater can be said than this: God is love, and love, Agape, is God." (Nygren, 147)

Nygren at first denies the oft-repeated claim that "love for God" in the Johannines is "mystical". On the contrary, he says, "it finds expression primarily in obedience in His will, in the keeping of His word and commandments (1 John ii. 5; John xiv. 15, 23 f.)" (Nygren, 148) Later, however, Nygren seems to contradict his first assertion. Even if the "primary expression" of love for God in 1 John is obedience, it is not the only expression. This brings disharmony in the otherwise simple New Testament view of Agape. This causes Nygren to talk about a certain duality in John's writings.

2. *The duality of the Johannine idea of Agape.* "It would not be entirely true to the facts to say without qualification that the Johannine idea of love marks the culminating point of the New Testament Agape motif", begins his criticism the Lutheran bishop. For

while John says the last word as to its form, Paul has a deeper insight into its essential meaning and content. Nor does the Johannine view of love display the strict unity and consistency that we found in Paul, for at many points there is a certain doubleness to be observed in what John says about Agape. Just when the Agape motif is brought to its highest expression it is also in a peculiar way weakened down. (Nygren, 149-150)

In Nygren's opinion this doubleness or duality is caused by "the general spiritual environment in which the Johannine writings and their conception of Agape arose" (Nygren, 150). This environment was dominated by Hellenistic ideas, or, as many suppose, Mandaean religion.

In the Johannine idea of Agape we should see the Agape of primitive Christianity set in an environment of Hellenistic Eros, and this environment might in some measure explain the modifications that can be observed in the Johannine conception. (Nygren, 150)

There are three areas where Nygren finds the duality of Johannine Agape evident: a. the "metaphysic of Agape" and its relation to unmotivated love, b. Christian love for "the brethren" and its particularism, c. the question of love for God and love for the world. We are going to look at these areas one by one.

a. *The "metaphysic of Agape" and its relation to unmotivated love.* By "metaphysic of love" Nygren means that, according to John, God does not just love, but he is love: "Love is one with the substance of God". "In this way the Johannine idea of love acquires a peculiar cosmic-metaphysical aspect... which forms the background of his view of love as a whole." (Nygren, 151). God's love is eternal, it did not start with having mercy on fallen human beings. God eternally loves the Son, because he is love. John tries to penetrate into the depths and mysteries of God's being.

The dual character of this metaphysic of Agape is quite plain. On the one hand, we find the thought of God's spontaneous, unmotivated love carried to its utmost limit; God's love is in no sense whatsoever based on anything outside itself; it has its ground in God Himself, for it is His very essence. It is not even so far dependent on anything extraneous

as to need and external object to which to direct itself. Love expresses something eternal and transcendent, something that was “before the foundation of the world”; for even then God was love – in relation to the Son. (Nygren, 152)

In other words: God’s love cannot be totally unmotivated if it springs out of his eternal being, and if he always loves with regard to his Son. Nygren finds the “Father Himself loveth you, *because ye have loved Me*” type of sentences (cf. John 17:27) puzzling. “The Johannine idea of Agape thus actually occupies a somewhat uncertain position between unmotivated and motivated love.” (Nygren, 152)

b. *Brotherly love and particularism.* It is interesting that the double commandment of loving God and loving the *neighbour* becomes loving God and loving the *brother* in 1 John: “neighbour love becomes *particularistic*” (Nygren, 154). We cannot exclude the possibility that John would have agreed with the necessity of loving every man without qualification. But it is clear that in 1 John he was talking about fellow-Christians specifically. His use of the family metaphor in 5:1-2 is a proof of this reading (cf. my conclusions in “The Love of God and the Love of Men: An Exegesis of 1 John 4:19-5:3”).

Nygren sees this as another example of the duality of John’s idea of love. “It loses something of its original, all-embracing scope; it becomes love for those who bear the Christian name... Of love to enemies there is no longer anything said at all.” (Nygren, 154) This means that even if love gains warmth and intimacy, it loses its unmotivated character. Whereas in the Pauline view God’s love is paradoxical, spontaneous, and unmotivated, because it loves the totally undeserved sinner, in the Johannine view the idea of Agape is not presented in such a paradoxical light.

That the Father should love those whom He has taken out of the world and given to the Son, and who have kept His word (John xvii. 6), is not indubitably “unmotivated”, or rationally “inexplicable; it is in one way very much what we should expect. In a word, we have in Paul the former persecutor of God’s Church who now by God’s grace and Agape alone is what he is; in John we have “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John xxi. 7), for whom it is self-evident that Christ’s love is bound up with membership of the circle of his disciples.

c. *Love for God and love for the world.* In Nygren’s opinion there is a third modification of Agape in the Johannine corpus. The key verse here is 1 John 2:15, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Why is it different from the Synoptic and Pauline concept? “In the Synoptic Gospels, and still more in Paul, ‘love’ has a definite religious and ethical quality of its own, in itself and quite independently of its object.” (Nygren, 155-6). When Paul speaks about love, he always means that divine love which gives in an unmotivated way. In 1 John this goes through a slight change.

When we are warned against love of the world, it obviously cannot be the generous, self-giving Agape-that is meant, but only “the love of desire”, or *acquisitive love*. Only in the latter sense can “love of the world” be set in opposition to love for God; though when it is,

there is always the risk that even love for God will be understood as acquisitive love. (Nygren, 157)

Nygren sees this as a danger, because from this point on the only difference between the two kinds of love is their object, in the one case the world, in the other God. "Then Agape, which otherwise is a love that gives and sacrifices, and the very opposite of acquisitive love, becomes itself a species of acquisitive love - namely, the desire that is directed to God and heavenly things." (Nygren, 157) Love for God then is Eros.

These three areas prove the duality of Johannine Agape for Nygren: the "metaphysic of Agape" and its relation to unmotivated love; the Christian love for "the brethren" and its particularism; and the link between love for God and love for the world, which is missing in Pauline theology. Nygren's conclusion is that John is deviating from the New Testament concept of Agape. "The Johannine conception of love represents in a measure the transition to a stage where the Christian idea of love is no longer determined solely by the Agape motif, but by 'Eros and Agape'." (Nygren, 158)

THE LIGHT OF THE JOHANNINES ON THE THEME OF LOVE

Instead of looking at the Johannine understanding of love as a necessary complement to the Pauline concept, and a helpful addition to it in order to balance the picture, Nygren rather sees John's theology of love as a crack in the Christian view of love, a crack which basically destroyed Agape in the next generations. Instead of trying to harmonize the supposedly varying New Testament emphases on love, Nygren chooses to find fault with one of the New Testament authors. This solution is similar to Luther's rejection of the Epistle of James, with the difference that whereas Luther questioned the place of James in the canon, Nygren criticizes a major writer *within* the canon. This solution is quite unevangelical, and possibly even un-Lutheran. It is not a question about the extension of the biblical canon, it is a question about the inspiration and truthfulness of the holy writers within the canon.

I would like to express my appreciation for Nygren's insights into the Johannine understanding of love. I agree with Nygren's assertions in all three critical point (cf. my conclusions in "The Love of God and the Love of Men: An Exegesis of 1 John 4:19-5:3"). I agree with him also in that these points in John undermine the concept of a totally unmotivated, spontaneous, and disinterested love. I do not share Nygren's opinion, however, that John would undermine the *Christian* idea of love, nor do I think that John deviated from the Pauline concept of love. It is Paul who is afraid he would lose his joy if he did not see the Thessalonians, and it is he who calls the Philippians his crown and joy! This is not unmotivated love!

Instead of undermining the Christian view of love, John sheds light on the kantian deviation from the New Testament concept, which is unconsciously propagated even by the Swedish theologian. Nygren's shipwreck on the rocks of 1 John is an example of how the Bible corrects our philosophical

presuppositions and formulations. Instead of criticizing John, we need John's theology of love in order to balance our one-sided affirmations and presuppositions. The three critical issues that Nygren summarizes in the Johannine corpus illuminate two major points in our understanding of love.

1. *Love is not altruistic in an ultimate sense.* As Christians always believed, there is an eternal love among the persons of the Trinity. Love is not only what God did in Christ, it is also what He is. John quotes Jesus' prayer, "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." Then Jesus adds: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." (John 17:23-24). All love is an expression of that love which exists eternally in God, who is love (1 John 4:16). Love is a quality which makes God eternally happy (1 Timothy 6:15). From eternity there has been a mutual appreciation and enjoyment of each other within the Trinity. God's being is always plenty of joy. Whether it is a desire towards this joy (glorifying) or an outflow of it (grace), it is the same joy in motion.

The motion of this quality can be either downwards or upwards. When its orientation is downwards, it is grace. It is giving love to those who do not deserve it. The peak of this is the cross of Christ. But, because God is love in his essence, the Father's love is not only an expression of unmerited favour, but also a giving *for the Son's sake*, to glorify the One in whom he has pleasure! When the Son sacrifices himself for us, sinners, he does that in order to glorify the Father and to receive the Servant's reward. Jesus's love is not unmotivated when, "for the joy set before him", he set aside shame and endured the sufferings of the cross (Hebrews 12:2).

We have to revisit the view of God's unmotivated love. I do not think God's love is ultimately unmotivated. John's theology of love is very important in this regard. Ultimately, there is no altruistic love in the universe. We live in a kantian climate where love is thought to be moral when it is altruistic (the more altruistic, the more moral). Agape is said to be superior to Eros, because Eros is selfish, Agape is unselfish. "An action is moral, said Kant, only if one has no desire to perform it, but performs it out of a sense of duty and derives no benefit from it of any sort, neither material nor spiritual. A benefit destroys the moral value of an action." (J. Piper, *Desiring God*, Multnomah, Sisters, USA, 1996, p. 89)

The biblical worldview which is seen especially, though not exclusively, in the Johannine writings, teaches us that not even God's love is altruistic in an ultimate sense. C.S. Lewis wisely asserts:

We Christians can point to the Incarnation and say that when God empties Himself of His glory and submits to those conditions under which alone egoism and altruism have a clear meaning, He is seen to be wholly altruistic. But God in his transcendence - God as the unconditioned ground of all conditions - cannot easily be thought of in the same way.
" (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 40)

What about the death of Jesus on the cross? If there is altruistic love, this should be the one! He was innocent, he came down from heaven for our sake, he died in our stead, he loved and saved his enemies! Yes, his love is altruistic

love, but in an ultimate sense, it is not! When Jesus's passion was approaching, Jesus said to his disciples: "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified." (John 12:23) The moralist is shocked by this: "The Son of Man to be glorified? I thought He came *for us!* I thought He died *for us!* I thought He made *a sacrifice!*" Yes, He came for us, but this is not the whole story. His sacrificial love does not exclude the fact that Jesus might have an eternal profit from His death, too! Jesus goes on:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it; and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him. (John 12:24-26)

Is it possible that Jesus teaches us to sacrifice our lives for a greater joy? Is it possible that our love of plenty (Agape) is an expression of our love of need (Eros)? Is it possible that our Agape is empowered by our Eros? Is it possible that our delight in God (or longing for God) produces our love for the neighbour? Yes, if this Eros is directed to God's joy! Jesus gave us an example: "For *the joy* that was set before him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). According to Isaiah, the Messiah must get his reward: "when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring... Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied." (53:11-12). Isaiah says that it is not unimportant for the Messiah if he gets his reward or not: "But I said, 'I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet, surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God.'" (49:4). God the Father answers: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (49:6)

This means that even Jesus' sacrificial love was not altruistic in an ultimate sense. It was rewarded in God's joy, and the deed was done in view of that reward. And, according to Jesus, the same is true about our sacrificial love: "If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him." However puzzling this sounds to Nygren, there is something in common in love for God and love for the world. Something that justifies the word "love" in both cases.

2. *The meeting point of Eros and Agape is God's joy.* Karl Barth asks: how can we compare Agape and Eros unless they have a common place from which they both come? "We can compare two forms only when they have at least one quality in common." (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1958, p. 740) This point in common is God's Joy.

God is His own Joy. Augustine says, "O Lord my God, thou art an everlasting joy to thyself, and some creatures about thee are ever rejoicing in thee" (*Confessions*). Paul speaks about "the blessed and only Sovereign... who dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:15). Love is God's joyful being. God does not just love, he is love. In God there are two movements of love. On the one hand, there is a pursuit of His own Joy: "/He/... works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we should be to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:11-12); "From him, and through him, and to him, are all

things: to him be glory for ever." (Romans 11:36). On the other hand, there is an outflow of his Joy. As Tillich puts it: "God's love towards man is the same love that God loves Himself with" (*Systematic Theology*). This is most clearly seen in Ephesians 1:5-10.

We love with true love only when we love *in God*. This is what John says in 1 John 5,2: "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands." One commentator on 1 John uses the expression "middle term" referring to "love for God" (Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, Harper and Row, New York, 1973, p. 122). This is probably a reference to one of Kierkegaard's deepest insights into the theology of love: God must be there in every love; we should love in God; God must be the third party or "middle term" in all love-relationships (*Works of Love*).

We should love with an Eros that longs for the Joy of God. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it: The chief end of man is "to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." We should sanctify ourselves for the sake of this final erotic joy: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory *with exceeding joy*, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." (Jude 24-25) We should love with an Agape that comes from our delighting in the Joy of God; our love for the neighbour should flow out of our satisfaction in God. Agape works only when we have a delight (Eros) in God which is greater than our delight (Eros) in the things of the world.

If we love God, we can have the same two movements of love that is in God. 1. Our Agape can be an outflow of our delight in God. God loves the *cheerful* giver. There are too many bitter servants of Jesus, but God is not delighted in our bitter sacrifices. Our Agape must come out of our Eros for God. It must come out of our celebration of the triune God. 2. Our Eros can be guided and sanctified by the command of God. Agape (neighbour love) is the expression of our love for God, our delight in him, our Eros to him. The frequent command in the Bible is: „Love the LORD your God, and walk in all his ways, and keep his commandments, and cleave unto him, and serve him with all your heart and with all your soul." (Joshua 22:5) „This is love for God: to keep his commandments.", says John (1 John 5:3).

CONCLUSION

Anders Nygren's shipwreck on the Johannine rock is not the sign of John's Hellenistic deviation from the Christian concept of love, it is rather, a sign of Nygren's misunderstanding the biblical unity between love and joy, delight in God and sacrifice, the act of God and the being of God, the surface level of "losing life" and the deeper level of "gaining it".

When Agape and Eros reach perfection, it is nothing else but the rhythm of the inexpressible Joy of God. It is the eternal life of the blessed Trinity. When our Agape and Eros imitate God's Agape and Eros, we participate in the life of the Trinity. Jesus prays for his disciples that

they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves... The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:13,22-24)

The eternal, triune God is love: love that moves upwards to glorify the most worthy object, and love that moves downwards to lift up the unworthy sinner. John shows us that there is no ultimate separation between Eros and Agape.