

The Meanings of Love

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And so I lay my love down at your feet,
And, pray, what kind of love shall my eyes meet?

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Preface, 2011.

The idea of love has billions of supporters worldwide and is one of the strongest words in the world. It commands both global and also intimate loyalty. The root meaning of love is Christian. Paul's words that love is "patient, kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered, selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up.." will not be gainsaid. They are really the only way to live. The Christian meaning embraces loving God with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength and loving our neighbours as ourselves. It extends to loving our enemies and those who mistreat us. It will endure. Christ educates us to see and grow in love by washing his friends' feet, describing the Good Samaritan and forgiving his killers. Christian love taps into the love of God for the creation and for us. Because God loves us, we are commanded to love one another. It requires understanding *of* and being *for* the other person more than for ourselves.

This meaning of love seems incontrovertible, and the challenge to all of us is to love others as part of our love of God. But that is not where the culture in Britain and much of the West is. As the Christian faith has been choked by the weeds of our economic and media lives, so this big love has got lost in the undergrowth. Many of those who learned to love selflessly have died, and new generations are into something else. Love had, in part, sidled from this all-encompassing meaning to focus mainly in the man-woman relationship. This was already a move of idol worship. Suddenly, man-woman life is expected to bear all the weight of this great word and to be the inspiration for all of love. Romantic love and sex were the hope and ambition of the culture, especially in the 40s, 50s and 60s, initially the escape from war into bliss, and then the greatest experience of life, the move into erotic freedom. For a while this romanticism, especially in film, buttressed by Christianity, held the culture of love together. Yet after a generation or more in western culture, though not in Bollywood, these relationships seemed not to be able to bear the weight of expectations. A glance across a crowded room cannot inspire the whole of life. Indeed, often the intoxicated "in love" couple became the most selfish and prone to split up. There were divorces and multiple failed relationships. Jack and Jill fell down the hill, and not even together. As with Anthony and Cleopatra, so Burton and Taylor, could not hack it with love. Romantic Love had to move on.

Years ago I remember wandering through a room in the British museum and coming across some Baalim. It was a bit of a shock. I had read about them in the Old Testament as the false gods worshipped in ancient Canaan, and I automatically thought of ancient gods as big figures, but these were tiny figures, little gods and goddesses to fit a household. Post modern gods are a bit like that – not the great gods of progress, romantic love, freedom, nuclear weapons and technology, but much smaller gods and goddesses like the ones in which the Canaanites put their trust to make life good and win battles. By the early nineties, the post modern era, the great romantic hope had fractured. Romanticism was still around, but it needed other gods and goddesses to prop it up. The screen goddess was on the way to becoming a mere celebrity. What were the new gods of love? This was the task of this little book, to find in a rough and ready way what love was seen as being. It was, and is, important, because these points of ultimate trust, these idols creep up on us. They root in our consciousness, not as a focus of prayer and genuine worship, but as a touchstone, the magic by which we hope to live. None of us is immune from them, unless we oppose them in spirit and truth. So the idea is to get them out in the open and examine them. The book comes up with ten such meanings, but makes no claim to be exhaustive.

These ten are partly old views with a long cultural history. Love as an ideal has been about since the Middle Ages and romantic love is the same, though it did not really take off until the early 19th century Romantic Movement. Love as feeling is a kind of modern offshoot of real romantic love. Duty is as old as Rome and Christianity. Happiness is a result of the Enlightenment and Romantic Movement. But these older views are challenged by others. The obsessive sexual quest emerged among a few in the late 19th century, but really only got going after the Second World War. The idea of Compatibility is very modern, as is the often unspoken idea that love can be bought. We also look at the way in which the power of love and the love of power are mixed up, and finally at love as achievement or attainment. All of these views, and perhaps more, are contesting in our culture to make love work, because it matters so much to all of us. But they do not. Instead they promote weakness and failure.

Identifying these weaknesses did not particularly depend on the author, because thousands of people had reflected on them in one way or another, and the task was merely to bring together these reflections and show the directions in which these kinds of idolatry lead. Each view has its own inner logic; it projects its adherents on a certain road. Love as happiness begins with hope, but then it is tied to self-pity as the individual is sorry for himself or herself when they do not get the

psychic rewards of their quest. Surprisingly, or not, those seeking love as happiness become the most unhappy. The book walks down each of these roads and contains a series of little stories which bring out some of the aspects of each of these meanings.

The underlying conclusion of the book is that we do not need to be lost in this cultural quagmire. We are like people who are asking the Irishman to tell us the way, and we receive the response, "If I were you, I wouldn't start from here. We can read the book and not make the error. The sense of failure not just of romantic love, but of all of these post-modern constructions of love, can lead to despair and cynicism. The ad seeking a partner looks for GSOH and must like dogs, not a melding of souls. But that is the wrong conclusion. There remains, by contrast, the deep and rich Christian understanding of love, able to cope with failure, opening up normal intimacy, avoiding all these pitfalls, and free. All of us can receive, learn and live it in relationship with God. The book is therefore merely a signpost back to Christian love.

Perhaps a little warning is necessary. This book is only part of the picture of love in our lives. How we are loved, or not, in our families probably matters more. We may be bullied at school. Friends and relationships at work establish the kind of love we are used to, and we all make choices about love every day of our lives that shape our culture of love. Of course, the Christian faith leads us through all of these as well, but this book does not. It is limited to looking at the culture of love.

Introduction.

A number of themes play into this book. First, love matters to everybody; let us say it is one of the five most important words in the lives of most of us. So, let us think about love, not with the help of some song lyrics, but with a little bit of study. We can give it a bit of time. There are many ways of studying love, but this little book tries to study love culturally. What does it mean to people? Obviously, it means different things to different people - ecstasy, saying you are sorry, rape, the underlying inspiration of life, throwing a friend in the river, and a cuddle at the end of the day. So what are the meanings of love?

Second, there is C.S. Lewis. As a scholar he wrote *The Allegory of Love*, a book exploring the literature and fact of medieval courtly love. He then went on to write a little book, *The Four Loves*. At a crude level we could ask, as this book does, Why stop at four? But more thoughtfully we can examine the four. They are *storge* – affection, *philia* – friendship, *eros* – romantic or erotic love and *agape*, or unconditional Christian love. Lewis analyses these types powerfully and in an obvious sense this book grows from *The Four Loves*. The choice of the four is slightly odd and dated; indeed, it may be better for being dated. Yet, “love” has moved on. It has become more focussed on man-woman love and it has perhaps also developed greater complexity. This book narrows onto man-woman love (not looking at friendship) and expands the number from four to ten. This is not six-upmanship, but partly reflects a disciplinary difference.

Lewis’s work is literary study, and actually the literary study of love is drawing on the most powerful reflections on love available to us. Indeed, this book also strongly depends on it. Yet, it is also a sociology book, looking at the cultural movement from modernism to post modernism. Broadly speaking, this is the understanding that western culture has changed from the 1950s, 60s and 70s. It was an optimistic belief in science, freedom, power, progress and technology, but has since become fragmented and even pessimistic. Perhaps this has also happened to our understanding of love. An optimistic “love conquers all” attitude has been widely replaced by a feeling of defeat as love founders in relationship after relationship. Looking at this failure of love is surely the right challenge for all of us.

This study is also sociological in another sense in that it tries to get into the dynamic of relationships in a quite specific way – the study of meaning. This draws from the tradition of Max Weber and Pitirim Sorokin. We construct meanings or models of life and relationships. For example, we can see work in terms of

capitalism, career success, socialism, the Protestant ethic, craft or materialism, and they all have quite distinct outcomes. These views, outlooks or perspectives are often called - following Weber - ideal types, and they codify in a rough and ready way the dominant attitudes in a particular area of life. It is not really very rigorous or complex. We all recognise that classical, rock, jazz, folk, church, pop, gospel, renaissance music have very different outcomes, and using these cultural bundles and their idioms like contrapuntal, riff, quartet, theme, improvisation, lead guitar and chorus is a good step in understanding what is going on. This book does the same thing for love. It sets out the ideal types of love and asks what they imply. What does the idea of love as duty, or love as happiness, lead people towards? At one level it is a powerful kind of analysis. At other levels it misses out much of people's love life, which also has to do with our parents, how we were treated as children, the influence of persons who love us, the experiences of love, whether we do learn from failure and so on.

But the limits of the book are far greater than this. Thinking about love is important, as this book avows, but often love is most deeply learned by the humble, those who are selfless and those who put their lives into the hands of God. Often *intellect* does not correlate with *love* too strongly. Perhaps, the author of this book suggests, along with millions of others, the central meaning of love is found in the person and teaching of Christ. So the book evidences the weaknesses of romantic love, love as duty, happiness, sex and compatibility. Although these views are all around us, they miss out on the full and central meaning of love which Christianity expounds and which drops from the mouth and actions of Jesus. Thus the book points away from the failing ideal types of post-modern love to the central Christian understandings than which nothing is greater. In the end the book is not much more than this pointing finger.

The debts of the book are first to God with us, the great and subtle Christ. Jesus, the world's greatest teacher, is the core of all human wisdom, and I am his student. Then, to Elaine, my wife and love over forty four years, for the discussions that have shaped out thoughts. Then, to my good parents, Alec and Doris, who gave me Christian love. The Ilkely Group over many years helped shape the sociology. Kierkegaard's *The Works of Love* and Sorokin's *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, both borrowed from Norwich City Library in my teenage years, were trustworthy books into the theme. Teaching cultural history and family perspectives for twenty or so years at Oak Hill provided some of the awareness for the book, as did reading and marking essays and dissertations. I hope this book is some kind of help for you towards Christian love.

Chapter One: GETTING LOVE WRONG.

THE FAILURE OF LOVE?

The study of love presents us with a powerful dilemma. On the one hand it is a word which has millions of supporters. Each generation gathers round it like fans at a Cup Final, and they not only chant the word in public but also use it in private on a pleasant walk, in bed, in a letter or just to their own hearts. On the other hand there are also millions of well-intentioned people who have seen the word turn to dust in their hands. Every night men and women sob as they realize that for them love has died, and the next morning the ache of the loss is etched into their lives and faces. For some the experience starts early as they recognize that their parents do not love one another and probably do not love them either. From this start they can go on a quest to find love again or even accept that probably the world is a loveless place.

Every day our culture is saying these two things. First, love is basic to our human experience and we must have it, but second, we must be cynical that it can ever work. The cynics are getting younger and some of them are turning their backs on love before they reach adolescence. How do we understand this contradiction and where do we stand in relation to it? Do we believe in love or not trust it? But there is a yet earlier question which comes before this dilemma. And that is: What is Love? It is this question which is the subject of this book.

The danger is in overestimating what we know. If love is good we cannot ignore the sheer scale by which we get it wrong. This is partly conveyed by the rates of separation and divorce in countries throughout the world, which often run at a quarter or a third of all marriages. Within marriages and relationships which last love often turns out to be defective or destructive, and none of us knows the levels of private suffering which occur under its label. Most of us have the experience that what we believed in good faith was love has turned out harmful or destructive to our partner in some way. We set out on the journey of love, but never really get there. What starts as love can easily change into recrimination, longing, tension and distant relationships. Thus, most of us have some experience of being failed lovers or of being let down by others, and the people who are blandly free of this experience often cannot see the hurt they are causing. This is therefore a common enough pattern to deserve a bit of thought and analysis.

Consider a situation which is quite common. You know two people quite well, say Henry and Anna. You know each of them and value their friendship. They are each pleasant and have a lot to give, and they are in love. Yet as their relationship

develops, it turns sour and they come to view each other very negatively; each sees the problem as the other person. Yet the Henry and Anna you know have not changed. Whatever has been going on there has been no dramatic change in either of them to explain the falling in and out of love. The issue must lie with the role love played in their relationship. It needs investigating.

Or consider a common explanation which is given for the breakdown of relationships: 'We were incompatible. That time round I did not meet the right person, and I had better try again until I do.' Although many people offer this as an explanation, it does not square with the evidence which we obtain from the larger picture. Most of us know couples who are strikingly different who get on well together; almost anything which we could call an 'incompatibility' some couple lives with quite contentedly. On the other hand statistics suggest that the people who try again tend to fail again, and fail the more often they try. It also seems odd that in certain countries and at certain eras a high proportion of the population seems to get the choice right, while at other times and in other places it goes wrong. Thus the idea of incompatibility as an explanation is an after-the-event gloss; it doesn't address fully what is happening in these millions of cases of the breakdown of love. We are looking at a cultural pattern which occurs across areas, classes, countries and continents. The modern cultural movement towards high levels of divorce has even crossed the old barrier between Communism and Capitalism, for the marriage patterns of Russia and Eastern Europe have looked very similar to those of the United States or Canada. This suggests that something bigger is going on than mere personal incompatibility. Indeed, it may be something which traps people, so that they tend almost automatically to get love wrong.

MODELS OF LOVE.

Our way into the issue is to look at the meanings of love. What people mean by love differs. Sometimes, when a husband tells a wife how much he loves her, she thinks or says, 'But it's not that kind of love I want.' What we mean by love has consequences for relationships, and some of them are not good. This study looks at a few key meanings and where they lead. If we mean different things by the love we offer one another, then at the very least there is likely to be misunderstanding, and probably some of those kinds of love are mistaken and snarl up relationships. If many of the meanings of love which are commonly accepted by most of us are misguided, insofar as we are shaped and influenced by them, we walk into messed up lives. It is therefore worthwhile studying what these meanings are and what consequences they have when we follow them so that our love is not blind.

The method of the study is to set out the models of love which we often espouse, show where they lead and explore their inner logic. In the chapters which follow each of the meanings is investigated in its own terms with examples of the kinds of relationships which it generates. We are not suggesting that any one person or relationship can be described by a single model. Yet, each model is a big influence on our culture. Each is set out as a group of attitudes, ideas and motives which have had an obvious public influence on the way we think about love. In order to present the model its characteristics are sculpted and the kind of response it evokes followed through. The aim of this analysis is provide a cultural map which can be recognised and assessed by the reader. In this sense the underlying purpose of the book is not just to examine what is the case in our culture, so much as to offer the reader some categories by which they may examine what is going on in their own lives. It is a very personal task, for actually we may not even know what our friends mean by love. Analysing it is an intimate business. This book offers a number of different attitudes to love which we can recognize and identify as having some influence on our lives. Although they do not occur in pure forms, they have an inner logic and coherence which demand commitment and create influence. Seeing them as discrete types helps to analyse the effects they have on us and possibly to see the tensions which occur between the different models.

At the same time this book points in two directions. It is a critique of a number of views of love which are common in our culture, but it points to something better. If a man is totally obsessed by a woman and wants her to be his possession completely, so that he hunts her and plots to make her into his own, then something is wrong with the meaning of love which grips his life. It leads him astray and causes tense relationships. But at the same time he loses out on a better meaning of love in its tenderness and openness. Where is this to be found? It seems to be rather a well guarded secret. The conviction and the underlying stance of this study is that it lies with God. We are going to argue that the true meaning of love, full-blooded, sexual, passionate and christian, is found in the relationship that each and all of us have with God. If this is the case, it fits current circumstances, because the christian meaning of love does not receive much publicity among the media voices we shall be examining. This study is not a full blown investigation of the christian meaning of love, but it points to some of the christian characteristics which have been ignored and sublimated in our culture.

THE SCOPE AND LIMITS OF THIS STUDY.

People who are not Christians reading this will therefore find it invites change and even prompts towards conversion to God. They should not be surprised. For most of us when we get love by the tail do not succeed in taming it, but get pulled off in new directions. If we take on love and God at the same time the end of the journey might well not be where we expect.

But the danger is not just for those who see themselves on the outside of Christianity. Love is the great leveller. We Christians who might believe that they know something about love can be locked into narrow and self-congratulatory models of love which don't really work. Love is no closer to any of us than our daily walk with God and each other. Christians do not own love and we are even quite bad at it. Jesus was quite clear about the difference between the woman who washed his feet with her kisses and dried them with her hair and the stuffy Pharisees. She loved, and their neat formulations were full of dead men's bones. All of us reading and writing this book are therefore on dangerous ground. What we prize highly as love might be given God's pouf, and what is unvalued might turn out to those who see afresh to be dazzling beauty.

Quite rightly some readers will already be wondering at the vagueness of the use of the word, "love". It seems to mean boy-girl stuff, but surely Christians are more interested in the love of God and of our neighbour. Actually this book focusses primarily on man-woman relationships - romance, sleeping together, cohabitation, sex, friendship, affairs and marriage. It is also even more limited than that, because there are many important dimensions to man-woman love which this study does not explore. It is worth stating some of them so that the limitations of what follows are clearly evident. The development of each person's way of loving and ability to love grow out of their *family and social background*; this deeply shapes each of us but is not studied here. The *personal and sexual identities* of men and women are also important for the way they love. The issues of *gender relationships* are untouched here. There are *national* patterns of love, for example, in the United States, India, France and Uganda which are very different. Love is also a *pastoral* issue where we need guidance. There is each person's *spiritual* walk of love or pride or hatred which is also not directly touched. Patterns of personal damage, healing, failure and lostness which are a part of many people's love history also need to be opened up in different ways. Most central there is the question of the truth of our relationship with God, our *faith*, which shapes the quality of what we often call 'love'. All kinds of aspects of each person's development and identity are important for the kind of love they can offer and receive. These are scarcely addressed here. This study also ignores love of family, neighbour, enemy and country which are a large and important part of

people's lives. It fits in, for a while, with the idiom of narrowing the meaning of love to sexual relationships. All these limitations reduce the scope of this study of man-woman love. Yet at the same time the destructive power of mistaking the meaning of love is so great, that actually this is one of the biggest themes possible.

It is worth also noting this study does not focus on love as a moral question, concerned with right and wrong conduct. There is wrong conduct; adultery dishonours each party in the relationship. Domestic abuse is evil and gambling and drink has destroyed many homes, but the approach here does not focus on these issues. Morality is rooted in the perspective one has. A romantic, or sex-centred lover, may see adultery as justified, because of the prior approach they have adopted. This approach seems to have no problem either in understanding life or in deciding what good love is. Yet the problem of identifying and living in true love is much more complicated; our motives, understanding, personalities and sense of what is good are so messed up that important questions occur long before people get to what is right or wrong. The truth about love is in itself an open and important question. Indeed, there is a further step in recognizing that the idea of 'morality', tied as it is to the notion of carrying out a principle formed in the mind, is actually a very limited view of the way people operate. It is not a biblical idea, but one which goes with 18th century thought, assuming that the rational individual relates to other people through morality. By contrast this study is unashamedly sociological; it recognizes our dependence on the views, attitudes and culture of others, and the way we relate to God communally. So this study, while hopefully not 'immoral', is quite strongly anti 'moral'.

The central argument therefore is that the biblical reality of love, rooted in the very character of God, has been obscured by counterfeits which form the predominant understandings of sexual love today, and it is these which cause our problems. The evidence for the argument lies in the inner contradictions which each of the meanings of love examined in the following chapters contains. They promise hope and fulfilment, but when their implications are fully unrolled, they offer kinds of love which fail us. If this is substantially true, it should help us to see without cynicism the gentle power of true love in our lives.

Chapter Two: Idealized Love.

One common perception of love is of something we strive towards - an ideal. It is what we hope, work and long for. To be in love is a state which we hope will not just be over the rainbow, but will arrive; the rainbow will end in the garden and stay there. Some enchanted evening you will meet your true love across a crowded room, and the chemistry will happen. Of course, we are too sophisticated to be taken in by out-of-focus pictures and gush, but the ideal is there as a reference point to which we continually return. It may start out as naive and become more sophisticated, but it underlies our reactions to others and shapes our emotional development. Love is an ideal, and if it is not there, we want it to be, longing for it to happen, or mourning that it has gone.

The pattern is one which occurs in many different forms. There is the ache in the heart of the teenager which is vaguely focussed on the poster every morning and evening. In the early 20s there is the quite definite image of the girl or man who will make life fun and who will have what it takes. The middle aged person begins to feel a slight kind of panic that they have not met the right person, or if they are married, might begin to construct an alternative model to their spouse - the wife who understands and never nags, the husband who tidies up, talks vivaciously and is never absentminded. (Perhaps the alternative model in the wife's mind spends more time with her than does her husband, so that when he is present he experiences a slight sense of disgruntlement that he is not like the model.) Sometimes love itself is idealised; at other times the person is the ideal. Let us look at these in turn.

IDEAL LOVE.

Ideal love is a blissful state where nothing ever goes wrong or causes disagreement and tension. It involves two people coming together and being at one with each other, enjoying fun, relaxation, empathy and a good time. It is the single relationship where the problems occurring in other relationships are not repeated, so that it remains unspoiled and good. It contrasts with the indifference and dullness of daily life. Many locations work at creating the conditions for just such an experience - the honeymoon suite, the intimate restaurant with the candlelit meal or the tropical island holiday, because they know that people will pay almost anything to know this has happened, even for a short while. People long for deep understanding, for the look which betokens ultimate togetherness, for the sexual encounter where the earth

moves or just for a sense that things feel right. Often there is a sense of whether the ideal is present, which of course is a time of euphoria, or of its absence, which is a period of yearning or anxiety. Or there is deep nostalgia, a hope for the time when it will return. The power of the ideal is so great, because what is sought is so good. We may moderate our hopes, but usually the vision of intimacy, love, care, beauty and communion knows no gainsaying.

And yet the ideal is our construction, and often these have very different shapes. He thinks love is never having to say that you are sorry and she that clearing the air is the best way forward. He thinks love is coming home and she that it is going out. His and her vision of the honeymoon do not match. Of course, usually the ideals are not polar opposites; they are subtly constructed from parents, peers, dating experiences and work. They are continually refined in our minds. 'Jim knew that this was the love he had been looking for. They swam, lounged in the sun and played games. Even shopping was fun. It was easy to love and care for a girl like this, so different from the catty remarks of June and the others at the office. For a moment his brow creased, but then Doreen leaned over and put some more sunscreen on his face.' We, of course, are more sophisticated. Yet they are also the work of our minds and hearts, fed by daily life constructions, daydreams and media fictions which happen to appeal to us. The grip of these ideals can be felt by focussing on a quite common one.

The idea of the ideal home is important to many couples. If the locus of the marriage is perfect - the perfect bedroom, the kitchen where every meal is a partner-pleasing creation, then, of course, the marriage will be perfect too, and love will reign. Many rich people now live their messy lives in these near perfect homes looking for the cleaner which will finally cleanse away the personal problems which still seem to hang about. Redesigning the kitchen becomes a substitute for sorting out a relationship. The quest, moving from one home to another, is a search for the ideal place, hoping for the magic to reappear. Of course, moves, new kitchens and carpets occur for other reasons, but the advertisers know how deep are the yearnings and hopes to which they are appealing. Sadly often the displacement of effort to the new home or decor detracts from the relationship which is the focus of the yearning.

So ideal love is thoroughly our creation, and often sets the terms on which others are to relate to us. It contains our own weaknesses and embodies them in our definition of love. It may be a problem to others who have to cope with our ideal of love and conform to its demands. Or perhaps it seems to them like a crinoline; it swirls round us keeping others at a distance. They must either tread on it to our

annoyance or blow kisses across the gap, while we live oscillating between the ideal and the daily reality.

THE IDEAL PARTNER.

The quest for the ideal mate is a similar powerful motive. Who is the person who will meet the hopes and desires of my heart? The picture is often strongly shaped by friends and the surrounding culture, carefully thought out and quite specific. The wife must be domestic, or a bombshell; she should put her family first or play golf. Dating agencies and friendship advertisements give lists of the kinds of characteristics desired; one 'Heartsearch and Romance' column produced requests for an attractive, slim, lively, unstuffy, good-humoured, intelligent, caring, feminine, non-smoking, fun-loving, oriental woman with high standards. The man still has to be 'tall, dark and handsome with intelligence, warmth and a sense of humour'. Sometimes the shopping list of characteristics is so long that it narrows down those who qualify to three of the world's population. Usually, of course, the ideal is much more open; it may be vaguely shaped by media stars and other personalities. For most of us it receives much of its shape from our parents - even without articulating it we might aim to marry somebody who is like, or a modification of, Mum or Dad. At this stage we notice how strong an agenda this ideal can create; it involves expectations and requirements of the other person which even if they are unspoken can powerfully influence the terms on which the relationship proceeds. 'He is not my type' often registers precisely the extent to which the actual misses the ideal. It also conveys how dismissive this idiom can be, casually sidelining thousands of people on the basis of what has been generated in our heads.

Sometimes we see the ideal mate with strong sexual attributes. At its simplest level this inheres to macho and sexy images of men and women, but actually they are far more sophisticated. In the West sexual images are one of the biggest growth industries. They are idealised according to different stereotypes in film, magazine and book, and are often developed through day dreaming and fantasy, which studies have shown engage quite a lot of people for two or three hours a day. The images play on certain traits which change. The dominant, strong, decisive male may give way to the sensitive, gentle, caring one, or the soft, responsive woman to the interesting woman with initiative, but the power of the ideal remains to shape its devotee, firming the requirements which they will bring to their daily relationships. Pornography is an extreme form of this kind of idealized sex which feed the fantasies of those who are searching for it. Sometimes women in the West feel required to look 'sexy' in ways which would bring into question the ability of any

couples in the poor world to make love. This in turn can become linked to the idea that a partner should perform sexually in a certain kind of way, so that a couple instead of being in bed on their own have thousands of other performing couples with them in their heads, an appalling thought.

There is a flip side to this ideal mate search. Many people feel pressured and try to live within the ideals created by those they know or hope to know. Early on in relationships this often takes the form of an awareness that the 'real me' is not what my partner thinks I am like, and if he discovers the real me, then he will lose interest. Millions of women have laboured either in their psyche or relationships under comparison with some cult female or the star attraction at the office; they live the words, 'If only I were like her.' There is the ridiculous advice purveyed by several North American books and magazines, that wives should wake up early and 'put on their face' before their husband wakes up so that he will find her looking nice. It is this idiom which makes underarm hair 'disfiguring'. The character of many women's concern with their shape, dress, weight and appearance, partly grows out of a strongly internalized ideal. Anorexia nervosa, compulsive clothes buying and obsessional plastic surgery all give evidence of the power of these ideals to control people's lives. Pregnancy becomes a major crisis for many women and men who live their lives in this idiom; the full rounded tummy is a threat to the ideal figure on which they believe the relationship is based. One of the things the Womens' Movement has fought most successfully is the tyranny of this attitude, if needs be by wearing overalls and smoking pipes. The freedom from this pressure is well worth it, but the problem still lies with those who nurture and impose the ideals. Many women and men struggle for years to find and be what their partner's ideal requires, until the impossible task becomes obviously so. Others fight for the emergence of the 'real me' from under the ideal.

Once upon a time a young man fell in love with a girl. She was beautiful and gentle and had green eyes. He wooed her and the time came to ask her to marry him. He saved up and bought an emerald ring to match her eyes. They went with subdued awe to their favourite spot, hired a boat and rowed out to the middle of the shimmering lake surrounded by rustling trees. He took out the ring, looked into her eyes, thought carefully, threw the ring over his shoulder and asked her to marry him. At first she was a bit taken aback, but then she accepted, comforted by the knowledge that the ring at the bottom of the lake meant he loved this brown-eyed girl who had forgotten her contact lens as much as he had the green-eyed one.

The pressure also occurs the other way. Until more recently female pressure for male dress, physique and appearance has been more muted, and the ideals have

been present in more psychological terms. One of the most powerful grows out of the situation of women who have been at home, often with families and domestic pressures whose husbands have worked long hours in the evenings and at weekends. To compensate they have used romantic novels, magazines, soaps and videos to create an absorbing, attentive and relating ideal who is different from the man they actually live with. Sometimes, this romantic ideal is vested on an attentive male who happens on the scene, but more normally it stays as a kind of hidden rebuke which never gets addressed or properly discussed. The man is vaguely aware that he should be someone else, but it is not clear who... At other times the pressure is imagined and not real; the husband believes he should be strong and masterful, when she prefers sensitivity and some help around the home.

Many of us feed into this already complex picture ideals of ourselves and our own love. We feel, for example, that there was never love like ours. We are patient, caring, thoughtful and prepared to put up with a great deal in the name of the love we have for our partner. Occasionally we feel the need to point out how marvellous our love is because it is not being fully recognized, and we may be shocked to find that what we have seen as so fine is actually valued less highly. It turns out that our sacrifices work out to our own benefit. We do the garden or mend the car to escape from more demanding commitments. The chocolates we buy are the ones we like and the great gesture of love and devotion is an act which we are prepared to bask in for the next ten years. Not only is my love idealised, but so is my personality. I am never unfair, always patient to the limits of endurance (a useful tautology), and really quite witty, good-looking and not a bad catch. These webs of illusion may be challenged but they often flourish through all kinds of bad weather.

IDEAL ANALYSIS.

We are now in a position to see how complicated are many relationships based on idealised views of love are. It is possible for there to be eight different 'personae' taking part in a single relationship:- the woman may consist of herself, her ideal self, the man's ideal of her, and her view of the man's ideal, while the man is sometimes himself, his ideal self, her ideal of him and his own response to her ideal. Even if all of these personae are not working at the same time, the relationships between them can become highly complex. Sometimes the real persons are too tired by the complexity to put in an appearance! Crucial in this situation is where the weight of commitment lies for each of the partners. If a wife will not let go of a certain ideal of herself, when the husband loves and enjoys her as she is, then there is a tussle which needs resolution. If the wife is confronted with the ideal woman, in terms of

appearance, sexuality or education, which she knows she is not, then the tension between his ideal and the actual her can dominate her life. Sometimes in resignation one partner decides to leave the ideal undisturbed rather than face the upheaval which disclosure would bring. The overall effect is to leave the participants with feelings of unreality, not knowing where they are, of always searching for the other person and even of not knowing who they are, which are serious and destructive to the relationship and to the persons involved. What started out as an ecstatic hope of love seems to work out as damaging and harmful, its opposite.

Bob felt he could handle money well; his brother had taught him quite a bit of accounting and he had looked after the football club accounts for two years. But actually he was not very good at planning expenditure. Jeanette came from a family which had repeated problems with debts and was glad that Bob was so much in control financially. However, her illusions were shattered when they went in the red after their first holiday and had to pay a surcharge. From then on she took over the accounts; it was difficult and the whole process filled her with forboding. Yet Bob recognized his tendency towards extravagance and cut back. As a consequence their finances were continually healthy; Jeanette put this down to her own handling of the accounts and continued to do them, difficult though it was. The cost, however, was a continued sense of anger over money at the way Bob had let her down, which was conveyed so strongly to Bob that he never felt able to offer to do them again.

The problems are deeper than mere complication. Inseparably linked to the ideal is disillusion. Indeed, the meaning of 'wedding' contains this for many people. The wedding and honeymoon is the time which she can remember for the rest of her life when the dull routine takes over. The older couples look on and say, 'It's nice while it lasts'. We were struck at a wedding recently by the intensity of the English custom of sabotaging the honeymoon car and if possible, the honeymoon. Why do 'friends' laboriously sew clothes up, arrange for raw meat to be placed in the bridal bed and get the honeymoon car labelled as a stolen vehicle? Perhaps it has something to do with the cynicism of the disillusioned making it difficult for them to face again the bliss for which they hoped. The ideal and reality must face one another, and when this happens it is often accompanied by blame, cynicism, disrespect and even hatred. The dynamics vary. 'If you were such and such a person, we would not quarrel'. 'So if that is what you are really like, I don't want to know you.' 'If that's what you think of me, I'll leave.' But behind all these confrontations lie the gulf between the ideals and the real, the struggle of people to be what they are not, the searches that are rooted in fantasy and the driving power of the self-defining ideal. Because this kind

of blame is a deep denial of who the partner really is, its destructive power is very great.

Other forms are less intense. Many couples who reflect on their conception of love will find that it fits a pattern of repeated striving and failure. Often the early anguish of the failure will lead the couple in the end to settle for something less; the ideal floats above reality not as something to strive after, but as a nostalgic warm memory. There is the ideal, which is love, and the reality, which is something slightly different. Life is tinged with a continual experience of the second-best.

THE SOURCE OF THE IDEAL.

Where does this approach come from? Although it might seem very contemporary, it actually has a long and supposedly noble heritage. To understand it properly we would have to trace it back to Greek ways of thinking which have had a profound effect throughout Europe. You can see this in a museum or art gallery which covers the period. The beautifully proportioned male and female statues (even if they are without arms) show us visually this classical Greek ideal. It is there, too, in the idea of the perfect athlete, the ideal behind the Olympic Games. So it should come as no surprise to discover that the ideal is basic to Plato and other Greek philosophy. But of course it did not end with the Greeks. The same attitude spread throughout Europe and deeply influenced the Catholic Church. 'Platonic love' was a high-minded celibate relationship which was often defined by the Church as the best kind of love. In the medieval legends the search for the Holy Grail was intertwined with the search for ideal love; it was a long and arduous quest which would eventually result in the attainment of the ideal. Knighthood with its valour and purity displayed the kind of nobility which could reach this ideal. At the same time it was often seen as unattainable; it would corrupt. In the most famous English legend of all the love of Arthur and Guinevere, the relationship which was to be the inspiration for the whole of England, was corrupted by Launcelot and then by Mordred, striking with tragedy the whole court of Arthur. In Italy a different tradition developed in the late 13th century. The idealised woman was fused with the cult of the Virgin Mary, so that since then Mary as virgin, pure, maternal and demure has been the archetype for millions of women world-wide; the ideal to which they must conform.

Although more recent thinking has lost many of these Greek overtones, the underlying conception remains. The ideals change with culture, but remained powerful. In Jane Austen's time the ideal woman was a person of sense and sensibility, who played the piano well, engaged in good works and graced the

drawing room. The social historian Dingwall (1956) describes how 19th century genteel American wives were so put on a pedestal and literally out of touch that the husbands engaged in sexual activity with the slaves and servants. In 19th century Britain we can read a lot from women's fashions. The tiny waspie waist was achieved by corsets which meant their wearers could barely walk across a room, let alone do domestic tasks. It was indeed a mark of high masculine status to have such an ornament as a wife. This attitude highlights a development in idealism which continually recurs. In reaction to the ideal with its antiseptic feeling many opt for the real, to know life, warts and all. The realist writers of the 19th century, like Balzac and Dostoievsky, sought what was really going on, to lift the thin veneer of civilised ideals and reveal the murky reality. Yet there is a sentimentality here too; to love the warts and all villain, embracing the smell, is no answer either, because there are things wrong with us which can be dangerously sentimentalised. Edith Piaf's 'Non, je ne regrette rien' was powerfully sung, but stupid. In more recent times this see-saw between ideal and reality is reflected in the Cadbury's Milk Tray advertisements on television and the accusing glances shot across the room at the husband when the hero climbs in through the window to deliver the box of chocolates. Heroic, unattainable love hath us in thrall, but it is also a joke. Most of us, when we reflect on it, will be amazed at how powerfully the notion that love is unattainable has been conveyed to us. If we believe this view of things, it is not surprising that we go around with an air of tragedy, sad that what we most desire seems permanently beyond our grasp.

ANALYSIS OF THE IDEAL.

The problem with this process arises from the way people make ideals for others in their own image; this activity involves a kind of tyranny. The ideal means imposing on the beloved an imprint to which he or she is expected to conform. The ideal thus becomes a prison in which the beloved is locked up, like Sleeping Beauty, unattainable to those who would wake her. The effect of the imposition is to create a psychic tension. Rather than an open relationship occurring, it actually takes place in the head of the one who is idealizing. Sometimes a person can actually relate more strongly to the ideal than to the person with whom they live. They are playing god, blowing up a plastic image of their own creation which they can live with, rather than loving their partner.

When we wake up to the problem we also realize the motives which often generate these ideals. Many of them are a kind of escapism - 'If only life was like this', or 'It is not really my fault', or 'if only the other person would change'. It is from

our own inadequacies that these ideals of love, ourselves and the other person are generated. They reflect often a pattern of scapegoating where we have run from true love and a true understanding of our weaknesses into creations which leave our mistakes unchallenged. Yet, of course, the idealisations merely make the failures deeper and more intractable. How good, then, to move away from these illusions.

POST-IDEALIST LOVE.

This involves us calling into question the process of idealizing love and of creating ideal images of ourselves and our partners. The problem arises because our ideals bear the taints and distortions which we create in them and because we seek to live in ideals as a process of escaping what might be true of ourselves and others. Biblical understanding requires us to withdraw from these mistakes. Our identity is given by God, and our own understanding of ourselves and others is a fallible and very incomplete construction. Our identity is not something which is constructed by our own intellects. Indeed, the Bible is rather stern about this possibility. Just as we are to create no false images of God, so we to create no false images of those whom God has made. To bear false witness of one another is to transgress one of the fundamental commandments of the creation. We are God's creation and are not to usurp to ourselves the business of defining what other persons should be like. For our ideals are always, so to speak, computer simulations, far less rich and wonderful than the real hands, hair and eyes. This truth is reflected in the experience which many persons trapped in idealist relationships have; they know that they are very much more wonderful than their partner has realized. They are right. The problem of the partner who has not found his or her ideal is really that they have not really discovered the person with whom they are living. If they listened, looked and understood, they would see how much more wonderful is the created person. When we have been messing about with ideals of ourselves or others, to move back into the central truth of our created identity before God is like coming home. At a level deeper than any of us understand, we can take our shoes off and be ourselves.

There is also a critique of ideal love. The kind of love we are required to show to one another is patient, kind, seeks the good of the other and does not bear grudges. It can be done now and with those we know. It is a command, because those are the absolute terms on which other people should be addressed. The commitment of marriage is more specific, but it rests on this same normative basis. There is no need for an ideal, because kindness and patience are always possible. The ideal is for those who are on the run, who are looking for special conditions, who want to be over the rainbow rather than getting wet. Love in Christian terms refuses to be an

ideal, and remains a do-it-now requirement, because we are made to love, to give ourselves to God and one another. Where we fail, we have to face it and change, not set off on some illusory quest.

The glory of the Gospels is the countless examples of Jesus meeting people with sickness, pride, quarrelling, aggression, failure, fear and lostness and loving them. He did not idealize or flatter his disciples or the leaders, but treated them straight. It is the love that can look anything in the face and respond with care, hope and faith. All of us have some inkling of this love as the way to live; we live in God's creation as he has created us. Yet the broad and stable basis for life which is given by God's love for us is obscured by the idealisations which are peddled in our culture. We would all far better pull away the ideals and gaze at one another face to face and see the awful beauty of who we are.

THE FEELING OF LOVE.

When we talk about falling in love, it usually means succumbing to an emotional state. It involves a deep longing for the beloved and includes a set of emotions - fear, elation, peace, joy and anxiety which are heightened and dominate daily events. There are few of us who are not gripped by some of these emotions at one stage or another and many experience going down the tubes totally engulfed by them. Falling in love again is a process of self-abandonment which is as complete as being in free-fall. There is no going back and the experience has to be followed through to its conclusion. People who let love 'take over' like this describe themselves as 'soft', 'gluttons for punishment' or an 'incurable romantic'. Others react against this way of entering a relationship and fight to stay in control themselves. They will decide whether they fall in love or not as a deliberate act of the will, not as a fatalistic keeling over. They will keep their emotions firmly controlled within certain areas of their life, making sure, for example, that they do not get in the way of career and work. Thus, we see, even at this straightforward level there are deep ambivalences about the role of emotions in love and in life. We usually experience longings, aches, hopes, empathy and concern for the other person which weave through our lives and colour the cloth. It is our feelings, too, which register the hurts of love, the areas where we have been run over by a bulldozer. But what these feelings mean is far from clear.

WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

This is a mighty subject. But the emergence of the separate subject, 'emotions' is itself interesting. It is a word which only really arrived at the end of the 18th century when states of feeling became thoroughly dissociated from ideas and cognitive processes. Since then the distinction between thinking and feeling, reason and emotion has become commonplace. Often people argue that the one doesn't and shouldn't (?) involve the other, and it is especially important to think things through dispassionately before the feelings are engaged. Others note love is a matter of the heart and not the head, and so when you fall in love and it does not occur as a result of rational reflection. With Freud there emerged a fundamental barrier between the feeling/pleasure centre of life and external mental controlling mechanisms. Adult love was seen by Freud as continuous with and rooted in childhood sexual and pleasure-seeking feelings.(Freud 1985 243-340, Fromm 1957 77). On this understanding many of our thoughts are rationalisations justifying the deeper emotional commitments which we have. Let us discuss some of the issues which arise from these points.

First, emotion does involve thought. Often we think most deeply about ourselves emotionally. Our feelings bring together the commitments and directions of our lives and express the tune of our daily walk. If that inner meaning is not clear or accessible to others it is probably because we do not think they will understand, do not trust them or find them too complex to communicate. We note that most of us think about our feelings, and feel about our thoughts. Frustration, for example, is a common emotion which occurs when we are not able to work something out - a child with a puzzle or a physicist with a theory - it expresses a quite complex idea that no solution is possible. Every thought we have is therefore played to some emotional tune which expresses how we stand in relation to it in many deep ways. Indeed, emotions often summarize bodies of reflection and judgement which we have crystallized in a certain way. Speaking often, but not always, conveys that tune better than the written word.

Another common 20th century misconception is that emotions consist of basic drives like pain, sex or survival which are essentially primitive animal instincts. (McDougall 1928) Much of the work done by behaviourist psychologists had this assumption. A similar tradition locates feeling in the subconscious, out of which it comes to conscious life. Most contemporary work has moved beyond these gross assumptions, but the underlying fault still needs addressing. It locates feelings in primitive responses; they are 'really' about sex or comfort or pain. They are basically to be explored, understood and controlled. In this study such a view is seen as a defective view of psychology which fails to recognize our complex emotional

development. Our feelings reflect our past, views, motives, faith and understanding of ourselves, and recognizing our own feelings and those of others can be a complicated task. For example, many of us experience tensions in our emotional lives because of contradictions in our thinking and attitudes; these are often quite sophisticated problems. By contrast, responses like rage, phobia and exaggerated elation signal a breakdown in personal development.

Another misconception is that everybody's feelings are the same. As we develop, so do our own unique emotional maps. Quite straightforward situations can produce wildly different emotional responses. A person alone in a house can feel she misses others, enjoys the solitude, fears the isolation, must work hard or is bored. The emotions take shape in the meaning framework in which they live. This shaping of emotional development will especially be our concern in this chapter, although it will also be important in all the other ones. For it turns out that being in love can be many different things, some of which are good and healthy, but others of which are destructive. The real challenge for lovers is distinguishing carefully which is which.

Finally, emotions reflect our relationships. Being with someone is bigger than a set of ideas; it involves commitment, care, patience and pleasure in them. It involves responses which are not segregated, but unified in their focus on that one person. And the responses are two way. We feel such and such about another person and feel their reaction to us. Sometimes these feelings are mistaken; we did not properly know what we felt or misunderstood them.

This suggests a deeper conclusion. Emotions can be true or false reflections of our lives. A manic-depressive experiences emotions which are, superficially at least, not appropriate to the immediate situation. We also talk of people behaving oddly when their emotional responses do not seem to fit what we expect. But in a deeper sense we may all be behaving oddly in that many of our emotional responses are not true to our lives and those we live with. Children often experience their parents irritation for things which have nothing to do with them. The feeling may not be matched by action which reflects genuine love and thus be a kind of emotional hypocrisy; it floats as a sentimental cloud above the needs of the other person. The reverse is also possible; a misdirected feeling of love can lead to insensitive and hurtful behaviour. Our feelings, therefore, need subjecting to careful scrutiny. They can be shaped for good or ill; they can reflect the truth or a lie. They can represent true or false love.

A SHORT HISTORY OF EMOTIONAL TYPES.

These points suggest that emotions are not a separate domain of life, but are closely integrated with all we think, value and do. However, there are strong trends

in our culture which invite us to adopt a stereotypic emotional map. In this section we shall try to identify some of these, especially since they can get in the way of open emotional responses. we shall look for a number of historical types which have emerged from and since the Enlightenment.

The modern history begins with a male assertion of the centrality of mind, thinking, understanding and mental control in masculine life. 'I think therefore I am (a man)' Men were to be educated, to think, to philosophize, to be men of affairs and state and to run life on the basis of their understanding. On this model emotions did not exist in men or were to be suppressed as irrational. The mind told the body what to do, and usually it obeyed. Emotions, like benevolence, seeking pleasure and duty were subject to rational moral control and ensured an ordered pattern of living. (Selby-Bigge 1964, Munro 1972) Woman by contrast were feeling-centred, could not think and had the meaning of their lives filled by men and other relationships. They were expected to faint, cry, swoon and clasp their hands to their bosoms. Although it was no new thing this was also the culture in which the double standard developed more strongly. Women were supposed to be naturally faithful to one man who would meet all their needs, emotional and sexual, while men's bodies were seen as much more likely to develop multiple sexual attractions, which sometimes they would try to fulfil, but which were supposed not to affect their minds. Thus, within this idiom, male sexual urges were relatively detached from emotional commitment, while women were faithful and wanted to get their man. Their sexual relationships were more strongly associated with childbearing, housework and death in a way which gave them a different, more fearful character. The two types emerging from this culture are therefore the supposedly rational, emotionless male, and the feeling-centred, irrational woman.

The second polarity focusses on emotional domination. Men, because they had economic and physical power, were used to exerting emotional control over relationships. This pattern often involved the suppressing or dampening of emotional life, but whatever form it took, it required the women to carry and support the tone which was established by the men. When the men scattered their emotions of anger, irritation, need, impatience and having fun about, the women were expected to come behind with a brush and pan and tidy up. Often this requirement would be established by orders, threats or violence. Women became used to absorbing and submitting to the terms expressed by the men, and having their forms of emotional expression dictated by them. Only in relationships with children and with other women were they able to step outside the demure imposed pattern, and many women had too little time not dominated by work to open up

these areas of emotional expression. Language and education were ways of muting women. (Spender 1985 52-162) The normal pattern was for the woman to spend her time reading the emotional state of her spouse, tending his moods to preserve equanimity and be the great soother. What the costs down the years of this pattern have been in terms of depressed women, nobody knows. (Corob 1987 55-61) The aggressive male was met by the blotting-paper wife.

However, a great change occurred in the 19th century under the influence of the Romantic movement. This allowed middle-class men to have feelings, sentiment and soul; it opened up the possibility of them experiencing the pangs of love and ringing their hands when it was not required. Male poets became national figures. The overriding message was one of romantic love. Come into the garden, Maud, because I want you to be the inspiration of my life. So the Victorian man would drop to his knees and plead the love of his maiden. His emotional attitude was akin to worship. He would go further and say that his very life depended on it, and he would have read many contemporary authors, poets and artists who had reflected similar attitudes. It is easy to be amused by this Victorian man, but it is worth noting two of his characteristics: first the great emotional freedom compared with previous eras and second the emotional faithfulness of this romantic attitude. Nevertheless, the pattern remained one in which the man expressed his worship in song, opera, poem, art, courtship and dress, while the woman became much more fully the recipient and inspirer of emotions. As heroine, sacred figure, mother, or even as Queen Victoria she was the fount of male emotional life, but with the exception of some novelists her own feelings had relatively little expression.

Yet at the same time the Victorian era was one of great moral dominance. Men were expected to be upright and moral (but often failed to be judging by the 80,000 prostitutes in London at the time - Mayhew 1862 31-132) Their emotional energy was channelled towards correctness and a sense that they were living above criticism. This was accompanied by attitudes like sternness, inflexibility, a dependence on rules and a distrust of emotions which might lead people astray and evidenced moral weakness. Within this framework emotions were likely to be evil and therefore had to be contained by a pattern of firmness and moral control. Women were seen as co-partners in this enterprise with the slight difference that their moral goodness was shaped by submission. They would do what they were told because it was infallibly good. On this model it was unnecessary and even wrong to feel; the main issue was behaving properly. There is the upright, even untight, male and the pious wife

However, this attitude produced its own reaction. Being naughty was experiencing all the emotions which were immoral. These were by definition enjoyable, because they were devoid of the stern correctness of moralism. The music halls and other kinds of entertainment, including drunkenness therefore offered emotional escape from this straightjacket. The process of seeking enjoyment shaped the whole direction of life producing either the hearty male or the jolly wench.

Another major change happened towards the end of the century; emotions became much more subjective. They were what people felt inside which had no obvious connection with public life and external relationships. Being in love was then part of an emotional quest which had no obvious relationship with marriage, faithfulness or even with the other person. Each person had their own inner dialogue with their feelings, but there was not necessarily a pattern of sharing or communication. Emotion became a silent, subjective truth which often was intrinsically private. Being in love was an experience accompanied by elation, sorrow, daydreaming, sexual expression and intense relationships, but all of this was part of an individual or even existentialist journey. Emotions were inexpressible. People's experience might meet for a while; they might touch flesh, but it would not last; it was merely a stage in a longer journey in which everybody was alone. Feelings on this pattern changed with the journey and had no stable moorings.

Alongside these emotional attitudes to love lies another which has been deeply formative in the West. It is the idea that the man expresses himself through his work, physical strength and his presence. He must avoid above all any show of emotion which would compromise or undermine his power and control of the situation and relationships. There are many different types of response which belong to this basic pattern - the strong, silent macho type who can take anything which is thrown at him, the unexpressive, often lonely and inarticulate manual worker, the efficient and in control professional man, the stiff upper lip public school adult taken from home at the age of seven into a public emotional cage. D H Lawrence fought this attitude in his native Nottinghamshire. Deep in all these types is driven the idea that emotion and weakness are linked together. To avoid expressing emotions or to suppress them requires certain kinds of behaviour which are difficult but necessary. A grunt or a cup of tea will express a year's devotion and being in love is strictly taboo. Women have to accommodate to the relationships which are set up in these terms in a number of ways. One is to reveal emotion, showing a weakness which assures the male that his strength is needed. Another is to fight the male power by generating feelings which will move the man out of his emotional armour. Many women finish

by living the emotional lives of two people constantly interpreting what their husband is feeling but never says or shows.

These developments yield twelve emotional types. Although they are too stereotypical to fit any of us directly, most of us have probably been influenced by one or more. Sometimes, of course, the gender of the type may be different from the one identified here. Let us set them out again.

1. MR REASONABLE. - 'I think and then act; feelings get in the way'
2. THE SUSCEPTIBLE WOMAN - 'My feelings often get the better of me.'
3. BOSS - 'I'm doing important things; make sure I am not upset.'
4. THE SOOTHER - 'My job is to keep my male happy.'
5. THE ROMANTIC MAN - 'She is the inspiration of my life'
6. THE MADONNA - 'I am the great mystery and he worships me'
7. MR UPRIGHT - 'I live a moral life and keep my emotions under guard.'
8. QUEEN VICTORIA - 'We are not amused'
9. THE PRINCE OF WALES - 'Mum didn't have much fun and I'm going to make up for it.'
10. MARLENE DIETRICH - 'I'm naughty and I like it'
11. THE MARLBORO' MAN - 'I'm lonely and nobody understands me, but I've got my horse.'
12. THE MASK - 'Nobody knows what I feel like inside.'
13. JOHN WAYNE - 'I'm strong, but there's a soft core inside if you can get to it.'
14. THE WIFE OF BATH- 'I'll explain what everybody feels around here.'

The point of these types is not to label individuals, but to describe some emotional idioms which have great power in our culture. Sometimes the types are just amusing: the woman who sighs at John Wayne is actually married to him. More often the problems which arise from these typologies are sad - the madonna idiom involves using emotional closure as a source of power; it creates distance where there should be intimacy. The Marlboro Man marries the Wife of Bath and feels even more alone when he has been explained. These emotional journeys involve pilgrimages as involving basic mistakes. They lock their adherents in idioms which do not allow a full emotional response. They distort the possibility of the whole person, born in God's love, having emotional freedom.

THE EMOTIONAL ORCHESTRA.

A christian perspective places our emotions in a rich context of response to God, to ourselves, to other people and the rest of the creation. A true feeling of peace is played on many instruments. Yet 20th century emotions have increasingly narrowed

their response to the human subject. As individualism has become more rife the focus of emotional inspiration is how the individual feels. He constructs his world from inside outwards and no longer has a home in relationships with God, with the community and the natural creation. On this view being in love is primarily what I feel. Love is whatever emotions arise for me as a result of a close relationship with a man or woman. Historically, of course, much of what is felt as love grew out of a Christian culture. Love was felt as kindness, care, patience, trust and tenderness, and it still is by millions because these characteristics are basic to the created structure of male-female relationships. They express the terms on which men and women are called to love one another. But there has been another cultural development at work which has expressed the outworking of humanism where people's emotions are a law unto themselves and take off in whatever direction is dictated by the heart. Here we must see a crucial difference between christianity and humanism.

Christianity affirms the importance of emotions in people's lives. Even more decisively it identifies them in Christ's life and in the responses of God to humankind throughout history. We should beware of anthropomorphizing God's attitudes towards humans into the kinds of sentiment which we happen to feel, because of the danger of corrupting God's attitudes to us with our own pathetic feelings, but there is no doubt about the centrality of love in God's dealings with humankind. This and other attitudes express most deeply the tenor of the kind of relationship which God has with us. We in turn are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, a complete response which captures our emotions in many ways. A Christian's praise to God will whoop it up, because flattery of the Creator is not possible and we cannot exaggerate God's glory and graciousness. Similarly, it is joy to suffer for the faith. Many of these emotions are relational. We are to live at peace with people, take delight at what is good in their lives and live in hope with them.

But, further, our emotions play a score which is bigger than ourselves. The meaning of joy, peace, anger and hurt are set in the purposes of God. We are to love in God's terms, and anything else does not respect and honour the person we love properly. We can, of course, go off and play our own thing, introducing dissonances to our relationships. We may not even hear when we are out of pitch and of tune. Yet the truth of our emotional life remains written in the great themes of the score. We learn and grow into these as we play under the direction of the Composer. Our self generated scrapings just do not make sense.

Thus, at the same time Christianity includes a pattern of radical emotional critique. Emotions can be as wrong as actions, motives, injustice and hypocrisy. The

biblical critique of emotions is both direct and very subtle. Lust, coveting, fear of others and envy are wrong - to be cut out of our lives; the Psalms repeatedly show strong emotions disarmed by being put in a bigger context which is God's. There is also an unconventional process of emotional retuning. We are to count it joy when we suffer for the good, because the power of evil is being met. Those who mourn are meeting truly what they face, and will be blessed. We cannot explore this emotional map, exciting and full of wisdom though it is. The simple point is that by contrast humanism has in principle no critique of emotions; whatever the egocentric human feels is valid, perhaps as long as it does not harm others. And what we have seen in a long process lasting at least two hundred years is the gradual self-assertion of human emotions which are damaging and destructive. The dilemma is focussed in the recent confession of a young man who murdered his girlfriend. He could only ask how he could kill the one whom he loved. The answer partly lies in emotions which are a law unto themselves, even the emotion called love.

EGOCENTRIC EMOTION.

The great change therefore occurs when emotions, instead of being rooted in our relationship with God, are turned to our own egos. We are so often trapped in this situation that it is worth examining it at greater length. First, the focus has changed; it is no longer the beloved, but the subject's emotions which rule the relationship. Indeed, the role of the other person is often to maintain the desired emotional state of the subject. Her job is to make me feel in love, and I am likely to be angry if she does not allow me to stay in this blissful subjective state. So we ask this sensitive instrument to stay on one note, which we like, rather than responding to the melody of the relationship. When the note does not sound right, we see-saw violently to other notes and do not find the tune. The feeling of love vacillates to anger when real needs, weaknesses and hurts appear, as they must. The emotion is therefore tyrannical demanding fulfilment. It also knows no other sovereign claim, but becomes a law unto itself; it will not bend to argument, to norms, to friendship or to persuasion. Although they are called feelings of love, they are actually always about me, and in a fundamental sense exclude and dominate the very person I am supposed to be loving.

Thus, we often talk about emotional blackmail. A couple is sensitive to one another's feelings. They can be picked up by a glance, the angle of the head or the way the door is closed. It is very easy for a person to say, I want you to make me feel like this. I want peace and quiet. I want to be happy. I want to be sexually aroused. Often these emotional requirements are accompanied by emotional threats. If you do

not give me peace and quiet, I will be irritable and angry. If you do not make me happy, I will sulk. If you won't arouse me, I'll turn my back. Thus, the egocentricity of the emotional requirements produce their own unstable pattern of threats and self-indulgence. Emotions fly around creating havoc with relationships. It is still often called love, but the fruits show how far it is from the real thing.

John came in the door, said "Hello", slung his case down and sat down in front of the television. His whole demeanour said, "Leave me alone I want a break". Helen said nothing for three minutes and then told him that Peter was still not home. He was angry at being told and went out to the car without Helen being able to discuss the possibilities. She was anxious, but it was still possible that he was coming back with his friend Bruce; she hadn't been able to leave Fiona and find out. When Peter actually arrived home, she told him off more than was justified. When John came back he told Helen off for not being firmer. The meal was not a pleasant one and Fiona was throwing food at the cat again.

The self-referencing focus of the emotions is often quite dangerous. Sometimes it forms a black hole into which the person disappears in depression or elation. The emotion cannot be wrong: anger that is unjust and petulant, love which is misplaced and possessive, longing which is self-indulgent or lust which is predatory is right because I feel it. It must be followed through. It cannot be thought about, or morally guided. Much less can it be handed over to God for an overhaul and reassessment. At the same time the feeling becomes unreal and artificial. Because the reference point has become egocentric it is cut off from that which would generate its genuine expression. Then, because it does not spontaneously occur, the subject needs to manufacture it, but in that process becomes engaged in a process of self manipulation in which the feeling of love is artificially stimulated. There is an analogy with the person who feels the need for sexual arousal, dissociates it from a real relationship, uses masturbation as a way of engendering the sexual feelings and then feels the emptiness and loneliness of this disassociated act. The drive for pure feeling therefore generates hollowness, because it loses touch with what the meaning of the feelings must actually be. Shakespeare expressed the point in the Merchant of Venice: "If music be the food of love play on. Give me excess of it, that surfeiting the appetite may sicken and so die." To feel in love in this arbitrary emotional sense is also to fall out of it and be trapped in subjectivity. Thus self-governing emotion wreaks havoc in the human heart.

AUTONOMOUS EMOTION.

The feeling of love has developed its own career in the twentieth century. When it becomes sovereign over relationships, a number of things happen. The first stage allows the feeling to override other norms. Initially, it is an excuse for not being patient, sensitive and showing respect. Then, being in love has higher claims than marital faithfulness, and it becomes an excuse for hurting and rejecting a husband or wife. This leads of course to the affair taking precedence over marriage, as it did with Byron and the Romantics, and with Hollywood in the twentieth century, or more mundanely with the retreat from faithful love in millions of marriages in this century. Being in love in the sense of bowing to this feeling is often accompanied by bullying. The boy creates pressure to go to bed, otherwise the love is not genuine. Although the subject feels this is love, in substance it is often a process of worshipping one's own feelings in a way which enslaves the other person. If couples were able to get rid of this emotional bullying, many of the stages of courtship would be a lot more serene. But the problem develops. Because the feeling loses its inner meaning by perverting to a form of self-love, in order to continue to be, it must find a surrogate source of stimulation.

Simon wanted to go to bed with Jean. The need obsessed him and coloured all of his life including the times he was with her. He could not sleep properly and when they met it was the agenda behind each meeting. She had slept with two other men, whom she had later come to dislike, and said she wasn't going through the same process again. Simon was angry that two men had slept with her and he couldn't. He actually played football against one of them the following Saturday and temporarily enjoyed three very firm tackles. That evening Jean said that unless they dropped the subject, the relationship was off. Simon went around very angry all weekend, but Sunday evening calmed down and recognized that he loved Jean on the terms she had set. He phoned and apologized, and as Jean said later, after phone call the relationship had a chance.

Most serious is the use of the other person to experience this perverted emotion of feeling in love. The relationship then becomes tinged with or dominated by the need for love going on in one partner. This is especially likely if the feelings of an earlier relationship are being resolved in this one. If I desperately need to be loved, freely giving love is likely to be very difficult. Sometimes the feeling can move into fantasy. When pornography is used, the reality of the subject becomes inconsequential. Many other feelings of love float around massaged by Mills and Boon novels or afternoon soap operas. They in the end turn out to be fantastic and destructive, although described by the word, 'love'. Because the process is unreal, it is likely to end in emptiness and bitterness.

The development of this attitude might explain something of the horror of rape and marital violence. To be slaves to our emotions requires that they be followed and served. Gradually the demands grow and the impossibility of meeting them generates tension. Self-control, or the integration of the emotions in a whole person disappears, and these acts are dictated by the rampant feeling which cannot be gainsaid, until the rampant tyranny is imposed on a victim. Many media forms invite people to travel inside emotions to the end of the line: horror movies on fear, hard pornography on sexual intoxication, suspense thrillers on excitement and violent films on aggression. Many people with distorted emotional maps are therefore encouraged to distort even more, because of the financial rewards which they offer to the peddlers of this emotional garbage.

BEING IN LOVE.

Yet the patterns above are far from the full picture. Being in love has a different pedigree which comes from Christian roots. Here emotion is given a dignified part in defining what it means to be human, woman or man. Thinking, working, learning and worship are all part of the emotional tapestry of life. And so is the feeling of love. Of course love is not all feeling nor is emotion its core. So what is the feeling of love? In part it is the desire to fully know and be known by another person, the desire for union and the need to cherish this special person. But this is more than emotion; it leads to action, thought, talking and it is hung out on the other person. It remains a relationship and the emotions are the orchestra which plays the score written by the relationship. To wait for her is to be patient. To care is to worry when she is late. To know her sleep and peace is joy. To find her overworked is to be eager to help. To see her beauty is to be filled with a sense of glory. The rich melody of emotions follow from the relationship and the object of love and they are bound up with thought and action in a whole response. Whether it is really a feeling of love depends on its truth or falsity. True love strikes deeper than our moods; it is both rock and rose. The actual relationship shapes the emotional timbre. If the relationship is good, the feelings will be, and vice versa.

When feelings go wrong, they are rapid signals of interpersonal sensitivity. They need to be heeded and shared, and rooted back in God's goodness and the deeper meaning of love, before they harden and become more distorted. Thus, the answer to the feelings, however overpowering and glorious they are, lies beyond them. They are a sign of what is so good and wonderful in that other person. To snatch at the feelings without God is to pick the flower and hold it without water.

ROMANTIC LOVE.

They say love makes the world go round.
 They mean OUR love, I'm sure,
 For when we take a stroll, the ground
 spins back round the earth's core.

Being in love is a powerful experience, as millions of people would attest, but it is not just an emotional experience of the kind we have considered. Something more is present in many love relationships which has its own character and effect on the kind of relationship which develops. This kind of love is properly called 'romantic', not in the sentimental sense, but in a deeper sense of worshipping this person which produces an overwhelming awareness of being in love, at least for a while.

Many of us will identify it immediately. It carries a sense that this relationship is central to life. Everything draws its meaning from the beloved and is tinted by it. Young men will write her name in the most peculiar places simply because it should be there, and young women dream of him when typing a letter or cutting their toenails. In some way perhaps it is particularly an experience of youth when the young person faces this other one for whom they would give everything, but the totality of the experience engulfs many who are middle-aged and old. This kind of love has been around a long time, at least since the beauty of Helen summoned Greece to fight the Trojan wars, and drew a thousand ships to Tenedos. This love is great and magnificent, the kind we think of with Romeo and Juliet or Anthony and Cleopatra. It is the Big One, providing the meaning of the universe and answering every question. It is the spindle of the wheel of life, the power for living, and dangerous stuff. It will ignore convention, riches, status and habit. To live for love and to find the meaning of meaning in love is surely the answer which will carry everything before it. Looking into her eyes makes everything else fall into place. He knows that there is nothing she could ask of him that he would not do. As long as this is right, everything else will be.

People's reactions to romantic love differ. Many dive inside it and soak up the complete commitment allowing it to change the meaning of the rest of life. Others fear its all-engulfing quality, but at the same time wish they or their spouses were more romantic. If only he would climb the drainpipe with a bunch of flowers between his teeth instead of slouching in an armchair! Others see romanticism as soft, and hold it at a distance, because they feel the need for a more controlled pattern of relationships. Others feel they have seen through this 'stage' and gone on

to relationships which do not involve these all-engulfing crushes; they are post romantic. And some are angry that what they believed in turned out to be an illusion. Few of us are untouched by this kind of love, yet what it is remains an enigma.

THE CORE EXPERIENCE.

Here Romantic Love will be seen as a secularised reworking of a great Christian truth. It takes a fundamental human experience, but it also distorts it. So we need to perceive both the underlying truth and what happens to it in the distortion. First the good part.

Many daily relationships are tangled with social barriers, work, differences of attitude and the self-contained isolation which many people adopt to survive. Alongside this, to really meet someone is an awesome experience. Here is this person who is sharing who he is with me; there is an openness and transparency. Each of us feels fully human and we know we can share ourselves without fear. This is further deepened when each person gives themselves to the other, particularly when that includes the giving of themselves bodily in a relationship of each sex; one meaning of nakedness is the sense of being open and uncovered to share everything. There is an unconditional giving, the wonder of male meeting female and the sense of self-discovery which goes along with giving one's whole self to this other person. It mirrors the time in creation when God brought Eve to Adam, and he let out a great hymn of response which marvelled at the way Eve was like him, gave her a name which was like his name and recognized in a fundamental sense that he was no longer alone - flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone. Shakespeare echoes this great theme in the *Tempest* when Miranda, having scarcely seen a man in her adult life, has Sebastian brought to her. It is a point of wonder which is there whenever woman meets man, because it is so basic to our human condition. Always there should be the sense of awe as every man and woman come into union and again express the sexual completeness of humankind. The love, openness, intimacy, carefulness, sensitivity and total commitment make a union which involves everything. It involves the way the partners act, think, eat, sleep, play and do the ironing. It is uninhibited, everything goes into the commitment and nothing is held back. It is not circumstantial, but is for better or worse, richer or poorer and so on. This in substance is what many people seek in romantic love, and it is wholly good, but it is not what romantic love means in our culture.

For this Christian understanding of husband-wife love and of the wonder of all real relationships is held in a bigger truth. God's love is central to the creation of the

universe and gives meaning to the life of every person and their relationships. Love has its origin with God and is reflected in the detailed care which structures the creation. It is expressed to us in ways which we can readily understand by Christ's life and teaching. God's commitment to us goes beyond our weaknesses and is the underlying reality of all our lives. And love is the norm by which God commands us to live in our relationships with one another, with our spouses and with God. It is the truth about our relationships whether we recognize it or not. Yet our love is a response. We are called to love God (and one another) with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Yet the rock solid truth of God's love, the reliability of the terms in which it should be expressed and the insistence on the need for honesty before God mean that this love does not die on our failings; it outlasts our pettiness and comes through our failure. The point is a completely basic one; the meaning of love is given by God, reflects the character of God, is written into the creation in God's terms and is exemplified by the conquering commitment of love in Jesus' life despite the evil and failure to which he was subjected.

By contrast romantic love seeks the meaning of love and of life in a particular and fallible human relationship. Although it is not always evident that this is going on, such a view of love asks the partner to become god, an object of worship and a source of power. This no man or woman can do. Not suprisingly, therefore, the literary and actual history of romantic love has always been closely linked with tragedy. What seems so wonderful at the beginning turns into something which does not work. Later we shall examine some of the inner dynamics of this process. Another weakness of this position is its transformation of the meaning of love into this exclusive sexual form, which eradicates from people's consciousness love expressed in terms of friendship, family, community, church, work and nation. Romanticism has played a large part in excluding love from many other areas of our lives. And finally the failures of romantic love have led millions of people into cynicism and mistrust; they are the post-romantics, the ones who will never be taken in again and have closed themselves to the true meaning of love. The cost of these romantic failures has been great, despite the great optimism of romantic love that nothing but good can come from it. Before we examine these in detail, it is worth looking at the history of Romanticism to see how it has developed away from Christianity and what its implications are.

THE HISTORY OF ROMANTIC LOVE.

Romantic love has been around for a long time. Perhaps its modern European expression begins with the medieval code of courtly love. This involved the gallant

knight in an adoring and inspiring relationship with a chaste and unattainable woman. Her adoration inspires his noble acts, yet the relationship remains either unrequited or cannot be consummated. We find this theme in the Legend of Arthur and the Round Table, the Romance of the Rose and other great medieval literature. In Italy this tradition developed with two great heroic relationships, those of Dante and Beatrice and Petrarch and Laura. Dante met Beatrice when they were nine years old; she married another person and died as a young woman, but she became the inspiration for Dante's life and work and even guides him through Paradise in his greatest work, the Divine Comedy. Petrarch first glimpsed Laura in the church of St Clara at Avignon and continued to worship her before and after her death in his poetry and writing. Later, as more secular humanist attitudes spread through Italy thousands of other men copied the idea of the woman as the object of worship and the inspiration of life. It was a time when the old Greek and Roman gods and goddesses were revived, not to be worshipped as deities, but to embody human hopes and possibilities. Venus was rediscovered, and the painter, Botticelli, painted her arrival drifting in on a seashell as a mythic alternative to the creation of Eve. Many other painters also painted Venuses who happened to be their mistresses or patrons. One painting by Titian shows a man playing an organ while gazing at his prostrate Venus; she is clearly the inspiration for his art. The idea of the grand, all-consuming passion, which was usually extramarital, took root in Italian culture. This Renaissance idea spread through much of Europe. In England its most famous development is in Shakespeare's work, especially with Romeo and Juliet, Anthony and Cleopatra, Othello and Desdemona. However, in England this tradition waned with alternative Christian views which gave room for passion within marriage and saw adultery as betrayal.

Only in the late 18th century did modern Romanticism really begin. It was probably as a result of the Enlightenment - the cultural movement which has made humanity the focus of modern worship. The dominant attitude of this period (for the men) was to hold the world and relationships at a distance and to try to understand them 'rationally'. Towards the end of the century this approach failed with contradictory views of reason and widely different conclusions, and quite suddenly many people began to look for a different way of approaching the world. This was to embrace it and identify one's soul with it. A sense of empathy with nature, the beloved, the past or even the nation became basic to life. This was the Romantic Movement, and it reshaped the meaning of love.

At its heart Romanticism involved a new hope for identity, for what made people whole. To be at one with nature, or the past, or the beloved was the meaning of life

and of love. The quest of the soul for wholeness was a movement which swept through Europe. The figures of the Romantic Movement are well known, Goethe, Schiller, Wordsworth, Beethoven, Shelley, Byron, Delacroix, Keats and others, but all of them were involved at times in their lives in the great transition which is summed up in the legend of Faust. They were turning their back on God, whatever the consequences, and seeking the one thing which would give their lives meaning. In Goethe's "Faust" the hero's quest is not for pleasure, wealth or learning, but for love. The love he finds is actually the love of a christian woman, but the terms he has worked out with Mephistopheles mean that he must find in it the meaning of his life. Faust's love for Margaret is an act of identification. He says 'Henceforth be our whole being lost in one another in overflowing joy - that lives and lives for ever and for ever.' But the tragedy of the choice of playing Mephistopheles' game works its way through probably to damnation. Similarly, for Wordsworth identification with nature gives intimations of immortality. He sees the daffodils, and pow, he was at one with the universe. At the centre of these romantic experiences was the idea that the human spirit could meet that with which it could identify and which would mirror back its true self. This was the era of national anthems when people felt an identity with their nation which gripped their guts and claimed their lives. It was also the era when Byron made the pilgrimage back to ancient Greece and the Arthurian legends wrung the hearts of the English. But although there were natural, national and historical forms of romanticism perhaps the most dominant home for the spirit was in the arms of the beloved. This was where identity was discovered and the soul of man ended its quest. Spiritual union with the beloved was the point of life.

Yet this new meaning of love seemed always to lead to tragedy. Goethe's 'Sorrows of Young Werther' showed how the emotion of love and the misunderstanding of society drove the young hero to suicide; from then on many a hand-wringing hero and heroine hung on a romantic love tinged with sadness. Shakespeare's great romantic tragedies were rediscovered and played to full Victorian houses with great pathos. Songs extolling this great emotional reality were written in the *Leider* of the German composers and then sung round the piano of Victorian homes. It is easy to forget how seriously the Victorians took these affairs of the heart and how exalted was their vision of romantic love and of tragedy. In Germany at the same time Wagner's Siegfried and Brunhilde were expiring time after time to deep sighs from the audience. This sense of tragedy seems to arise from an awareness that somehow this love could not carry the weight; people wanted it desperately to succeed, but it cracked and was not enough. As a religion Romantic Love was inadequate. Soon the

seriousness gave way. Later popular romantic songs with more vulgar themes were sung in the music-halls. 'Sentiment' became one of the great characteristics of late nineteenth century life. 'Daisy, Daisy, on a bicycle made for two' requires a lubricated throat to carry conviction. At the end of the century there were other developments which were more obsessive and destructive which grew out of the dynamics of romantic love. (Praz 1970) Many became much more sceptical with the First World War, poverty and revolution about this rosy-eyed view of life.

In the 20th century romanticism has been reshaped by Hollywood. The romantic film pulled in the crowds. It obviously spoke to the yearnings of the young people who flocked to the cinemas, and everywhere the message was that when the two hearts were united, everything would be fine. Chaplin and his girl walked off into the sunset. Hollywood also constructed male and female stars who could carry the adoration of the opposite sex. Women swooned when their Man came on the screen, and men silently worshipped as every film of their idol appeared. Perhaps someone like this idol lived round the corner. Surprisingly this often happened, as girls round the corner began to look and dress like the idols... Through the middle decades of this century the idols became more sexual and physical - Mary Pickford, Jane Russell, Marilyn Monroe, Brigitte Bardot on the one hand and Charlie Chaplin, Gary Cooper, Robert Redford and Arnold Schwarzenegger on the other. The film industry, although mainly outside Hollywood, developed its own anti-romantic anti-heroes, but even as this process was happening the old films were travelling round the world winning new converts to romanticism. In India through the film romantic love has taken a complete culture by storm in less than two decades. The often unthinking transmission of romanticism became a self-perpetuating industry with newspapers spitefully pointing out the difference between the screen idols and their lives (Anthony and Cleopatra were Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor), but feeding off romanticism at the same time. So on the one hand romantic love has been pushed by the media, including books, magazines, comics, and records on an unprecedented scale, but on the other hand a vast underworld of antiromantic feeling has grown. It is difficult for anyone to escape being romantic and cynic at the same time.

THE FATAL FLAW.

The early Romantics like Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth knew that they were creating an alternative religion. Worship in its full sense was being transferred from God to a man or woman under the name of love. The other person becomes the meaning of life and love is seen as a source of salvation and identity. The dynamics

of this kind of relationship need exploring, because they are very complicated. Part of the analysis involves understanding what it is like to be a god or a goddess. Humanism involves transferring the central meaning of life from God to human beings, so that human beings become gods or goddesses in their own right and in their own terms. This transfer happened historically partly through the old Greek and Roman deities becoming human. Botticelli has a painting of Venus and Mars; Venus lies across the painting languidly looking beautiful and expecting to be admired, but she is not. Mars is fast asleep, probably drunk, and cannot even be roused by a faun blowing a horn in his ear, let alone by the beauty of Venus. So the deities became human. Yet a god or goddess, even a small one, has a glory which has no outside source; they produce good vibrations and are to be served; they are by definition good and they are the focus of all that exists. To fall in love on these terms is to bow the knee and submit: *La Belle Dame sans Merci* hath thee in thrall. Sometimes people aspire to this kind of status; it seems quite an attractive existence, but perhaps more often it is a mantle which is draped over their shoulders by their partner. Yet it imposes a terrible burden.

It is easy to suppose there are few gods and goddesses walking around; most people do not look grand enough. But this is to miss the point. All that one quite ordinary person needs is a single worshipper, and they can slip into the role quite easily. Some men become gods by saying how important their time is; they are about their business and nothing is to be allowed to distract them. Some of us develop an aura, which says how special we are. Not a few women believe that it is a privilege for a man to take her out and pay the bills. Thousands of trivial activities establish patterns which say how important, how beautiful, how infallible some people are. Yet it would be a mistake to assume all these attitudes involve self glorification. A wife may commit herself fully to her husband's job and career; she supports it, works for it and to some extent lives vicariously in it. He wants to succeed genuinely 'for her sake'. Things go wrong, but they suffer beyond the circumstances because both had built on this kind of glory.

Behind the need to provide inspiration for the partner, lies the ordinary person. They must behave as if they are always in control or their beauty captivates. Perhaps they are never allowed the possibility of doing anything wrong and what they say must always be the last word - "'Let spades be trumps!' she said, and trumps they were.' Perhaps they always have to be served and are never allowed to lift a finger for themselves or anybody else. Whatever frailties there are must remain hidden so as not to undermine the terms on which the relationship is set up. This is a very lonely existence. The worship of the other person means that they can never be

dependent without breaking the structure of the relationship. Because our culture encourages us to build up images of intelligence, strength, beauty, power and charisma, many of us are trained to be mini gods and goddesses. Because these images have behind them this false principle, they shrink those who dwell inside them, even colouring all that is good in their lives.

She had worked with him for thirteen years and knew everything. He had done good work, had a deservedly high reputation and was always in demand. Everybody at work and at home depended on him. He had worked so hard. Now the waiting list had disappeared and the work had dwindled. He had cancer, probably not terminal, and his treatment began next week. She had discussed it carefully with his wife, whom he had not told of his illness. She knew that at 2.30 this afternoon he would have no work to do. At 2.25 she asked if he wanted coffee and brought it through. He looked defeated in his chair; she hovered slightly and asked him if he were unwell. 'No, I'm fine.' he said. She swallowed hard and said quietly, 'No, you are not. I've talked to Nancy and know you have cancer, and we've discussed how we can help you.' In about half a second the armour of professional competence fell away, he smiled, then guffawed, thanked her and phoned home.

Thus, anybody who tries to be a god or a goddess, must be alone. But there are other costs. When the god fails, the worshipper is let down. The god should offer salvation in material, sexual or emotional terms, and has not. This comes as a crisis of faith which is ultimate and overturns everything. When the girl who has made life radiant does not do so anymore, she is punished. When the woman who can do no wrong, does wrong, it seems unforgivable. When the man who is in control fails, he cannot be trusted for anything. Sometimes before this happens the person is aware of its likelihood and retreats, making safe the pedestal, and so there is distance rather than the ordinary intercourse of two open people. Sometimes when a young woman marries an older man his maturity and savour faire put him in this kind of elevated position. He may even have been her boss at work. He is in control and knows the score. Then each of them grow older. She gains the experience to question what he says and does, and if he, rather than accepting this as a normal part of maturing feels threatened by it and hangs on to his godlike status, there is trouble. Of course, none of us believes we are fully gods and goddesses; we are only omniscient in some areas and our self-importance knows some boundaries. But still there are millions of men and women walking around with the crestfallen expression of fallen idols. They may have been put on the pedestal by their partner or climbed up there themselves, but metaphorically they have keeled over. Like Dagon, the idol of the Philistines, there is no way they can ever get up again.

Nor is the position any better for the worshipper. He or she hangs everything on this relationship. Without it they do not exist, and its failure, even in quite limited ways, is close to annihilation. Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina* shows the terrible dynamics of this process. Anna leaves her husband and even her son for the compelling love of Vronsky, on which she hangs her life. But soon Vronsky is not able to bear the weight and seeks to create his own space in quite ordinary ways. Anna finds this threatens the central meaning of her life and seeks to bind Vronsky in her total love. At the same time she begins to become aware of his limitations and faults, and these anger her so that she repeatedly rows with him. Gradually the fragile basis of her total commitment is exposed; her life is left without meaning and she finally throws herself under a train. Sometimes a situation occurs where both partners are so dependent on each other for their identity that the relationship collapses on this dependence. They cannot grow in normal healthy ways, because the only meaning they have is in their romantic love, as Lawrence portrays through Gudrun and Gerald in *'Women in Love'*.

Sometimes in pursuit of this pattern a woman seeks to live vicariously through her husband. His work shapes her life. He requires the total sublimation of all she might want. All her emotions are subjected to his emotions. This situation, even if it occurs in a less extreme form, is not stable. Either at a certain stage she will discover her feelings and her thoughts and move out of this pattern, probably with a few rows and traumas, or he, because he is relating to a no-one, will seek to provide a change by continually provoking her or by finding somebody else. Worshippers are often walked over by petty gods. But many worshippers are not honest. They see through the god whom they have served and continue only with the semblance of worship. They sing a hymn once a week and then go about their normal business. They have seen through romantic love and in dismissing it believe they have said goodbye to the possibility of love at all.

POPULAR ROMANTIC LOVE.

Today romantic love is more mundane. Women have irresistible power because they are wearing perfume or men because they are cool. The flattery which will generate self-importance is daily performed by the advertising industry. The New Age movement tells us we are all gods and goddesses, and can engage in self worship. Millions of us practice being little bronzed gods and goddesses on crowded beaches each summer. It is nice to receive even a little lukewarm idolatry; wouldn't it be fun to be adored by women or be a femme fatale? No longer do most men believe

that the meaning of life can be found in a relationship with a woman, but they might be happy to settle for the meaning of the next few months..

Each new generation arrives to adulthood with some version of the doctrine of romantic love. Those who have experienced little love in their own families, or for whom work is tedious, are deeply tempted to see in romantic love a blinding and total solution to life. The young woman finds an older man who lifts her from inattention to being an object of worship. It is wonderful. The flattery works for a while, as the man knows it will, and then he moves on, manipulating the idiom of romantic love without an ounce of the stuff in his soul. She slowly regains her sight and loses her ability to open herself to her beloved. Boys and girls yearn to be the kind of idols who will command this kind of worship; it seems to be the only viable way of finding love. They dissect in detail the lifestyles of the famous, searching for the formula which they in turn must adopt. Possessing a certain pair of trainers becomes of unfathomable importance because of its contribution to the necessary self-image.

The popular forms of idolatry are very constricting, like the hourglass figure of the fifties which the woman worthy of adulation had to achieve. Since Charles Atlas' body-building claims of moving from a puny weakling to a muscleman the male equivalent has also been around. The irresistible beauty sits for hours applying and removing cosmetics. This pattern expresses an almost universal law. Those who seek to become idols are enslaved to them. The idioms turn out to be vain. They fundamentally misstate who we are and identify love with a particular kind of pretence and flattery. Often we play the games of romantic love, but know underneath that they are not true; this is not what we are really like.

Samantha found that Donald flooded her with attention. The contrast with the pattern of being ignored at home and having customers who only looked at the banknotes she was dishing out was vivid. She especially liked clothes shopping together, so that he could tell her what looked best on her. They had a really good time and she felt more confident - she swung her hair and took a longer stride. But after a while something went wrong. It was partly money; she was spending a lot and Donald even more on her. One afternoon the focus was so much on her and what clothes she should buy that she tried to provoke him; as an outcome he finished up buying a dress for £110 which she did not really like. She was actually so angry when she should have been grateful that she quit for home as quickly as possible and did some washing up. Gradually the relationship fizzled out and Samantha suspected that Donald was a bit relieved when it did, although he still said how much he adored her.

The deepest cost of romanticism lies in the way it causes millions to give up on love. If this great love is supposed to be the meaning of life, what happens when it fails? If this person should inspire love, what if they fail? Because there seems to be nothing more, even the very young turn their backs on love. They fall passionately in love, experience some exploitative sex, and back off into wary relationships and post romantic cynicism. They are not able to consider that the kind of love they trusted was fatally flawed. By contrast we walk in a broad place when we open our lives to the scrutiny of God's love, so that our failures can be recognized for what they are and cleansed out of our relationships. We might be tempted to live in relationships of make believe, inspiring, as we believe love in one another, but the kind of love we need is that which recognizes and abides through our weaknesses and sin. That love cannot be disillusioned, because in principle it has none

LOVE AS DUTY.

For many the prime conception of love is as duty. Women, especially in Eastern societies, have been taught it is their duty is to love their husband. At its most extreme in the past this conception was registered in the custom of suttee whereby women committed themselves to the funeral pyre of their dead husband. Now it is expressed in much more moderate ways, and recently dating agencies have done a strong trade in providing wives from Asia to husbands who dislike the emancipated Western woman and prefer a woman who knows what duty and submission mean. Nor is the conception just of the wife's duty to her husband for Asian marriage also involves a strong understanding of the husband's duty to provide for his wife and children in economic circumstances which make that a task of great sacrifice and endless hard work. By contrast many western marriages seem flabby in their emphasis on self-gratification. Often the idea of duty is given strong religious sanction with punishment or dishonour following failure to live in the prescribed way. In this study we shall not examine these eastern meanings, important though they are, but focus on duty in the West, a rather different idea.

There are many western couples who have experienced the pull of romantic love threatening their marriage, but duty has won and has re-established stability. Similarly, when emotions are running rife and are creating chaos, sober duty can often restore order. Duty also provides strong subsidiary ideas. Love is seen as bringing home a wage, cooking his meals, having his shirts ironed or saying it with flowers. Indeed, when this pattern is changed, it can seem devastating. When the wife says, 'No meal tonight, cook it yourself.' he knows something is wrong. But it is

important not to parody this position and underestimate its strength and the compelling power it possesses. Unlike the positions we have previously examined, this one always provides an answer. Keep on doing your duty. Love your man or your woman. More than this, it has a hook on a central biblical truth. Love lasts; all these other things will vanish away, but love will never end. If love means being faithful, providing food and shelter for the family and never being angry, then you just get on and do these things in all circumstances. It also emphasises putting the needs and problems of others before one's own. This commitment to giving priority to others provides the inner strength of many families and cannot be overvalued. Especially when one's spouse has turned out to be a despicable heap, the duty view of love sees through the problem. But in many relationships these views of duty are mixed up with others which are more questionable.

LOVE AS MORALITY.

The meaning of duty is complex. One strand within it is the idea of love as doing good to the other person. They receive cups of tea in bed or are given lavish presents, but behind these actions is the understanding that from good only good can come. The evidence is convincing and much of the time all of these household acts of care betoken love in a straightforward and heartwarming way. Yet it is not quite so simple. It depends on the focus. If these actions have their focus in the lover rather than the beloved, they are acts of self-righteousness and self-justification rather than love. There are a number of tests of this tendency. If past acts are brought up as a way of rebuking the partner or justifying one's own actions, they are being fed into this framework. If the other person feels done good to rather than really helped, the same is possibly going on. And if the subject cannot receive love and care without feeling insecure and slightly threatened, it is probable that they are trying to keep their bank of goodness fuller than anyone else's. Being good and doing good in a self-validating way is one of the most powerful human motives and few of us are immune from it. That is why Jesus criticized it so rigorously.

It can be accompanied by a kind of rigidity. Many of us have quite fixed views of the terms on which we will receive love from others. The check lists are often quite extraordinary. The man should dress a certain way. The woman should be colour coordinated. He should never be so rude as to disagree with her. She should always laugh at his jokes. He should never go to sleep in a chair. She should never break wind. Many of us have this detailed morality of loving because we value our loving so highly. Actually, our conception is built up from our parents, friends and culture and often reflects narrow views of love. Some people are very confident about the

kind of love they offer and expect; they dictate the terms and the other partner is expected to fit in with them. Others are more circumspect about the terms on which they give love; it even makes them timid. - Nancy had problems here. She was so concerned about how she should dress for her date with David that she was an hour late. He had gone, and when she eventually caught up with him, the cinema was so dark that he scarcely saw her anyway. Queuing for the ice-cream took twenty minutes, and when they parted rather quickly afterwards, she worked out that he had only seen her for five minutes after two hours of getting ready. After that she eased up a bit when she went out. - Especially early in a relationship there is often a lot of anxiety attached to these moral codes. This reflects the extent to which we give and experience judgement as to the kind of love which is acceptable.

IS MY LOVE GOOD ENOUGH?

Linked with the moralism of love is the attitude which decides either to accept love or reject it as not good enough. We shall call it the probationary attitude to love. Will my love come up to scratch? Many children have a deep and haunting experience that the love they have offered to their parents, brothers and sisters and friends has not been good enough; it has been rejected. Thus, the most valuable thing that they have to offer, their very selves, are sent back as not good enough. Possibly, they are asked to resubmit with improved performance. They learn that love means fulfilling certain conditions which will be acceptable to others and no longer give themselves, but work at the moral prerequisites which are necessary for acceptable love. The idea of 'moral' in this situation can amount to almost anything. A woman must accept physical violence or sexual abuse. A man must provide a home, decorations, furniture and garden which are luxurious and perfect before it is accepted that he really loves his spouse. Each year he winces as the specification of what he must provide is pushed higher and he remains on probation. Or the woman is loved she believes on the grounds that she is an exciting person, and the worry sets in that if she changes, then love will be withdrawn.

The question of whether my love is good enough is a devastating question. Of course, there are refusals of marriage proposals and friendships break down, but far deeper is the question of whether love which is offered with a sincere heart is judged and rejected. Anyone who stands judgement over such love with this kind of moral authority immediately has great power; they have the ability to make any situation into an examination where they will set the questions, mark the papers and decide the pass-fail criterion. These judgements shape many love relationships, leaving one or both partners critically focussing on the performance and validity of the other's

love in a way which must drive them apart from one another. For this kind of approach must generate criticism, accusations and dissatisfaction. It contains an arrogance which says that I deserve such and such a kind of love, and you are so much less than I deserve. The sense of self-rightness becomes self-righteousness evaluating the most precious thing that the other can give as not up to the mark. Holding this moral position can be used to induce a kind of perpetual slavery and a deep discouragement in the life of the other person. Love becomes an external performance which must come up to a certain standard before it is accepted. The heart has gone out of it and only a sense of behavioural failure is left.

Frequently the response to this kind of moralism is for each partner to judge the other for the failures of the love which is offered. Charge and countercharge are presented in ways which aim to shift the weight of blame and moral failure to the other. In this kind of argument and quarrelling each partner focusses on their own perceived strengths and locates the weaknesses of the other so that moral superiority can be established. The arguments which each partner uses may be quite accurate, but the problem lies in the fact that the context is moralism, blame and self-righteousness, rather than love and openness. Behind the arguments lies the sense of hurt arising from the way their love has been judged and an inability to respond positively. Couples in this situation will complain that the love has gone out of their marriage, which is quite accurate. It has been replaced by a pharisaic moralism which makes the giving and receiving of love impossible. This is not only constructed out of judgement, but also from refusing to recognize how hurtful attitudes and actions have been. The idea that 'it is not my problem' can be used as moral insulation. What matters is only who is right and parrying blame.

Alison felt she had an unbearable load. With the work and the children she had to organize the whole day down to the last minute. Dominic didn't pull his weight. What upset her most was the fact that he actually took time to relax and rest when she was tearing about. Because she was under pressure she couldn't do things well. It was becoming worse because the children didn't help much either, even with a lot of nagging. Jason, Fiona and Henry were old enough to lend a hand but they never seemed to know what to do and everything fell on her shoulders. Really she was the only one who did things properly. Nobody else had learned what housework involved. They were just as irresponsible as the people at work. When Jason told her one day that she never allowed anybody to do anything, Alison exploded. But when the steam had cleared, she began to dish out tasks permanently, and was surprised when they had learned to do them how willingly and well they co-operated.

One of the astonishing things about Jesus is the way he broke through this moralistic garbage. First of all he firmly rejected all the judgements of himself, his disciples and those he met which came from this assumed right to judge. When Martha chided Mary for not helping with the housework, he commended her for her commitment to learning and gave Martha space to cool down. He refused to allow his disciples to be censored for picking grain on the Sabbath, or children for shouting in the temple area. He turned the focus on the judgers, asking them to notice the plank in their eye before focussing on the speck in someone else's. He accepted people where they were; he recognized that people wanted him for the bread, the miracles, the healing and the excitement, but he always accepted whatever love was offered him. It came from a woman who was a prostitute who was polluting him with her hair and tears; it came from a leper who said thankyou when he was healed; it came from a thief who was about to die. Often the love was tested in straightforward ways, but always Jesus accepted what people gave of themselves without any of the burdens and provisos which those who were not the Son of God felt compelled to add. The central truth is that God is always able to relativize the performance to our circumstances and situation, but seeks an open loving heart and sincere commitment. A bruised reed he will not break and a slowly burning candle he will not blow out. Nor should we.

LOVE AND DUTY THROUGH HISTORY.

The language of duty has deeply affected love down the centuries, but it has taken a number of markedly different forms. One of the most influential is the Enlightenment conception of rights. It saw people as being born with certain natural rights, like the life, liberty and pursuit of freedom of the United States Declaration of Independence. Although these might signal important external constraints on the attitudes of others, they had the problem for those who 'possessed' them that they were self-regarding. My rights were what I could lay claim to. This mode of thinking has deeply influenced the culture of love. Within marriage it has normally reflected a breakdown in co-operation and a legalistic view of relationships. There is the right implicit in English law down through the centuries of the man to rape his wife whenever he felt like insisting on sex, only rescinded in 1991 in Britain. Far more normal are the plethora of customary rights which husbands always and wives more recently have insisted are part of their lot. Many of the older patterns convey the idea of territory which was built into this approach. The husband had the right to leave the kids with the wife. The wife had the right to collect the wages on payday and give him an allowance, or to collect him while still sober from the pub. The

husband could throw the meal in the back of the fire and demand the cooking of another one if it were not up to scratch. 'I know me rights' was the warcry in patterns of trench warfare which occurred in many homes of the past. The language of this rights conception has changed, but it is just as common. Now, however, it focusses more fully on individual freedom - to spend, to lifestyle, to sexual adventure and to ignore the partner. For the key to this approach is the pattern of justification it offers to whatever the individual wants irrespective of the needs, concerns and fears of the partner. It is a form of systemized insensitivity in which each person becomes convinced of the right to go their own way regardless.

Another conception of duty was as an act of the will, often dissociated from emotion and understanding. It owes much to the philosopher, Kant, and the dualism which he built into his interpretation of human beings. On the one hand the mind gathered the ordered rational knowledge of the external world, and on the other the person exercised his will, guided by universal moral commands. (Kant 1929, 1909) Love, since it was obviously not a matter of knowledge, was therefore a matter of will and duty. And Kant lived like that; people put their clocks right by the time he passed the door. This view had widespread influence; it was not uncommon for conversion to Christianity to be presented as an act of the will, with the assumption that emotion and understanding will follow. The moralism which was so pervasive in the 19th century was heavily influenced by views similar to Kant's. Love on this view was a matter of deciding what was right and carrying it out with an inner determination to see it through.

This view tended to be impersonal. It was universal in the sense that it was what one does to anybody. It involves establishing a rule which defines right conduct and then carrying it out as an act of the will. The whole conception of the love is contained in an armoured decision inside one person and whoever is receiving the love is in a certain sense irrelevant. They feel they are being done good to, but it does not touch them personally, because the conception has nothing to do with them, but only with general concepts like soldiering on, doing right by people and being a good husband. It is an approach which is much comforted by rules. When the subject of love comes up, such a person is likely to respond, 'Well, I do this, that and the other; what more can I do?' However, it is also impersonal with respect to the giver, because it is a conception which leaves very little room for receiving love, for being the object of affection. Perhaps the person is wary of being dependent on the love of others, perhaps they fear blame, or perhaps they just delight in following rules. The motives can vary, but if the central point of generation is 'the will' there are likely to be problems. Sometimes people think that 'emotions' are unreliable and

the 'will' trustworthy , and the exercise of the will often ignores and sublimates an emotional life which also needs addressing in terms of love. Only when our whole self is behind the chosen path is love pure and uncomplicated (Kierkegaard 1962) There is a stiff upper lipness which feels insecure on emotional grounds and will try to make sure that the relationship does not stray there.

A further sense of duty is task orientated. It sets goals and ends which are seen as being central to the business of loving. Indeed, some people approach loving like a business operation. Then when the goals are fulfilled, love will have been done. The lady receives a fur coat or a new house, and either the lover sets himself a new task or sits back and congratulates himself on a task completed. Because the sense of love is always based on activity, it then becomes difficult to give love in any other terms - through listening, suffering, accepting or waiting. This view always looks to the future; it is doing things for next week or next year and the relationship which takes place in the present is a working one, but one where the couple are not able to down tools.

Fred and Freda were both in the Green Movement. They had actually met clearing a river north of London. When they were married Fred committed himself to creating the best home he could for Freda. He worked hard; they moved twice and within four years had a fine home in Twickenham. On Christmas Day in the fifth year a number of things struck them. The first was the cooking. Because Fred had worked so hard to make home into the place Freda would enjoy, she had responded by doing more and more elaborate cooking. It seemed to fit the home. But previously, they had liked plain simple food. Second, there were children. Now they had sorted out the house, they were ready for children. They had talked the agenda through many times before, but it was all too neat; it seemed to be making life into one damned thing after another. Finally, there was ecology. They did not want it, but they were moving into being big consumers. Life was running them. After church they had a light snack and then went for a long walk through the deserted streets of London, and it was on that walk that their love dived beneath these self-imposed pressures into something more tranquil.

However, often it is not those who live by duty who are the source of the problem, but those who set up the dutiful patterns. If the husband's career requires it, then of course it is the wife's duty to move yet again; should any other possibility receive consideration? Those who receive dutiful love can even abuse the person who is giving it, especially since they may feel they have a vested interest in reinforcing the pattern by nagging, the use of financial power, physical abuse, moral blackmail or frequent appeal to a sense of duty which they themselves ignore. By using this view

of love millions, mainly men, have heaped untold suffering on their spouses. Wives have cowered under drunken men in the name of duty. Partners have sobbed themselves to sleep at the unfaithfulness of their mate hanging on to the thin thread of duty. Men have humoured extravagant wives buttressed by a sense of duty. There is something degenerate going on here. The idea of duty is imposed on a person who is then to be treated without dignity, respect or affection. In the past, especially, some women have been left with all the repetitive and uninteresting jobs, while the men live more exciting lives. Some of those men have then found their dutiful wife boring. The problem, normally, is not with the dutiful wife, so much as with the husbands who create dutiful wives by expectations and grumbling. Those who find their partner uninteresting have probably themselves made him or her that way by closing down possibilities of communication and action. No person is boring. It is the lack of care and sensitivity which pushes the other partner into routine and predictable responses, often with a deep awareness of how far from real love and concern their lives are lived.

THE BADDIES AND THE GOODIES.

Deep within this meaning of love is the idea of being good enough to be loved. Many people are crushed by what they consider as failure, measured by some of the standards set out above. They have not done well in their career or are unemployed and feel deeply that they have let the one they love down. They have not been able to give their partner what is seen as a basic right; so, for example, many of the ten per cent or so of couples who are not able to give birth to children add to their disappointment the completely unwarranted feeling that they have let their partner down. Others are aware of things about themselves which they feel are dispicable and make them a failure and unworthy of love. It may be past sexual relationships or the way they have treated their parents and brothers and sisters. Many suffer from addictions which give them a repeated sense of failure. But often it is not even anything they have done, but the attitudes of others. Children become discouraged when they are described to their face in ways which imply they will never change. 'There's no hope for him.' These assessments which may be fed by even quite mild criticisms paralyse the ability of many people to love. They have an overwhelming sense of how little value their love must have. The sense of defeat makes all attempts at love half-hearted. We have failed before and will we not do so again? What seems like an inability to love is likely to be this kind of lack of confidence. The answer to it is straightforward and fills the New Testament. The heartfelt love of each person is inestimably valuable. We do fail in our love, like Peter, but we can be forgiven,

recover and learn to love better. Those who turn their backs on the love of others do not know God.

There is another devastating effect of this kind of sense of failure; people move into privacy. There is a pervasive sense that nobody could love me if what I am truly like is revealed. I therefore retain a private area where there are skeletons which remain hidden are kept. This move has peculiar consequences. First, it is likely to mean that the me which remains hidden as the true me, the one which superficial onlookers do not see, is the failure. It becomes central to my identity and it is the thing that I cannot talk about to anybody. Even more incongruous is the fact that many of the sources of failure - childhood and adult abuse, educational barriers, lack of skills, physical and health problems - are in no sense the fault of the person who experiences them so deeply as failure. Second, it also leads the person to dismiss the love of others, because it is seen as being based on a misconception. 'If only they knew me as I am, they would not love me any more.' The wars which take place in people's hearts on this score are titanic. On the one hand they are in love and want to open up their lives to their beloved. On the other hand maybe during the early stages of friendship they have presented themselves to their love in a favourable light, but above all they do not want to reveal the failures and sense of unworthiness which dwell in their lives. They are hugging with one arm and holding their partner at arms length with the other. With care and patience all these areas of failure, sin and unworthiness, if they matter at all, can be brought out of privacy into a relationship where love removes the fear which made them grow. (see E Storkey 1993 for fuller treatment)

The bigger problem always is for those whose sense of love is marked by self approval. They are doing it right or have marked out their daily ration of love. It involves taking the children to school, washing up after supper and putting the cat out plus shopping on Fridays. It is the love which has totted up all it has done in the last month. Like the Pharisee in the parable who prayed to himself explaining all he did and thanking God that he was not like 'this publican', this kind of love is only involved in a dialogue with itself. Whatever good is done is not done in relationship, but performed in front of the mirror. It is felt by others as external, and does not touch them where they are. It brings into what is supposed to be love destructive patterns of judgement and spreads a defeated sense of failure through people's lives. Instead of people meeting one another face to face they pass one another dressed in their own petty notions of what love should be like. The care that Jesus took to attack this attitude shows that it must be one of the most potent sources of bondage in human lives. The goodies and the baddies do not exist.

LOVE AND GRACE.

Too often in the past duty and moralism have been identified as a Christian view of love. They are not, and there is a sustained biblical critique of all views which seek to identify good and moral behaviour with human judgements and standards. When the focus is on human valuations of love, then people begin to stand over the law of love and make it their own, to interpret it as a method of bringing others to account. Immediately this kind of pride subverts the true meaning of love and turns it into a weapon of blame and recrimination. Jesus' criticisms of the destructive, burdensome nature of this approach to love ring out through the Gospels, and Paul makes clear that all self-centred attempts at love which have as their agenda the rightness of the individual are doomed. The only hope is to move into the enjoyment of God's love which is not an individual act of the will, but encompasses the whole relationship in grace.

God's grace is not a matter of desert or earning capacity, but begins with the free, undeserving commitment of God to us as persons. As Jesus took Peter through his multiple failures into the ability to love and give, so we are invited on the same journey. It offers us no hope of resting in our duty, goodness or rights, but instead validates our ability to respond to God and to love one another however pathetic are our present abilities. These relationships penetrate far deeper than rule orientated behaviour which locks onto individual performance. They reach into our failures and successes and put both in a bigger context. They keep the focus of the relationship open instead of self-regarding.

John could not cope. He had been unfaithful to his wife, Mary. It was casual sex over a weekend when he was away and got drunk. He knew he had to tell Mary. At first he argued to himself that because it was casual, it need not matter to either of them, but then he saw how that cheapened at least his participation in their own lovemaking, and fortunately he dropped that line quickly. Then he focussed on what he had done. There were no excuses; it was despicable. Mary would be right to blame him. The most pathetic thing was to have sex with another woman when Mary was pregnant. John played through all the things which Mary would say and acknowledged in detail the weight of every one, before facing her with what had happened. It was when he confessed that he finally saw the problem. As he told her, he felt in her face, her heart and her womb that she had been hurt. He was focussing on what he had done that was wrong. Even in his self-examination, the focus had been on him, whereas all that mattered was the way she had been hurt. He was gripped by uncontrollable weeping.

But behind all the failures of moralism lies something which is stronger than steel. It is the willingness to suffer for love, to forgive seventy times seven, to go the extra mile. It is the attitude which is so committed to the other person that it will go with the problems. This is not cold duty, but is described by Jesus as full of joy and gladness. It is not even the kind of self-satisfaction which comes from being seen by others to suffer. It ploughs on for the good of the other, knowing that God's purposes of love are a stronger truth than any obstacle it might encounter. This kind of perseverance outlasts duty; it carries on when duty has become hollow, and most of us only begin to glimpse what it means when we face the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

LOVE AS HAPPINESS

WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

Since Jefferson coined the idea that the pursuit of happiness is one of the basic rights of humankind it has featured strongly in the West. Many people accept that the great unwritten law of life is that they want to be happy. The key love relationship must therefore be the one that makes them happy. There are great cliches, like 'They both lived happily ever after' which describe how many of us expect to live. The fairy story is for real. Many people therefore check many times a day whether they are happy or not; it is the thermometer of existence, and the central measure of the success of relationships.

Yet what this great idea means is not always clear. Contentment, enjoyment, pleasure and satisfaction sum up aspects of the central theme. Jeremy Bentham, the English Utilitarian philosopher developed a more general understanding of happiness. Everybody, he argued, sought pleasure and wanted to avoid pain, whether it was physical or psychological. They therefore calculated which actions, friendships and relationships gave them the greatest pleasure and sought them, or avoided those which on balance had a more negative effect. On this argument all relationships involve a search for pleasurable rewards. Even those which seem to involve altruistic behaviour are such because this kind of behaviour brings psychic pleasure to the subject. Bentham taught that pursuing the greatest happiness of the greatest number was the aim of public policy. Everybody wants to be happy and there is no point to relationships which do not give people pleasure. Happiness is never having to say you are sorry, wearing his vest and sitting by the fire with one mug of cocoa. It is a commonplace that the business of love is making one another happy. Being happy - "smile please" is a requirement on many occasions. Almost all

married couples will remember the face ache which followed the wedding; they were happy, but the effort of one more smile for the photographer, so that posterity will know this was a glad occasion, was just too much. When finally alone, we gazed at one another with long faces relaxing the muscles that could take no more. After the wedding all I want is to make her happy. I would do anything to make it happen. So the agenda is built up. But what does it actually mean?

Happiness is a self defined inner state of contentment. It is when what I wanted to be I am. It is the best of all possible worlds for me when all pain, problems, sadness and discomfort are chased away. Each of us has a question to which our happiness is the answer. It is subjective so that each of us can be happy in our own way. Some of us are never happier than when we are having a good cry. This allows it to be a live and let live attitude. It just depends, as they say, what turns them on. Sometimes it is model trains, going to the races or staring into the eyes of the beloved. Nobody has to dictate what happiness will be; you just decide it yourself and get on with it. And it is potentially warmhearted; everybody wishes everybody else A Happy Christmas. You wouldn't want them to have a bad time would you? So love is the commitment to making your partner happy, bringing about that inner state of contentment. It should be quite simple.

THE CULTURE OF HAPPINESS.

There was a time, some men sigh for it still, when the definition of happiness for a woman was to find the (right) man. The man embodied so many of the woman's life circumstances through his job, attitudes, income and family that she could effectively sink all her dreams of happiness in him. This view involved no strongly individualized set of desires, but would involve taking up the roles and opportunities which were offered by the newly created family unit. During this epoch, which lasts in some families up to the present, ideas of happiness were firmly embedded in social customs which were quite formal and often associated with family and leisure. Holidays, picnics, parties, family gatherings and sports contained moments of celebration set in well defined social patterns. Within this people were glad and sad, but the scope for the search for happiness was usually circumscribed by hard work and family commitments.

Only with the 50s in the States and the 60s in Europe did a younger generation have scope to construct their own culture of happiness. It was the era of Elvis, Cliff Richard's 'Summer Holiday', 'You've never had it so good' and a youth culture which aimed to enjoy itself in its own way. Or so it seemed. Records, soft drinks and clothes were all sold by adults within a driving idiom profit-making, and making

people happy developed as a highly successful commercial art form. Provided you had the cash, it was within your grasp; you just reached out your hand and plucked the flower. Instant relationships arrived. The Hippie culture offered the love-in, the idea that the pleasure of sex should be severed from any need to relate to the partner. If it made you happy, that was fine. Soon this individualist utopia was dampened with tears as couples woke up the next morning to relationships which had to mean something or nothing. But there was an inner change taking place in the meaning of love; the search for happiness was rerooting in the individual's psyche; every person had their private longings, hopes and fantasies which played the tune of love for them. Like ancient troubadours they undertook the long search from town to town singing the song which they believed would be answered. Some developed a commitment to the pleasure-principle in sex. They became involved in calculations about what technically gave the most pleasure sexually and sought the Big One, discarding failures as they travelled on. The personal relationships involved scarcely seemed to matter. Another focus was on experience; some experiences shared were pleasurable, and the young hoped that in some relationships enough of these could be strung together to make a permanently pleasurable bundle of subjective rewards.

It was about this time that the assumed identity of happiness between man and woman was thoroughly fragmented. The Angry Young Men of the late 50s, Osborne, Sillitoe and others, hit out against the domesticating housewife and family, but they were merely the detonators of a far bigger explosion. The early Feminists vocalised the possibility that men, rather than making them happy, were often a great source of pain and depression. They recognized they were fed up with spending so much of their lives trying to keep men happy. The concept which had been so full of optimism in the 50s and 60s became much more problematic. Some held on to it through the materialist dream of being able to buy happiness, but the face of Paul Getty, the richest and the saddest man in the world, denied any link between money and happiness. Now the idiom of happiness lives on in the hopes of each new generation, but in the adult world it is a disintegrating idol. You can find a bit to worship if you want to, but most are also aware of the emptiness of the happy culture. It is now strung out on artificial smiles, television quiz shows and the Christmas booze-up, part of the sentimental froth of life awaiting the next day's hangover.

MAKING (HER) HAPPY.

We need to examine why this trend has occurred by looking at the internal meaning of happiness for relationships. Already, some of the implications of this approach become evident. If the ultimate value is her happiness, everything else has an instrumental role. Slowly the primacy of her happiness is imposed over different areas of life. I must humour her to keep her happy. She wouldn't be happy with that. Gradually activities and motives are shaped round maintaining these inner subjective feelings of well-being, which become more capricious and unpredictable as they are fed with egocentric food. Rather than relationships having value and requiring mutuality, they are seen as feeding this subjective sense of well-being. It demands that he be a means of making her happy and subordinates the significance of all the daily activities of life to this end. Eventually he feels used by the one who must be and remain happy, who sucks in pleasant experiences and satisfaction from those around her. The holiday is just to make her happy; it is not a shared experience. Making love is a question of making her enjoy herself and not of mutual expression and receiving. So the self-centredness of the drive leaves partners feeling lonely, either as they live in their own search for happiness and face the depressions which go along with it, or as they try to meet the thirst of their partner for an unslakable kind of satisfaction.

Yvonne faced the problem of Gordon's overwhelming concern for her happiness at the office. It meant that she was never really able to relate to him properly. She puzzled as to the best way of changing things without dishonouring his love. One of his patterns of overwhelming concern was constant offers of a drink, and she decided to act there. The next day she accepted every offer and consumed 9 drinks of tea and coffee. Gordon willingly made each one with a smile and usually had one himself; he showed no irritation although the offers did tail off slightly in the afternoon. Yvonne's blood turned a watery brown and her only consolation was that once he had been desperate for the toilet when she had beat him there. The next day she changed her tactics and offered him drinks. This was unusual, for normally by her calculation there was no need for an offer. At 10.30 when she appeared smiling round the door and offered him his third cup of coffee, he grinned and gave in and their relationship began.

This approach becomes the great engineering project of life. The husband wants the wife to be happy, and becomes a comfort zone for her. He provides a nice home, takes her out, gives her exotic presents, provides her with excitement, and the relationship becomes warped. Although he is doing all these things for her, he is not actually providing her with a person to relate to. Often he is so busy worrying over things that he is not there as a person. Sometimes it does not occur to him that his

company is what she wants, because he thinks of himself all the time as a restaurant waiter waiting to provide. There is an underlying insecurity, because unless he can make her happy the relationship is doomed. He is anxious, watching her to see if this state which is the core of the relationship can be maintained. Anything which might make her upset becomes taboo. Gradually a way of life is engineered which conforms to this design, but it is one where he does not participate in a marital relationship, but merely ministers from the outside to her internal state of wellbeing or misery. Inevitably, because he is ignored, he builds up resentment because things in his life are not being addressed.

Nor is the lot of the other partner any better. She is forced by the focus of the relationship to be concerned with her inner feelings of elation or pain. Moreover, she is led to believe that these have some kind of ultimate significance and constantly tests them with a subjective thermometer. When it is up she is up and when it is down she is very, very down. She is at the mercy of this subjective state. Also built into this model is a pattern of dependence which is very powerful. It is like the child who continually needs to be the centre of attention or needs entertaining all the time. When adults are not doing what they should, the child sulks or throws a tantrum. It needs to be kept amused. Similarly, the woman who needs her man to keep her happy is locked into a pattern of dependence which is debilitating. Just as a child may cry or sulk when he has not received a sweet, she walks around with a form of this syndrome; she is upset that life has not made her happy. He may take on mood manipulation, so that if she feels depressed or unhappy, he develops a series of diversionary tactics which will help her feel better. Gradually as the moods become more developed the tactics have to become more extreme; a headache requires a Mediterranean cruise... Yet still the responses stay outside the basic problem, the need to to be made happy. Even more seriously, the couple are not able to share sorrow and grief in their desire to escape from it into a chin up mood. Moreover, the weight of this task is depressing for him as he realizes he will not be able to make her happy whatever he does. Faced with his failure he loses the optimism which has driven him on; his agenda for love cannot work and he must either question his love or his philosophy.

Jean felt different from last year. They had had a holiday in the Bahamas, and really it had been a good holiday. Dave was pleasant as usual, but there had been the wait at Heathrow which had spoiled things from the beginning, and the other problem was just how many people there had been around. She longed for empty beaches where there was nobody around to intrude on her enjoyment, but always there was somebody else spoiling the view or making a noise. It seemed you had to

pay the earth to have a holiday on some exotic island to be really happy. Dave had been OK, but it wasn't a very exciting holiday either. This year they had no option but to spend less. The holiday brochures full of crowded Spanish beaches sickened her. It was probably the last holiday before they started a family and the thought of it made her depressed. Whatever holiday they had was bound to be a failure.

The agenda of this motive is bound to fail. It contains an inherent impossibility. When we enjoy something, it is the thing which we enjoy; our pleasure results from whatever has caused it. To say 'we enjoy ourselves' is strictly inaccurate; ourselves is precisely what we do not enjoy; indeed, joy is an unselfconscious state and one which is focussed and hung out on whatever is its source. Normally, the things to which we respond in this way are those which are good; we may kid ourselves at times that other things are pleasurable, but it is love, beauty, good actions, relationships, the natural world, gentleness, honesty and food which provoke pleasure simply because of what they are. Yet if our concern is centrally our happiness, the selfcentredness of the attitude prevents us from relating to things as they actually are. The possibility of joy is ruled out by the egocentric preoccupation. Thus the man who sees the women around him in terms of the sexual pleasure they might give him, cannot simply enjoy their dignity and beauty. Because the happiness motive tries to put the subject at the centre of the universe, it actually cuts him or her off from what can give joy. The quest for happiness makes all the resultant feelings counterfeit.

By contrast the biblical understanding of blessing is surprising and quite different. Rather than being something which is pursued, blessing has to be given by God, and the terms on which it is given are non-egocentric. There is the odd request that people lose their lives and thereby give up the centrality of concern with their own gratification. God gives blessing to those who are not full of themselves, who mourn, are meek, who deprive themselves to obtain justice for others, who are merciful, peacemakers and pure. In other words, because there is a deep comitment to what is good in God's terms, a person experiences the joy associated with that goodness, even if in a context of suffering. Thus, it is more blessed to give than to receive, because the focus on what will benefit others allows love to flourish. There is no escape from this law; if our motives really are selfish, they will contaminate what we hope will make us happy, but insofar as our motives and love is pure, we will experience, although not seek, blessing.

NEWSPAPER AND SLIPPERS.

The egocentric reference point of this view makes the other partner expendable. Only as long as she succeeds in keeping him happy is the relationship a stable one, and if all he sees in her is what makes him happy, he is going to have a shallow and unrewarding relationship. Sometimes the demands are quite nebulous, like the very powerful one, 'Do not mess up my life with problems which you have, but keep me blissfully ignorant.' The wife will handle the income tax, schooling, clothing, childcare, family relationships, Christmas cards, holidays, washing and ironing, paying bills and looking after the pets while he watches snooker and doesn't want to be disturbed. Or perhaps all kinds of problems emerge in the relationship which he will not acknowledge even when they are chronic, because he doesn't want his happy existence to be troubled by anything which is serious. And they are happily married aren't they? Eventually, she walks out or bangs her head on the wall, and he is suprised. 'I didn't realise you felt this way.' he says. At other times his agenda of happiness swamps her daily life. The husband's concern with keeping fit and enjoying exercise means that money and time are spent on his leisure and fitness activities while she is just expected to stay fit through housework. He needs his social contacts - golf, pub, football, office friends, and she baby minds. The good life for him generates washing, housework, domestic disruption, and she is supposed to sort it out and do a job. He is quite content and she walks up the wall.

Sadly, there is also a well trodden route from this kind of indulgence and concern with happiness into extramarital affairs and new relationships. When the concern is whether she will make me happy, it creates a number of possible responses. When he is feeling sorry for himself, he imagines situations and people who might make him more happy. Not suprisingly when he has been so self-indulgent at home, he feels guilty there and looks for others surroundings which would be more congenial. Because the idea of someone making me happy is so flawed to start with, it develops into a quest, moving on from one person to another. Within this context all kinds of floating relationships occur which have a mutual happiness message as their chief agenda. They may work for a while in their own terms, but sooner or later the issue of whether this pattern will develop into a real relationship occurs, when the original terms of its development work against it.

There is, of course, another tradition of woman being asked to make men 'happy' on a consumption basis through prostitution and pornography. Here we see the end of the line where sex is seen completely in terms of egocentric gratification and the relationship is reduced to a transaction or a piece of paper. What becomes evident is the loneliness of this approach. The woman who serves as a prostitute knows that there is no love in the process but only gratification, and presumably conducts the

relationship in those terms, while the man is really only having an extended conversation with himself - what turns him on, what sexual experience can he hang onto for a while and what did it feel like for him. Gratification becomes divorced from care. The depths of the problem which grow out of this attitude are made evident by AIDS, for in the act which is supposed above all to express love, it seems that men and women are prepared to pass on death.

Another aspect of this vision is disturbing in a more mundane way. The inner search for happiness has become so deeply part of the consumer culture of our day that people spend large quantities of time surrounding themselves with things, experiences, forms of entertainment, sources of excitement and novelties which will leave them happy and content. This transaction is so routine in daily life that it becomes ritualistic. We pay for a meal or a film and wait for it to make us content or entertain us. Increasingly these items create an environment which is absorbing - watching television, listening to a walkman, the exotic holiday or the luxurious home. There is a process of control, where the subject orders his environment in a way which will bring him pleasure, as he gets what he wants. In the past only the rich had servants and waiters, but now many more people are into the "What would you like, Sir?" consumer culture and the built-in patterns of indulgence which go with it. When relationships are seen and structured in similar terms the damage of this perspective becomes fully evident. It becomes important for the girlfriend or the wife not to be an inconvenience, to fit in with the comfortable surroundings. When a direct demand it made, it is irritating and needs to be marginalised. Relationships are programmed in a similar way to an evening's television viewing, so that the girlfriend is switched on when it is suitable. The underlying impersonality of this kind of relating is so ordinary that it is easy to ignore it; yet it chokes the roots of a real loving relationship, strangling it with trivia and self-indulgence.

What is striking about this directing goal of happiness is the way it creates inner dreams which are basically destructive, because they are tainted by the selfishness and whims of the subject. When these are imposed on the world, what is supposed to be nice, happy and harmless turns out to be evil and to display a fundamental disrespect to others. Because the inner idea is so indulgent, it is often difficult for us to see how destructive and hurtful are its consequences. The idea which many people associate so closely with love is actually an evil selfishness.

The corruption of the search for happiness goes deep. In any relationship it is a bid to put myself at the centre of the relationship. It is asking the other person to worship my wants. By this central religious act the sensitivity and openness of a relationship is warped, and it becomes difficult for the person to receive what the

other person has to offer. Like Midas, everything which this motive touches is turned into the uniform gold of what I want and loses its individuality and sparkle. So it is inevitable that the search for happiness will be married to patterns of depression and introspective pathos as the underlying cosmic loneliness of the attitude becomes apparent.

MAKING OTHERS UNHAPPY.

Of course, we feel instinctively that life should be joyful and pleasant. Children often convey an uncomplicated sense of total enjoyment which makes much adult behaviour morose, sulking or uptight. Perhaps this is partly because in the adult world many of us spend a lot of time deliberately, or unconsciously, making others unhappy. It is such an obviously spoil-sport, dog-in-the-manger attitude that it is often difficult to admit what is happening and why. Yet the argument goes along the lines, if I am not happy, why should they be happy. And so a number of strategies are developed, a permanent frown, making sure that the others are always under the cloud when it rains, a sense of hurt or just an attitude which conveys it is not right under any circumstances to be happy. The source of this attitude may be some quite legitimate feeling that one's hurts or situation are being ignored, but because the idiom of happiness is being manipulated, the outcome is destructive, especially when it becomes a longterm pattern.

Sometimes the source of this pattern is as simple as the fact that the parents of the subject made sure they were not happy when they were children and the next generation becomes intent on passing on the same attitude to life. There is a need to look on the dark side and to punish those who are joyful. Whatever the cause it needs seeking out and uprooting before it is imposed on others.

BLESSINGS AND JOY.

Of course, many people are "happy", or to use more solid terms, they experience blessings and joy throughout much or parts of their lives. In fact, a little joy can go a very long way - through suffering and separation. The Christian understanding of happiness is rigorous; only what is good leads to blessing. And, of course, we are surrounded by good things and wonderful people each day of our lives, even when we are in a prison cell and can only see a square of sky and pray for our family. To thank God for those we are given and recognize again how wonderful and beautiful they are is already to go away from the vanity of happiness and link again to the joys of the real world. There is a difference between the depression and recrimination of happiness-seeking and relationships which are committed to love and care,

returning good for evil and putting the other person first. Then joy happens as a byproduct in the most normal places - seeing the beauty of those old hands, recognizing the steps on the pathway or looking at the face which you can read down to the last millimetre of muscle movement. And always behind each of these experiences of goodness is the awesome generosity of God, prodigal in blessings and not allowing the second best.

The terms of blessing are being poor in spirit, mourning when something really is wrong, being meek, hungering and thirsting to live fairly, being always ready to forgive and out for peace. It is those who suffer for good, who are pure in their motives, who are not self-elated, who enter into the meaning of suffering and who are humble before God who are given the joy of knowing a life lived in tune with God. Because joy is God-given, you hang on to the God Who gives it, not to the joy "itself". It is those who truly love God and one another who experience joy. Joy is at God's disposal as a fruit of God's Spirit working in our lives. It is not a possession we can claim for ourselves. The big challenge for all of us is therefore whether we work at our own agenda for happiness, or whether we open up our lives to God and to the terms of God's love. Then the richness of those with whom we live becomes evident and blesses us. There is more than a little possibility that God has got a better grip on what will really bless us than what arises from our own little dreams of happiness.

LOVE AS SEX.

THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE?

Perhaps the most pervasive idea of love over the last decade or so is that it means sex. When people say love, they mean going to bed. The question arises as to whether sexual activity in Western societies reflects this point of view. It is not obvious that it does; going to bed with someone may reflect a fear of loneliness or a desire for happiness rather than a belief in sex. It may reflect a desire to show her who is the boss, or prove how attractive I am. But although it is probably not the only component, the evidence seems to suggest a belief in sex as the dynamic of love. People believe that sex as the great pleasure principle will create a relationship of love. It is one of the great commitments of our age. Many sex manuals are on sale with the message "Improve your love life", with the implication that if things go well in bed, everything else will go well too. Thus, the argument goes, insofar as it is consciously expressed, sex is pleasurable and therefore sex is good, and therefore it must be a good basis for a relationship of love. If we have pleasure in bed together, we will love one another.

Yet often something else is conveyed. Earlier periods have developed industries which offer sexual pleasure largely dissociated from love. Mayhew in 1862 estimated the number of London prostitutes to be 80,000. (Mayhew 1950 31-132) Yet now the public industry is greater. The scale of pornography and prostitution suggest that many people do believe in sex and will pay for their beliefs. The sales of the pornography industry, whose magazines have outsold Time or Newsweek, is considerable. The outlets rival those for food in many areas. Prostitution, massage parlours, sex shows, adult movie clubs and all kinds of other providers of consumer sex flourish in our cities. The message of these establishments is quite clear: 'We will give you bodies which will arouse you sexually and give you what your body desires.' Although many of the suppliers in this industry are avowedly not sexually motivated, but directed by money, there is little doubt that the vast consumer demand comes from those who want bodies for sexual arousal. Already we see the ambivalence of this focus; on the one hand sex promises love and on the other hand you can have sexual pleasure without the need for any kind of loving relationship. Thus the argument changes and becomes: sex is pleasurable and therefore good, and so it should be on offer without any of the encombrances of love or relationships. When the sexual arousal industry is so pervasive, it is likely that both these views deeply influence many of the relationships which take place on a non-commercial basis. At root being in bed with a woman or man and enjoying it either makes love or substitutes for it. We are addressing therefore not just pornography and prostitution, but a common attitude which is present in many marriages and other love relationships. The argument of this chapter is that this view is not only not a good basis for love, but it is not even good sex.

First, we note that much sexual experience is not pleasurable. In a recent study young women describe having sex in terms of 'it just happened, awfully painful, cringing, quite drunk, regretted it, crying, I felt awful... I would rather get up and make a cup of tea.' (Holland 1992 645-73) There are many people who experience sex as defeat, failure or an empty activity. Indeed, there is abundant evidence of a pattern where men seek pleasurable sex with women and girls in ways which are predatory and aggressive, and their search for pleasure causes pain and reaction on the part of the women. Because the sexual relationship is an egocentric search for pleasure in which the woman is used, her nonparticipation in the event in turn arouses resentment in the man. What starts out as a singleminded quest for pleasure finishes as the opposite, not just for the woman, but also for the man. The terms on which the gratification was sought were, so to speak, self-refuting. Yet many men can be so addicted to their own self-gratification that it takes them ten or twenty

years to work out this simple point, and in the meantime they do much damage to themselves and others.

Rex had been to bed with Ruby four times now. He cast his mind back over the experiences. His earlier sexual relationships had been casual and a bit unsatisfactory, but this was different. She had a nice body and he felt each time that sex was better. He was elated by the situation and after a quick drink they went straight back to his place. They settled down and he put his arm round her. A few minutes later it happened. He shifted the position of his arm and began to say, 'I prefer..' Even as the words came out, he swallowed them. He saw her face harden. Ruby felt, and she was right, that he was going to suggest on the basis of his past experiences what she should do. 'I don't want to be just another one.' she said. Rex didn't want her to be either, but because he had been hoping that she would be better than the others, he couldn't handle the situation. She left twenty minutes later with damp eyes and informed him that she would not be seeing her again. He turned and beat the sofa with his fist. When he wondered over to the window, she had already disappeared and it was pouring with rain. She would get very wet.

Thus, in summary, when sexual gratification is selfish and egocentric it involves using the other person in a way which kills the possibility of giving and receiving pleasure. Conversely, when the pleasure of the other person is the focus, the giving and receiving of pleasure is possible. The question is: when is the pleasure of the other person genuinely what is going on in a sexual relationship? Clearly, it can only be when love is present and an egocentric search for pleasure is not.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AND IT.

One of the chief preoccupations of the last few decades has been with sexual behaviour and its improvement. It has generated a research and counselling industry which has functioned on the idea that if you know how sex works in a biological sense, then you can improve it for humans. The research of Kinsey at first was focussed on gall wasps. He collected somewhere between two and four million of them over a period of twenty years. Later he brought the same codifying techniques to bear on people's sex histories. He had the aim of completing a hundred thousand sex histories, although the Kinsey Report was based on a mere few thousand. Nevertheless, the impact of having reports on the sexual behaviour of thousands of men (1948) and women (1953) was to bring people to a direct awareness of sexual behaviour as a category on its own. The work of Masters and Johnson reached the public in the mid-sixties and they focussed on a detailed examination of the body's response to erotic stimulation. Kinsey concentrated on

reports, Masters and Johnson on direct clinical experiments. The emphasis was on the physiological changes which took place during coitus and orgasm in the book *Human Sexual Response* (1966) and the psychological aspects of sexuality in the 1970 study, especially focussing on frigidity, impotence and premature ejaculation. These studies helped some couples who faced problems in their sexual lives which they could not overcome, but their focus was on sexual performance.

The better kinds of therapy interestingly often involved deconstructing the couples' anxiety about 'it', i.e. having sex, and allowing mutual patterns of help and understanding to develop. They were relational and understood the centrality of love. Thus Kaplan writes, 'Love is the most important ingredient in lovemaking. Making love with someone whom one loves is simply not comparable to such an experience, no matter how technically proficient, sensuously free and even gentle, with an unloved partner.' (Kaplan 1974 523-4) Yet sadly this was not the central thrust of the sex industry; it was conveying the central message that sexual physiological satisfaction was love. We should be quite clear that making money has largely driven this message, not a search for the truth. The wider public perception of these studies, sex manuals and much other literature was that the male-female problem was one of sexual physiology, which was largely to be met by behavioural and other responses. Recent falls in the birth rate have been put down to the time couples spend in bed reading sex manuals..

There was actually something quite manipulative going on here. On the one hand gall wasps, rabbits and most of the rest of the creation did it without sex manuals and counsellors to good effect. And the human species seems to have got on fairly well at reproduction over the last few millennia. So the aim was not mere effective copulation. The real focus of all these studies was on what sex meant to people, on its psychic dynamics, and here the assumptions of the studies were quite clear. If couples achieved a suitable level of mutual sexual arousal, if the performance was good, then sex was a success. Masters and Johnson and others were clear that marital commitment or love was not part of the agenda, but merely the immediate performance. Thus, bodily contact matters more than the person with whom it is achieved. Sex was to be dissociated from friendship, trust, commitment and having fun in the rest of life. It is actually a deconstruction of intimacy; what it potentially part of an intimate shared relationship becomes an instant turn on. The use of couples in an experimental situation, observing their performance with a relative disregard for their long-term relationship, shows this was the emphasis in the Masters-Johnson studies. The framework of analysis was essentially a stimulus-response model used in many physiological studies with animals.

But this attitude is not only confined to laboratories. The concern with sex as performance was pushed as a new campus industry. Sex manuals encourage it. Many men were worried about their virility and the fear of impotence is probably more widespread now than it has ever been. There was an industry of sexual stimuli, which presumably implied that being together was no longer good enough. There is a problem here. The stimulus-response model contains its own weaknesses. Will the stimulus be enough next time? What will he need to turn him on? How well do I need to perform? Like the progression from soft pornography to hard pornography in the search for ever greater stimuli, this search for sexual performance is restless and has no peaceful answer. Because at root it holds the other person of little account, except as a performing body, it becomes an impersonal routine concerned about having IT and devoid of interpersonal chemistry.

Jim had made love to Pamela a dozen or so times in their three month friendship. This time a problem surfaced which had been there for a few weeks. Jim wasn't sure what to think about. He knew his thoughts had to be sexual if he was to get the most out of it. He could think about breasts and bottoms, but there was only so much to think about and his mind strayed onto other things. He partly concentrated on the performance and doing well, but the more he did that, the more difficult it seemed to become. He could fantasize, but that didn't seem right to Pam. As he glanced at her face, he saw that she wasn't really concentrating either and he asked her what she was thinking. 'Actually, I'm wondering whether it is going to rain with the washing out.' Jim shrank and felt very annoyed. They lay back, and then it did start to rain. Pam dressed quickly, rushed out and came back with a slightly damp pile of washing which she dumped on the bed and folded. When she came back to bed, Jim tried to think about sex, but however hard he thought, nothing happened, especially with the damp washing about. Eventually, Pam climbed out of bed and began the ironing.

The problem of the sexual focus is very common. There is a well documented response summed up by the phrase, 'All he seems to want is sex.' which is best interpreted in the following terms. The woman (usually) becomes aware that her partner shows relatively little interest in her, her feelings, interests, concerns and worries, but becomes interested when the possibility of going to bed arises. She feels and perhaps says with some resentment, 'You don't really want me; you just want my body.' He may protest, but the intimate relationships which follow have hanging over them a lack of commitment from the woman which reflects the resentment she feels that she is being treated in a compartmentalised fashion. This attitude is so widespread that it is often institutionalised; a few decades back it was understood

that when a girl became pregnant, she caught the man. He, it was assumed, was only interested in sex, but when a baby came he had to accept the full package whether he liked it or not. At a guess the weight of resentment at being sexually used has a far greater dampening effect on the sexual life of the West than all the titillation of pornography and sexual stimuli. All over the West people are having worse sexual relations because the emphasis on impersonal sex leaves women especially, but also increasingly men, feeling used and depersonalised.

Much of this pattern reflects the commercial exploitation of sex. There are many men and women in affluent houses, with fast cars and holiday homes who have made a lot of money out of selling pornography, prostitution and other forms of consumer sex. They are presumably more interested in money than sex, and their technique is to offer a commercial 'product', which is, as they would say, 'harmless'. This idea is mythical. Sex is used to exploit people; Pornographic magazines are not likely to be as cheap as *Motorcycle Weekly*, because personal weaknesses are being exploited. It is so much an idiom that the sex consumer will be ripped off that nobody questions why the margins of profit are not the same as the local corner shop. Obviously many of the women and children involved are exploited and intimidated. This represents the success of a process which is destructively behavioural. People are enticed into sexual experience, fantasy, voyeurism and lust through commercial methods which are similar to those used in selling soap powders. The hope is always for something "better", but the escalating search which this industry promotes is always for worse. The lie on which the whole industry feeds is that sex is a consumer good, an 'it'. As with other addictive industries, people need help to cut the addiction, by exposing its false claims and prosecuting the peddlers. What they deal in is not filth, but unloved bodies.

The dissociation of sex as an 'it' from the rest of life is bound to be a problem. It destroys personal integrity and wholeness. It makes people feel distant from or trapped by their bodies. Often sex becomes strangely emotionless, an activity which is needed, like sleep. It occurs outside normal life and depends on fantasies. Thus, not suprisingly, many experience sexual activity as compromising their personal integrity and even as something destructive for them. They are, in some way or another, at war with 'it'. The problem arises from seeing it as 'it' in the first place.

THE INTEGRITY OF OUR BODIES.

A christian understanding of bodies recognizes that we are our bodies. God has created us, first as babies and then as adults, as bodies. We are wonderfully made, down to the way in which our blood corpuscles fold up to pass through our

capillaries. We are not 'in' our bodies; Jesus rose bodily from the garden tomb and ate a fish to show his disciples he was alive. Nor are we 'just' our bodies in a physiological or reductionist sense, for just as the creation is a mixture of what is seen and unseen, so are we. In recognition of this truth the Bible does not compartmentalize personhood into mind/body/spirit/soul/ or other compartments, but uses the terms interchangeably. Thus Paul, in stating what our response to God should be like, says the following: 'offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.' (Ro 12 1-2) This statement and many other biblical ones affirm the integrity of our bodies before God; they are temples of God's spirit. They have been made very good and we are to be at one with our body.

There are many serious ways in which sin and evil destroy this integrity. Poverty and famine weaken and destroy many bodies. Social judgement of the fat, thin, short and tall damage the bodily identity of many. The distortion of appetite by greed, dieting, drugs and addiction is leaving many people at perpetual war with their bodies. Because of past sexual experiences involving abuse or sexual hypocrisy others do not feel honoured or honourable in their bodily existence. Throughout the history of peasant and industrial labour bodies have been abused by the work demanded of them. In North America and Europe these abuses have been tackled, but alongside them have come other forms of physical stress which are more insidious, associated with travel, pollution, noise, media and sleeplessness. And, as our biblical perspective would lead us to expect, many body problems are psychosomatic, growing out of personal problems which remain unresolved. But although many of these problems are serious, especially on a world scale, the dominant problem in the West for the body comes strangely from the worship of the body.

The dominant form is worship of the female body by men. Again, it is not real, but involves a pattern of collusion between male fantasies, demands and hopes and the willingness of women to create and sustain myths. Men who want sex as a physiological experience create a demand for and encourage stereotypical female bodies which meet their wishes and fantasies. The history of this pattern includes Chinese footbinding, bustles and the modern history of models, pin-ups and sex objects. Freedman has made the point that this is beauty bound, women strive for the physical perfection demanded by men and in the process live confined lives, pressured by fashion, cosmetics, diet, notions of attractiveness and the need to

appeal. (Freedman 1988) Trying to be an idol is hard work. Often, because the idol is stereotypically young and characterless, it at the same time dishonours the real beauty of women. Now, of course, a similar idiom of male body worship is growing to make the pattern more symmetrical. Both of them miss the real point of the given created beauty of men and women. Alan as a portrait painter, but both of us, travelling on the underground experience the awesome beauty of face after face in the carriage. But perhaps the deepest beauty of all occurs when hearts and bodies reflect the love of God and one another. Then beauty is no longer bound, but free and easy.

THE WORSHIP OF NATURE.

Really, however, something deeper is going on here. Body worship is part of a culture which does not locate the body as a good part of God's creation and our personhood, but roots it back in nature. This paganism identifies the body with nature, Mother Earth, the life force and with the primal forces which shape human destiny. Sex within this perspective, rather than being the expression of marital love, is a religious act of identification with the life force. It is the great religious mystery of life which puts its advocates in touch with the source of their being. The ancient nature religions, the Ashtorah, the high places, the Dionysian cults tended to have orgiastic rites as part of their religious activities, because sexual consummation was central to the creation stories and the act in which identification with nature's deities was most complete. Thus sex was an rite of impersonal worship, a way of finding one's identity through the great natural act, not a statement of love. Throughout history the worship of nature has tended to be accompanied by sex as worship. This is what Paul is describing in Romans 1, and the full force of his argument about Greek and Roman culture is crucial. He says, 'For although people knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.' This nature worship and its reflection in seeing sex as the key to human identity has re-emerged in the culture of the modern West.

It has often developed in the context of a mind-body split. The body represented a blind force which was often dark and dangerous. Within this way of thinking it was

very often identified with women, with the power of women and with witchcraft. It therefore needed controlling by the mind, which was seen as holding the body in subjection. Whenever the body seemed likely to get out of control, the mind should step in and steady things down a bit. Within this tradition there was often a dualistic response: the body was concerned with sex and the mind with love, with Platonic love, with duty, with purity and with proper marital and family life. These two worlds lived together in English Victorian society with 80,000 prostitutes on the streets of London living alongside table legs which were covered to keep them decent.

At the end of the 19th century there was a new search for the 'natural'. It is found in Gaughin's quest for natural life in Tahiti, the rediscovery of savage art, in the sexual attitudes of Havelock Ellis and other late Victorians, but perhaps the key figures in this development are Freud and D H Lawrence. Freud's emphasis was complex, but it involved discovering the personal roots of development in infant sexuality; the body's natural activities became the point of reference for self-understanding, and the subconscious and dream worlds were seen as points of connection with the natural self. Naturalistic educators revolted against mind training by adults and naturalism as a healthy nudist movement had a significant impact. When Mediterranean holidays were very expensive there were thousands of goose pimpled bodies at resorts on the South Coast of England extolling the virtues of unclothed living. The point in this development is not so much the ideas of Freud and the post-Freudians, but the underlying assumption that the truth about ourselves and our relationships was to be found in the natural. McDougall and others emphasised drives and urges, and Social Darwinism similarly conveyed that what is most basic about ourselves is the animal. Much Nazi philosophy and propaganda reflected this view of things. The Arians were the natural people uncorrupted by Jewish intellect or Christian asceticism. Thus the way was opened for many of the old pagan and dionysian religious themes to re-enter western life.

A similar development can be traced in Lawrence. Early in his life Lawrence was influenced by christian teaching and used its imagery, but his search for god was carried out in his own terms. His concern was to penetrate to the truth of human existence and relationships free from the destructive incumbrances of culture and the mind. His search for this kind of purity was not promiscuous, but concerned with a rediscovery of healthy life and relationships. But the meaning of life seemed to him to lie more and more in the primal life force gods of Mexico and elsewhere. He too went on a pagan quest which would make sex into the central sacrament of human existence and which he hoped would free people from the corruptions of

mind, control and domination. (Hough 1962) This quest has been followed by millions since who have taken the same cultural road. They have been told that the discovery of their body is the key to self-realisation and that sex is a religious sacrament which realises this central truth. Popular culture has conveyed this in different ways. The sex idols of the screen, Monroe, Bardot and their successors created an initial media idolatry of this idiom and as a later development of the theme Madonna poses as a quasi religious figure and adopts many forms of sexual uniform which reflect this cultic worship.

The underlying motif in this trend was that sex is an act of worship of nature in which the participant experiences the ultimate reality of the wider universe and also of his/her own nature. It is self discovery and the discovery of the other. However, the discovery which is made is of the impersonal, the inner force, it, which has no personal referent or meaning and merely aligns the participants with the grunts of animals. Sometimes it is contact with the great primal force. Sometimes it is the meeting of yin and yang, the basic male and female principles of the universe. Sometimes it is being in touch at the deepest level with male/female power, so that the female body or the phallus become a central image of the universe. But all of these are religious experiences and statements which flow beyond the relationship to the basic forces of nature. Of course, this is all rather high flown and rarified for most people. But the popular culture is the same.

Magazines imply that people find themselves through sex. Everything has to be natural and new mystical forces are discovered which unlock the natural in all of us. Body cults which idolize the male and female form, often in quite grotesque forms, sell magazines and collect followers. Homosexuality is read by many as a natural condition, which requires people to 'come out' and identify themselves as 'gay', rather than as the outcome of relationships and sexual experience which can be reversed. Fetishes of male and female power lead to peculiar sexual practices, and other groups, often quite dangerous ones indulge in other forms of ritual sex. Throughout there is a continual refrain. Sex is natural, therefore it is good. It is part of human nature and it even expresses when we are most fully ourselves, because we are at one with the nature gods and goddesses of the universe. The effects of this view are devastating. The meaning of sex has nothing to do with the unique relationships of the persons who are involved in the acts. They are seen to be relating religiously to nature and to their own natural urges in a form of cultic worship. What is called 'love' has its meaning in the physiological acts of mutual bodily stimulation. It is an impersonal act of worship, which expresses a pagan belief in the mystery of life. Often it has, and may now be, associated with human sacrifice. Of

ultimate religious significance, it cannot be viewed critically or seen as encouraging evil. On this view rape is OK; it is the same act with a sacrificial victim. Although there are all kinds of contributory factors to patterns of rape, this crude naturalistic philosophy seems historically and currently to be one of the most serious. More behavioural forms of this ethos function on the idea of a stimulus which must evoke a response. This builds in a demand for escalating stimulus of the kind seen in hard porn and the more bizarre forms of prostitution. The logic generates the increasingly frenzied abuse of women and children, and sexual rites which are subhuman in the demands they make of the participants. The liberal hope of dispelling fear and ignorance in sexual activity, praiseworthy in its own way, is now swallowed up in this much deeper religion of nature. It would be easy to focus on the sensational and the unpleasant, but more important, because of its pervasiveness is the widespread experience of those who seek naturalistic sex and find themselves left with empty relationships. For if the physical act is supposed to be meaningful in itself, then the relationship is incidental. Copulating couples find themselves lonely in their perception that all they are doing is meeting a natural urge. Fulfilling one's nature turns out to be very different from loving one's partner, especially when that nature is selfish, arrogant and self-indulgent.

SEX AND TRUTH.

The root problem with this view is the way it makes sex more basic and fundamental than love. The problem can be traced by looking at the alternative meanings of the sex act. First, it can be a statement with my body that I love this person and give myself to her/him unconditionally, openly and with nothing withheld. The body statement 'I love you' is true and a celebration of what is happening in the rest of life. This is a stable meaning to sex, where it is true to the rest of life and grows out of the love and care which the married couple have for one another. The very intimacy of the relationship opens the question of whether the hearts of each are pure and given without reservation to one another. It also means permanent commitment and takes place in a context of unconditional trust. The word, 'troth' summarises the relationship where the truth of love and self-giving is unconditional, and sexual enjoyment follows from this truth. Without trust of this kind intimate sexual enjoyment gives way to fear and emotional distance.

The first alternative is that although a person says with their body 'I love you', they do not fully mean it. They may mean, 'I love you, until somebody else comes along', or 'I love you, but not enough to live with you for life', or 'I want you to think I love you' or 'My feeling for you now is very intense, but I may soon get over it'.

These introduce a lie into the relationship. What the body is saying the heart does not mean. This involves two problems. On the one hand the person is involved in a form of hypocrisy which is within their own body; they are physically living a contradiction. Either they become resigned to living the hypocrisy or face its problems. The second person who is being told a lie will sooner or later discover it. Because the relationship is so intimate the meaning of what is happening will be clear through the false sexual statement, and the person who has been told the lie will be hurt. There are millions of people who are locked into the hypocrisy and self-deception of their protests of love in bed. They know and regret that their love is cheap. There are millions more who have been hurt as they have given everything to their partner and learned later that they have been discarded.

To avoid this possibility many are now opting for a meaning of sex which says it is just a natural act or a source of satisfaction which has no relationship implications. Although a couple might go to bed together, this is merely mutual gratification and has nothing to do with love. This view actually makes the sex act, which should be intimate and loving, lonely and self-indulgent. It involves turning away from real relationships of love and living in a world of subjective gratification. Persons are treated as bodies. There is no need to talk, only to touch flesh.

Biblical truth does not allow anything other than honesty of thought, emotions and body. Our bodies are meant to speak sexual truth in the full context of our relationship with God, with each other and with ourselves. Then the meaning of sexuality becomes far richer, incorporating all we are as men and women. We love and honour our own bodies and those of other people. They are very good. There is no difference for single and married people. Each knows bodily integrity and relates chastely to others, either in faithful marriage or in friendship. Then, too, the truth, or truth, of our relationships is reflected fully in all our bodily relationships. The way we kiss our father, hug our friend, link arms with our neighbour or play tennis with our partner involves true loving relationships with all those people. In each of them there are the destructive possibilities of sin, but more positively there is the goodness of all that God has given us in one another and in our bodies. On the one hand our bodies can lie, kill and destroy, but on the other they can love, work and be temples of God's Holy Spirit in bed and in the rest of life. Always the truth finds us out, but the better way is walk in it.

LOVE AS COMPATIBILITY.

Each of the meanings of love we have considered thus far has its own history in national cultures, families and the lives of individuals. Many of them run

concurrently and one of the pitfalls we must avoid is simplifying what is a very subtle picture. Yet there are historical developments in the history of love which, although imprecise, are important, because they reshape the attitudes of many people and relationships. Perhaps the deepest change in the last few decades has been a growth of unbelief in the older humanist views of love - romantic, feeling, duty, ideal and happiness. A generation of children have now grown up in North America and Europe experiencing something like a quarter to a third of their parents marriages ending in divorce. They and many other younger people experience that 'love', whatever that means, often does not work. They are in an obvious sense the post-romantic generation who are not going to accept an optimistic model of love and run with it.

Another bit of the picture is the way the older generation has interpreted the failure of these relationships to the younger. By far the most common interpretation has been that Mum and Dad were just not the kind of people who could get on well with one another. They were not compatible and this had become evident as the relationship has developed. This, of course, is a useful explanation. It avoids passing blame on anybody. It opens the way to other relationships which might be successful, and ending the relationship also solves the supposed problem, for each person can define the other person as the one who is not compatible. However, although a useful explanation, the question is whether it is true. Possibly, it is merely an excuse for fairly frequent changes of relationship which can all be declared not to be a good match. Is what is called a love relationship merely a question of getting two people together who are a good fit with one another?

The idea of personal compatibility is quite interesting. Does it mean that individuals have certain characteristics which need to be similar? Or can compatible be dissimilar? If somebody is impatient, it is difficult to know whether they are better matched by somebody who is patient or similarly impatient, or perhaps the first person should not be impatient in the first place. Maybe the emphasis should be more on what people do, their lifestyle, rather than what they are like. Golfers, churchgoers, compulsive shoppers should marry one another and have their free activities in common. This model almost becomes a question of comparing personal organisers. Yet it is not to be so easily dismissed, because there is a sense in which a complex process of sifting goes on among many prospective partners by which they decide whether they want to link up with one another. What is going on in this process, and is the idea of compatibility really basic to man-woman relationships?

PERSONALITY TYPES.

Dating agencies and computer dating are part of the modern pattern of relationship forming. Many of these involve the kind of social sifting which was done by parents, fraternities and sororities or the Young Conservatives in past eras. Advertisements in India still reflect these patterns. Prospective partners are expected to detail education, colour, height, appearance and a list of other qualifications which will be vetted by families who are engaged in a social placing operation. In the West a more individualistic idiom operates. Certain characteristics are seen as those which will be liked by the other person. Some computer dating agencies have models of compatibility which are more than just social classification; these involve complementary, similarity or polar attraction assumptions. Often questionnaires are used to establish what personalities are like on the basis of which classifications are made. But the underlying conception is of personalities who fit.

Actually, of course, many of these processes claim to be more rigorous than they are. The success of the dating agencies has more to do with the anonymity of modern city life and the need to have some conventional process whereby people can meet within a process which has recognizable stages. Yet behind them lies an interesting question. Are people personalities with characteristics, or are they more plastic and open, able to adapt and change in relationship?

One of the big ideas of humanism is the self-made person. Character and personality is built from the inside out. Our culture continually creates personalities; it is the assumed mode of personal growth. Often these processes involve publicity, self-projection, image building and the development of personal style. And when people talk about one another, it is often through personality-type language. 'He is a go-getter, quiet and seems nervous, while she is easy going, talkative and has no ambition at all; I don't see how they could get on together.' Often we are told what kind of a personality we have, either to praise or blame. So the idea of personalities is inculcated in many of us. And when the question, Why should anyone love me? is asked, it is assumed that the answer must lie in personality. To be loved they must be the type. To remain beloved they must continue to inhabit the personality which drew the other to them. The process of personality development becomes the route to being loved; it might, like Eliza Doolittle, involve education, or appearance, or a certain kind of appeal, but I must become the kind of person who can be loved. This idea contains a kind of tyranny both in terms of what individuals believe they have to do to themselves and also in its impact on others. The model especially destroys the ability of those involved to sensitively develop in relation to one another.

This is related to the struggle which many people have to know if they are marrying the right person. Of course, the move of sharing one's whole being and

whole life with this other person is a big step. Often, of course, we are attracted to people who are like us, which may be a good, or bad, thing. But if it hinges only on the idea that one person will be right and another wrong because of the kind of personality they are, it misses a bigger point. It is almost like the artist who believes that the quality of his painting hinges centrally on the kind of brush he buys. Whether the relationship is open, giving, respectful, kind and marked by mutual joy and care indicates not whether personalities fit, but whether two persons can become one. Sometimes personalities are too rigid to change properly into a union. Sometimes weaknesses have to be carried by the other partner for decades. Sometimes lack of respect for a partner would strangle important parts of their life. Sometimes people close down the possibility of growing together. Marriage to one person may compromise a life direction which is part of the other's faith, or it may help it. The delicate and free decision to become married or not needs to go deeper than personalities; it is more mysterious because it involves all of our personhood including our faith. Most centrally it concerns whether each person loves the other unconditionally and will give and receive love on God's terms.

Perhaps this issue is made more acute by the tendency of the age of marriage to become later. People who marry young grow older together and there are processes of melding and co-operation into which they grow. Those who meet when they are older have fuller developed 'personalities', and therefore need sensitivity to one another in all these areas of development. If they have settled into areas of rigidity which cannot be overcome by love, there are problems. When the great richness of earlier experience is fully welcomed into the relationship, including defeats and failures, most of the awkward corners in people's lives can be rounded. Because the idea of personality is so individualized, it discourages the sharing and communication which can make us more open and accessible.

The concept of 'personality types' probably does more harm than good. Many of us operate with views of people, even those we know quite well. They are extrovert, sociable, shy, disorganised, intuitive, domineering, emotional, artistic, or sometimes, boring. But to say they ARE these things creates a too rigid pattern. All of us, for example, have the experience of seeing a friend behave with somebody else in a way which is quite different from the way they would relate to us. Clearly each relationship has its own unique characteristics which mean that none of us can type another with great clarity. Often these typologies reflect our own treatment. The boring person merely reflects the lack of interest and respect which the labeller exhibits; each of us is inexhaustably rich and it is those who label others as boring who constitute a dismissive, won't you make my life exciting type.. People also

reflect the way they have been treated by others. Many experience growing out from under oppressive family backgrounds; they are becoming something different. This points to the fact that most of us also have some sense of why we are such and such a type. If a person is "reserved", it is perhaps because they have good reasons for not sharing their emotions or thoughts with others; they have been let down, they don't have the words or they never spoke at school. Immediately there is a far bigger meaning than is conveyed by any of the labels with which we regularly stop. Personality labelling is often therefore a dismissive and destructive process.

Monica pushed Tony to be more assertive. She wanted him to be more in control at work and at home. Friday evening he came home and announced that he had become national product development manager, a massive promotion. Monica was sensible enough to see that it was not her pushing which had produced this result and was intrigued at what was going on. That evening, after coffee, she asked him, noting that for once he did not have to be defensive because of her pressure. His answer was interesting. At work there were many people who were pushing their products and their way of seeing things. He had been committed to a different line - evaluating products carefully and assessing their limitations. He, for example, had recommended against tooling up for a product he had been working on, and because of market conditions other companies in the same area had lost millions. They had noticed and trusted him because he was not assertive. 'Why', Tony asked, 'do you need me to be assertive?' 'I suppose its because I'm frightened of always getting my own way' Monica replied. 'Then we don't solve your problem by pretending its mine.' Tony responded. 'And it isn't as much of a problem for me as you seem to feel it is.'

Although people differ in all kinds of rich and various ways, Christianity emphasises a even more open view of personhood. Faith is the direction of life which people take before God and in relation to one another. Faith in God opens us to the ways and purposes of God; it involves becoming as well as being. We ask God to guide and shape our relationships for the better. This can shake us free from rigidities and faults which do mar our character and relationships. It is not often that people say with bitterness, 'He is 5' 6" and has red hair'; they do more often point out bad temper, arrogance, an inability to listen and laziness. But conversely misdirected faith can involve people growing into patterns of evil and self-deception which are harmful and destructive. Seen in this perspective personality can become a problem when individuals tie themselves down into their persona, continuing in whatever wrong attitudes they might have, and lose the sense of the onward development of life before God. The idea of personality becomes nostalgic and develops rigidities

which limit the openness of relationships. There is also a tendency for our development of personality to be less rich than the challenges with which each stage of life presents us. In the end all that matters is the life that each of us lives before God, Whose understanding of each of us stretches way beyond any feeble projection of personality.

LIFESTYLE COMPATIBILITY.

Another variant of this model focusses less on personality and more on lifestyle. It is not very ambitious. In the late twentieth century many young people see life in terms of organising a life-style. They are in the business of getting their act together, putting together a package, getting it organized. Career, leisure, pleasure, travel, friends are co-ordinated into a pattern which is acceptable and suits them. If the package doesn't work, then it is reprocessed. An characteristic of this approach is the independence which the participants expect and demand to live their life their way. Obviously there are constraints, but these can be negotiated and often pushed back until I get what I want. Traditionally, many women have been asked within marriage to fit-in with the lifestyle of the husband; they have often adopted the role of servicing their husband's needs. He has activities like golf, football and drinking which she is expected to support. We remember meeting one dear couple whose annual holiday was always organised around visiting a Test match. The wife who had no interest in cricket at all at first also became addicted to the game but really had no option. More recently women have thankfully developed less subservient responses, and along with this has come greater independence of lifestyle. In some relationships the male-female styles of living diverge, and the question which arises is how two independent lifestyles can co-exist in a marriage in a viable way. The answer which is quite often given is to choose partners who fit, who have compatible lifestyles. On this view love, in its romantic and other varieties is really over the top. There is no point in going overboard when what matters is how the agendas work out. The question then is, What kind of relationship is compatible with my life-style?

The answer which is often given is almost behavioural. If someone can be found who likes the same kind of things and has similar attitudes, then a relationship can be established which will not impose on life and will at the same time enrich it. The terms of the relationship can be negotiated. They can involve sleeping together, but not sharing income. They can involve sex, but not exclusive sex. They can be established for a couple of years and then there will be a review. The pattern is cool, and the procedure avoids acute emotional stress and tangled insoluble problems

which occur when two people irrevocably get hitched. However, in principle the model also contains pattern of inner reserve and emotional withdrawal. There is no basis for long-term trust of this man or woman, and I will make sure I do not get hurt. When a couple feel they do not like one another as much, they drift into a more distant pattern of living, or even apart. Actually, this distance can only be maintained at a cost. The 'it doesn't matter to me' idiom of relating is based upon hardening of heart and withdrawal through hurt. We can make ourselves insensitive, but the costs are very great, even if we are not aware of it.

Sometimes, this attitude reflects a view of time which centres on the idea of getting the most out of life. This seems harmless enough but has quite serious consequences. The New Soft Male is part of this phenomenon. He is characteristically described as incapable of real commitment. He is quite prepared to use a woman when she is young and attractive, but when there is the question of children, or a commitment which costs something then he runs back into his independence. Behind this attitude are all kinds of calculations which express an attempt to own time. My time is my own and I don't want anybody else meddling with it. Especially, I do not want anybody laying claim to my future and believing that they have a permanent claim on my life. Children, within this way of seeing things can be a threat rather than a blessing. Young couples with this approach face the possibility of children as a great trauma, because the care of babies requires that the parents fit into their routines of feeding, sleep, play and cuddles. Unless the parents escape from their view they define the relationship in terms which are akin to warfare. How dare this kid try to mess up my life. Until both parents, and especially the father, let go of the central concern with their lifestyle they cannot bring up children properly.

One underlying question is with the humanist idea of owning time, for human beings do not have dominion over time, nor can they control what happens in it. Frequently our own agenda is so powerful that it tries to dictate what history should be like. But things do not work out that way. We are given each moment by God and cannot own even one minute for ourselves. Even the smallest wistful hope that yesterday could be repeated is pathetic. Time is given by God in all its richness, and only when our past, present and futures are entrusted to God do we know eternal life. And part of the joy of life is to love others whose time is just as precious as our own.

COHABITATION.

We can now see something of the real meaning of cohabitation. When people cohabit rather than marry all kinds of things may be happening. Some prefer it to legal marriage, because they do not want their relationship to depend on a legal document. This is a good healthy sense of biblical truth, and just reflects a weak subsidiary argument and possibly a cold parental marriage. Others are thinking for the present and haven't developed a deeper view of the meaning of time in relationships. But many are cohabiting in the sense of this section. They are putting together two lifestyles while retaining an individual commitment to a way of life. They are, for example, having sex in the sense of doing something which is pleasant and congenial but doesn't imply anything more. Its meaning is the same as taking a shower. More or less inevitably the point occurs in the relationship where the question arises: Do you mean more to me than having a shower? If the answer is, No, it hurts. Cohabitation thus tends either to grow into something more meaningful, although with a muddled and misguided starting point, or it reveals the underlying lack of commitment, love, joy and excitement on which it is based. This is not two people shaping up to share one another's lives, but a few pages in the filofax of life.

John moved in with Trudy. He enjoyed the change and it was pleasant being together and doing things outside the busy demands of work. She was younger than him, attractive and great fun. The shared costs of the flat were more economical for both of them and they enjoyed life in bed and out of it. He noticed a number of erratic patterns of behaviour, but the first time it really struck him, he winced slightly at the thought, was when she had thrown a glass of water in his face. He would have understood if she had been angry or something had upset her, but it was in the middle of a pleasant meal. The incidents got worse, but she always refused to comment on them in any way. She said, 'That would be compromise'. When she got to the stage of pouring a bowl full of cold washing up water over him in bed, he decided it was time to get out. He concluded after that it was probably safer to have his own place. He wondered why she always seemed to have a fixation on water and was glad he hadn't got more deeply involved.

THE PROBLEMS WITH COMPATIBILITY.

The idea of compatibility is thus more disasterous than it seems. There is an inner hardness in it which demands that she is compatible to him or he to her. Indeed, it is possible to construct compatibility requirements which make more or less the whole population not suitable for me, and many people argue themselves into quite exclusive demands as to what their partner should be like and blame them when

they are not. There must be quite a few relationships which seem to hang on whether he or she decides how a room is decorated. Yet this is preposterous. On the whole it is always possible either to find areas of compatibility or the opposite; actually the strangest people marry one another and get on well despite magnificent differences. Although the idea of incompatibility is often used to describe personality differences which make a relationship 'impossible', it usually describes attitudes which prevent sharing, openness and self-sacrifice. Many of us have and develop deep-seated demands which are the terms on which relating with us is possible. Put more accurately, they actually define the limits of our love. Real compatibility grows through trust, communication, patience, care, sensitivity and the very straightforward biblical principle of putting the other person first. When two people are bonded together in truth, they share their time and commitments, but if the underlying commitment is to their own agendas, then the incompatibilities will occur.

Similarly, the idea of attractive or likable personalities proves shallow. He can be a very nice man, but the question is why. There are great complexities in personality construction, but if the focus is on myself, rigidities occur which are abrasive and insensitive. Over time real love relationships rapidly move beyond even multiple personalities into more central motives, attitudes and ways of thinking. By contrast, the confusion and complexities which arise from people's personalities actually get in the way of straightforward open relationships. The biblical route out of this impasse is found in the radical critique of egocentricity. We are to count others more important than ourselves as a way of redressing our tendency to put ourselves at the centre of the universe. Real humility makes what each one of us wants and desires to do in the context of what in God's purposes is good for all. 'Thy will, not mine, be done' is central to a radical redefinition of lifestyle and character which recognises how deep are the patterns of respect, co-operation and sharing we need to develop. The meek are compatible; they are the ones who quietly fit in and make co-operation work. In our egoistic culture they tend often not to be noticed, but they are often around.

Nor is there any hope for relationships which are just structured on convenience and suitable lifestyles. Treating one another like fast food restaurants does not work either. It cheapens, hurts and hardens. Living with and relating to a partner over any period of time evokes and demands bonds of love. Many cohabiting relationships collapse into marital love which has real guts to it, but the damage done by the attempt to pretend that intimate personal relationships can be handled like a visit to a hotel is enormous. For if people are wedded to their life-style and treat their

partners as a pleasant component of that lifestyle, the shallowness of the relationship will soon become evident. The central message of Christianity is the steadfast commitment of God to humans who are callous and evil. Christ's route to the cross was marked throughout by responses which never opted out, which loved through. We need this relationship and others which are more than just shallow convenience.

COMMUNION.

The compatibility idea begins with the assumption that I have no problem living with myself, but difficulties arise if others do not fit with the way I live. Relationships become external, managed, held at a suitable distance. Because the religious focus is inside myself there is no hope of deep communion and empathy. Others know they are being held at a distance. Central biblical truths cut through this individualism. We are not individuals first who then enter into relationship, but are born and grow in relationships which express who we are. We can be ourselves before God in solitude, but we are to love one another as ourselves. And all of us are problems both to ourselves and to others, so that the self-satisfaction which comes from a consumer culture is a disastrous illusion. The dethroning of the ego which requires others to be compatible is often painful, but it opens up the relationships where both partners are humble and patient. They can open up to one another, accommodate weaknesses and live with irritating habits. The heart of the matter is whether there is an ego agenda to life, or whether in God's hands we are willing to be shaped to commune with.

OWNING AND BUYING LOVE.

LOVE AS POSSESSION.

One of the great characteristics of love is the giving of oneself to the other. To receive another person's gift of themselves, in whatever way it happens, is the most generous act of all. Paul had this understanding of sexual relationships. Your body is not your own but you have given it to your spouse and vice versa, and so your body's concern is to do what your partner wants. To know that 'My beloved is mine and I am his' is the Song of Songs. Many, perhaps most, couples experience this process of self-giving as basic to the meaning of love. It is good and right. It is symbolized by the transfer of rings at weddings which are often seen as tokens of ownership, and it rules out any idea of independence and self-assertion from the later conception of the relationship. Yet this self-giving relationship is, and must be, voluntary; it must be done at the time and pace which is acceptable to the one who gives. Because giving, possession and ownership are so important in many areas of

life, it is easy to get them wrong in love relationships and worth spending some time unpacking their meaning.

The question of who owns us points the issue. The Christian answer is straightforwardly that no other person can or should try to. God has made us; we are the handiwork of the Creator, but even our relationship with God is not one of ownership and possession. We stand before the Father as children and stewards, but not as slaves. One of Jesus' last careful messages to the disciples was to convey they were friends, not servants. Each of us therefore has our identity and integrity before God as an open relationship. But conversely, because God, by creation, does own us, nobody else does. Abraham Kuyper once said, 'When you bow the knee to God, you bow it to nobody else.' Thus slavery is outlawed, parents do not own their children, and marriage relationships are not to be seen in terms of possession and ownership.

Slavery, the business of owning a person has a long history in the empires of Europe - Greece, Rome, Spain, Portugal, Britain and other countries all fostered slavery. Just as owning slaves has now been recognized as a fundamental denial of personal freedom and dignity, so the idea of owning a wife or husband is basically suspect. It implies that the person is treated like a chattel, something which is at my disposal to use as I see fit. The very idea is repulsive. It is worth noting that the brideprice, or dowry, which is common in many African countries does not have this character at all. Many studies of the place of dowry in subsistence economies show this transfer both helps give resources to older parents and makes sure that the husband is capable of providing a livelihood for his wife and children. Its meaning was not usually that of trading goods for a wife. No human being can own another person because only God as our Creator has any such claim on a person, and as Jesus showed, God's relationship with each of us does not require bondage and servitude, but is intimate and free. The idea of wife as servile possession is still quite strong in some cultures. Often women work far harder than men and are treated in various senses as part of 'his' labour force. Much evil is done to women in the name of this view of things, but another form is also powerful in the West.

This is emotional possession. This is a substitute for faithfulness which is the permanent, unconditional giving of one person to another voluntarily from the heart. As in the West couples lose the meaning of faithfulness before God they try to recreate it by one partner emotionally possessing the other. Sometimes this is pursued by a process which can be described as buying rather than giving love; behind each act is the agenda which says, 'Now you will love me, won't you.' At other times it occurs through developing an emotional leg iron, through creating economic dependence or other forms of manipulation. Sometimes it occurs through

a detailed attempt to control the partner's emotional life; they are told all the time what to feel. Viewed subjectively this is seen as a guarantee of love; it means that this person will never leave me and will remain mine for ever. Yet in doing this, it subtly undermines the meaning of faithfulness and truth, because it says to the other partner that at the deepest level they are not exercising freedom and a heartfelt commitment. We recognize this in the normal meaning of 'possessiveness'. It implies the subject does not possess the object of her/his affection and desperately seeks so to do, hanging on to the person whose spirit is elsewhere. The control is external and obsessive and doesn't capture the soul of the beloved. In this situation the other partner might feel the need to withdraw so that they can freely give their love. They feel smothered and in need of space where they can be themselves. Strangely emotional possession is an admission of the absence of freely given love; it is a substitute which creates further problems. The solution lies in finding again the basis of freedom, love and trust in relationship with God. The Christian meaning arises from the faithfulness of God to us and the awesome freedom which God's gives us to respond in love. Emotional possession is a form of torture to both partners, and it is the birthright of Christians to know steadfast, faithful and freely given love, however inadequate, in their friendships and marriages.

LOVE AS CALCULUS.

Another cluster of meanings is linked to the idea of possession in a more 20th century sense. While the 19th century and earlier saw possession in terms of the possession of labour, ownership of the means of production, we in the 20th century see it much more in terms of consumption. It is not possession as required service but as the satisfaction of wants which is our frame of thinking. Imperceptably love has taken on this meaning. We are all used to buying and selling most days of our lives and deciding precisely what our wants and dislikes are, and almost automatically we can treat love the same way. We trade love for love and each day tot up the accounts. If the account is in debit, we feel peeved and cheated, but when we are in surplus, we feel just fine. Maximising satisfaction and the calculus of exchange shape the daily intimacies of life. The Beatles were right, 'Money can't buy me love', but for many people the processes of exchange and the intricacies of cost-benefit analysis have led them to the opposite conclusion. They believe that the only love they get is the love they will pay for.

Some social and economic theorists have developed this perspective as a general view of human relationships. Exchange theorists in sociology and economics see relationships in terms of transactions through which players seek to maximise their

own satisfaction. On this view our relationships grow out of mean calculations, and we are all very lonely. Some economists even construct complex formulae on the basis of which people are supposed to have another child or an affair. (Becker 1981) Their mistake is to see this approach as normal rather than as a breakdown of love. When people believe that they must buy love, or will only sell it if they receive a good price, they can no longer give of themselves, or receive of others. Love becomes a process of take and give, a series of transactions in terms of which to calculate what can be gotten. there is an inner obsession with what my rewards are, what I get out of it. Sometimes, this develops from wants into needs; the things I need for love become absolute demands which create or can be subject to exploitation. (Walter 1985 60-9) The contrast is with Jesus' words, 'Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands - all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.

This calculus happens first of all in dating and mating. Direct calculations about whether a person is rich or poor are probably quite rare as the basis for marriage. Yet perhaps there are a range of calculations about whether somebody is a 'good or bad prospect' in terms of earning power. More common is a process where the personal assets of a potential partner are weighed against those which can be offered. Sometimes, reflecting this kind of attitude, young men describe a dance as a cattle market or women as 'talent'. Getting the best deal in a relationship, although obviously not love, often shapes relationships strongly. Behind it lurks the implication that when the deal loses its attraction the customer will move on. It is callous way of approaching a man or woman, which leaves its adherents emotionally dead.

However, there is a more indirect form of transmuting love into a materialist calculus which has influenced many more relationships. Because material well-being is such a high value in contemporary society, the best way of showing love to a spouse seems to be to present them with the material best. Or these things can be seen as a reward for love, just as many shoppers treat themselves and others to rewards. (Lunt 1992 90) Historically in an employment market where the career-orientated professional male has dominated, this has been expressed through the man working hard in order, as the saying goes, to provide the wife with all she could possibly want. She has a nice house, and everything within the home is fine, but her husband works and she sees little of him. As he is successful, they buy a better house, which in the great conurbations of London, New York and Los Angeles normally means that she is further away from him upstate or out in the suburbs. He,

because he is successful, has even more pressures on his time. Sooner or later she complains; she resents seeing so little of her husband and decides it is because he does not love and value her. He extends his activity in the area where he is appreciated, namely at work, and when eventually the situation becomes structurally impossible, she runs off with a drop-out and he is consoled by his secretary. What is especially sad is that at the deepest level his love was sincere, but because the materialist culture corrupted it, it was never shared interpersonally, but was always expected to travel through objects. There are many couples who fervently desire a long hug or a romp in bed who have to make do with a new kitchen or another holiday in the Bahamas.

The calculus view also works to rot many love relationships. When partners begin to ask whether they have got as much from a relationship as they have put into it, then all kinds of acts of ordinary kindness become a focus for bargaining or resentment. 'If you do this for me then I will do that for you' is a disastrous way of proceeding with a relationship. And it is also very complex. Often this kind of bargaining is going on: 'I will probably stop sulking, if you stop disagreeing with me, but I am not sulking anyway.' Partners decide what they will trade and even use what will cause their partner the most pain because it has the highest trading value. The effect of these interactions is to break a relationship down into trading units which can all cause contention, but sooner or later one partner asks the question, 'Is this relationship worth while (for me)?' Because of the terms in which the question is asked, it prompts a negative response.

Deep underlying all of these attitudes is the ego satisfaction model which leads to an introverted way of seeing relationships. When someone is asking what benefits a relationship brings them, it does not leave much room for spontaneous living. Often when we are really sorry for ourselves, we are apt to calculate - 'After all I have done for him...' It is a focus which thinks in terms of commodities and exchange, but which does not recognize the direct interpersonal character of love relationships. Many people in our culture who long to give themselves to relationships with one another are being fobbed off with calculations which limit their relationships drastically.

Once upon a time there was a group of workmates who had a glorious Christmas party each year. They gave super presents and had great fun and thanked one another for all they had done for one another through the year. Then a new boss arrived, and after the first party, when he received a lovely lot of presents, he sent round a memo because he was slightly worried at the expense involved in getting good presents for all his staff. It said that he had really enjoyed the party, but

perhaps next year they should try to cut down on their presents and make them slightly less attractive.

Everybody agreed and eventually got ready for next year's party, and brought their presents. As usual it was a great hoot of a party. When the presents were opened David received a book on 'How to embalm bodies' and a 1986 vintage bottle of milk. June had a dishcloth with an electric flex attached. Diane was ecstatic with her tin of maggots, running her fingers through them and passing them round surreptitiously. Shirley thanked Dan profusely for turning the tin can inside out and sticking it up again and Mary kept using the hairbrush in a bottle. When, finally, Bob was presented with his toilet paper in brine, he was a bit unsure how to respond, but the flushing sound was greeted with fervent cheering. As everybody hugged and parted, they all thanked one another for such a wonderful time and Bob for the great idea, he wasn't quite sure what was going on.

LOVE AS COMMODITY.

Banal though the fact is, love is often seen as a thing which can be bought. Basic to contemporary experience is the pattern of going to the shops and buying the things that we want. We buy an astonishing variety of things which are surrounded by promises, and many of these feeding off the importance of love, promise it through their purchase. 'Oh', you say, 'we're not stupid. We know that!' Yes, but can you escape it? The power of this idiom, driven by the need to sell, is to offer us soft toys, cards, cars, kitchens, coffee, holidays, flowers and food as love. Many companies other than Mills and Boon have a vested interest in love. (Tomlinson 1990 139-152) Often the items concerned have a special love mark-up. Who has not bought a particular card for birthday, Christmas or Valentine's Day which was extortionately expensive. And you, poor dude, pay because it is love. If we ask the question of where love is to be found, previously, it was in the eyes of the beloved, but now it is in the shopping mall. Young people fall in love and go shopping, unchaperoned as well.

It would be easy to dismiss this as too simple. Yet love is commodity-shaped today. Around the advertising of a fast car images of love gather. Chocolates, wine, silk clothing and many other consumer items wrap themselves around the meaning of love and tell us that it is here. Many women believe they cannot make love without a sun-tan. These consumer idioms intice us with the promise that there love will be found, if we pay. They make love complicated and expensive. It has to be expressed in lavish evenings out and expensive clothes and misses out on the simple need to talk together. It cannot be love without a bottle of wine and the

congratulation of affluence. Much of this is described as 'romance' and 'glamour', the process whereby people vamp up themselves and their relationships to generate the feeling of love. But the question is whether this is really necessary. Perhaps the ordinary person is just as interesting and wonderful as the 'glamorous' person. Perhaps they are more straightforward, honest and sensitive than the person who needs to put on an act. Perhaps the sensitive human face is far more beautiful than the overdramatised, made-up mask. Perhaps the skin, eyelashes and hair of a dear spouse is far more deeply beautiful than the powdered model of a girlie magazine. Thus, we face the question of whether the ordinary but solemn intimacy of day-to-day, loving relationships is being lost in advertised idioms of love. Somewhere there must be some man who actually first looked at his wife in a magazine. 'Hello, she looks nice. Haven't I seen her before somewhere. Just come over here, darling, and let's see what you look like.' Because love is located and taken over commercially, we no longer believe it can be with us all the time, ordinary, fun and free. But it can.

It was just a look - so easy. John had bought Mary fine items of jewelry each Christmas to express his love. They cost a lot and were quality designs. He and she took great care over the clothes which went with them, but the insurance was high and laid down careful conditions. It was actually quite difficult wearing and looking after them. The look told him what he already knew. Mary needed no jewels. Her beauty was her own, not by adornment. He did not know how to bring up the subject, and asked Mary if she liked the necklace. She said she did very much and put her hand to her bare throat. When he frowned, she came across and kissed him and said she really did like it very much. For once he said what he thought: she was deeply beautiful without jewels. She assessed what he was saying, pointed out that the business of looking after them was quite burdensome, and suggested that they sell them and live a more relaxed life. John concurred, happy, as he put it, 'to get rid of the clutter'.

CAPITALIST LOVE.

Within an industrial culture man-women relationships often mirrored those which took place within much capitalist industry. The man was in charge and controlled the work of his woman. She was at his disposal to achieve what he wished, and love for him was merely to treat her as a good worker and in a sense pay her due. The economic dominance of the man in the family sadly created the terms of the marital relationship, sometimes even where men were fighting against the evils of capitalism. The power of this model has diminished as work relationships have changed; although it perhaps remains strong among two groups which seem very

different - the top business, managerial and professional groups and some old style manual labouring communities - who perhaps still sometimes treat their wives as personal servants. Now, however, the meaning of capitalism has changed; it is more managerial and ownership is a wider phenomenon. It centres less on ownership of the means of production and more on consumption ownership. A central experience in many people's lives is owning houses, cars, videos, dishwashers and a new pair of shoes.

Of course, people do not normally treat their partner like a dishwasher, although it has been known to happen. Yet the focus of love can become that she is mine. In some ways this is wonderful. It cuts through all the uncertainties of relationship into the knowledge that this person belongs to me and no-one else, or conversely that I belong to this person and I alone. Something that a person owns and treasures he looks after. He lavishes care and attention on it, and frequently gets it out to look again at this beautiful thing that he has bought. Sometimes women especially are treated as such a valuable possession. We scowl at car adverts which use women to sell cars, but perhaps ignore that car relationships are also being used to define women. Women, it is frequently said, 'go well, are fast, make me feel comfortable, are responsive, are turned on, perform well'. These kinds of phrases reveal an attitude which reflects the consumption model. The girlfriend is carefully looked after, well dressed and frequently admired. She is seen as valuable, and her price is reflected glory on the 'owner'. Although the woman is treated with lavish care, behind this pattern lies the assumption that the man is the owner and this valuable possession is for him. It shows when the woman undertakes independent activities which move outside the frame of reference which the man has constructed. This becomes threatening and undermines the terms on which the relationship is conceived. When many people relate to so much around them in terms of ownership and possession it is easy for these ways of thinking to be transferred to even the most intimate relationships. Some wives enjoy initially the idea of being "kept women", not in the sense of being at home and looking after the children, but in the deeper psychological sense of giving themselves over to their husband to be part of his domain. But sooner or later the fallacy of this loss of integrity becomes evident, as the weaknesses of what the husband wants as owner become evident.

Barbara, for ten or so years had enjoyed marriage, two growing children and a lovely home. She dressed well, colour-coded, and enjoyed all the goodies which Alan brought home. But she felt stifled and unfulfilled. Her outside commitment was to Amnesty International. She worked for them three days a week on Far Eastern cases of torture and developed effective networks to monitor and publicize

the cases of injustice. Alan felt threatened; he was bringing home a very good income and aimed to have everything just so, including his wife, and she was working at and thinking about injustices the other side of the world. He felt he was losing control and disliked the intensity with which she pursued these cases and her relative nonchalance towards the home and their social life. To bring the issue to a head Alan began discussing the possibility of Barbara getting a paid job. He pushed her quite hard. But then she said, 'With your income we can afford me working for Amnesty free; we can contribute to upholding some standards of justice in these areas. If I work for pay, both of us will be saying this justice doesn't matter.' Alan agreed and later realised how close he had come to forcing Barbara to conform to his consumption values. After all, learning from your wife was no great problem.

CONSUMER CULTURE.

Often the weight of a consumer culture prevents the giving and receiving of love in a more complex way. Earning and buying, calculating and handling goods leave little room for relationships. Couples spend most of their time together relating through things, and the things themselves even structure the character of the relationship. A dress, golf clubs, a pair of shoes or a carpet become emotional charged objects which generate thunder and lightning. Many of the things we have and own involve policies which we hold quite deeply, and because we are invited to live so fully in a culture of work and leisure-reward, differences in these policies can be traumatic. Wants and priorities prevent the growth and mutuality of love. They intrude on relationships and claim first place. We spend all the time in the house talking or listening to the inanimate servants and have no time for one another.

Joe found this a problem at mealtimes. His wife wanted to be thin, but not in the sense of wanting to diet or take exercise. She wanted to buy thinness off the shelf in the supermarket just like everything else. Or rather, she wanted Joe to do it because he largely did the shopping. Each mealtime when they sat down Joe was failing to make her thin. They had fat free skimmed milk and chocolate digestive biscuits, thin carrot soup and packets of crisps, and Joe, who liked to be logical and consistent, could never quite work out what was going on here..

BEYOND PRICE.

The commercialisation of the meaning of love misses the point and does not address us as we are. Each person is beyond price and cannot be owned or treated as a possession. Money never buys real love, nor can the love of another be possessed. The most we can hope for is the freely given love of another person, and we are all

able to give our own love in our own way. But the freedom of love is only part of the situation. Because we are God's, we can belong both to God and to other people. We can give ourselves to them and they to us in the exclusive relationship of marriage and in friendships. This kind of giving and receiving uncovers the sense of 'being mine' which the possessive person covets. But it must be on God's terms of non-possessive love and respect.

Similarly the Bible turns upside down the take and give calculus of love. It is based upon a fundamental misunderstanding. All of us, even those suffering deeply, receive more from God and other people than we give. If we operate on a give-take basis, we are always in debt. We face the bankruptcy of our own nature. On an entirely different principle God asks us to receive unearned life, mercy, grace and love. We are also shown that love is the greatest blessing to the giver. It is more blessed to give than to receive. However ordinary and pedestrian this might seem, because giving truly honours another person, it echoes back what we are meant to be. It brings us closer to God and is God's great intoxicant of life. Christ commanded us to love one another because there is no other way to live abundantly.

We therefore need to be very clear what money can and cannot buy. 'If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.' (SofS 8 7) To reinterpret the truth of what loving relationships among us can be in terms of the commercial thought forms of the market is an insult to God. It is to take our grubby little measures and put them in the scales against the great gifts of God and in the process demean ourselves. When a woman came and poured expensive perfume over Jesus, the disciples seemed to have a good argument. 'Why this waste' they said. 'This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.' Jesus responded affirming what she had done. 'She has done a beautiful thing to me... wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.' And so it is.

LOVE AS POWER.

The problem with romantic love was that you lost control. It took over and made you weak and helpless, and then other people took advantage of you. There seems to be a problem in the powerlessness of love. On the one hand it reigns powerfully in the lives of some people, but on the other hand those who do not acknowledge it seem able to ride roughshod over people and come out winners. There are millions of men and women in all the countries of the modern world who have wept uncontrollably because they have been deserted by their partner and feel that the power of their love has been defeated. Of course things have gone wrong, but they

know that they have given love which was genuine and true, and it has been thrown away. Often they have been left unloved, weak, with dependent children and teetering on the edge of deep bitterness and hardness. In spite of this many have continued to love their partners and children, despite the suffering, and have known that whatever the defeat was, it was not the defeat of love.

Yet it is easy in this situation for people to harden themselves. Immediately, they are so hurt that it is not possible to face the grief and inner sense of devaluation and dishonour, but later the situation is addressed with a policy. 'I have been caught once, but never again.' They tell their own psyche that they will never again be open and unconditional in relationships; the base line is mistrust and not love. 'Everybody is out for what they can get, and it is a fool who trusts anybody.' From now on they will be in control of their relationships which will be conducted on their terms. This revolt against love is happening at all kinds of levels in our society. Everywhere there are little notices saying 'No entry to love; only power relationships allowed here.' People say it with their offices, wallets and eyes. There are loveless environments. We all know them and can identify them. Some architects make buildings without love. When there are no windows below 10ft and vents blast stale air at you as you pass you know that someone has decided not to love pedestrians. When occupants of shops and offices are given no natural light, they know that architects do not like them. But these no love decisions and contexts occur at other levels. In some offices the men know that if they 'make a pass at', or more accurately sexually harass, a woman, they will get a stiletto through their shoe. It is open warfare. But even in very intimate relationships many people have decided in their hearts that power is better than love.

Some of those who have suffered find protective havens of care and love against the hurt they have experienced. Friends, refuges, single parent groups, lesbian and church groups have often been built against the loneliness of the seeming defeat of love. Often in these groups the recognition of genuine love and its goodness is built again, provided there are strong external defences. But it leaves the underlying nagging question, Can love be defeated? In the rest of this chapter, at first indirectly, but then directly, we shall address the question of whether power is more powerful than love.

THE MACHO MALE.

Machismo is popularly seen as flexing biceps and revving up motorbikes, but it is part of the great historical identification among men of power as the basis of love relationships. The history is horrific. Men treated women as conquests, using

physical violence and abuse as a way of bringing them into subjection. They were often territorially confined, subjected to rules and punishment which would keep them in line and taught that whatever their husband said and ordered was right. Another cultural form of this idea was that men needed to protect women; the idea of the knight defending women against external threats was deeply internalised by both men and women. What both tended to ignore was the fact that men were protecting women against other men, and often protecting them as their possession. It was in effect a male protection racket. Often power was transmuted into automatic authority and independent women were rebellious. Like Katherine in 'The Taming of the Shrew' they needed to be brought back into submissiveness. We do not know in many cultures, including our own, how pervasive have been threats, abuse, violence and physical domination of women. Many men still cannot see any other option than their own control; their bones tell them this is the way to relate to women. Often other principles were at work, but nevertheless the male conviction that their power was sacrosanct dominated relationships and ran very deep. Anything which challenged it was threatening. Yet historically the bases of male power did change. Women moved into the work'force'. They became good athletes. Physical violence was publicly outlawed. Possessions are legally shared within marriage. And feminism challenged the idea and practice of male power in institutional terms. Yet still it was difficult to unlearn the idea that love was to be exercised through the use of power. The woman 'needed a boss' and the man who could not dominate was deeply threatened.

The pattern runs in families, relationships and the minds of men. The silly sexual myth that women need to be dominated is still producing large scale physical and sexual abuse. Men control their homes and their wives, becoming petty dictators who cannot let go of their demands and see the bigger picture. At work it surfaces in the idea that the important person is the one who has women at his beck and call; there was a loudness and an aura of self-satisfaction around the man who was taking his two secretaries from Michigan to New York for the day to do some Christmas shopping... It is present in the compulsive need to many men to prove themselves as powerful businessmen or sportsmen; their father or someone else has told them the conditions under which 'You'll be a man, my son.' and they have to go and do it. There is also the belief among some men, before and after marriage, that they need to prove themselves sexually by what are revealingly described as 'conquests'. Locked up in all these attitudes is the completely inconsistent notion that love has to be strong and powerful, that domination is love. The sheer illogicality of these patterns escapes men who claim to be rational. Abuse and rape are actually seen as

expressions of love in some men's minds as a result of the confusion which this view generates.

The egocentric dream which power offers is the idea that if this woman will submit to what I want then everything will be alright. When my will reigns, when she is not being awkward, then peace will reign. Most potent of all is the emotional closure which says, 'Whatever happens in this relationship, I am going to be in control.' Somewhere, however deeply buried, there is a layer of stainless steel which declares against dependence and openness and for being stronger and impervious to attack. Hence the idiom of the strong, emotionless male. In Hollywood films the macho strength is conveyed through fists, gun, grunts and a firm jaw, and eventually the woman, even if she has a bit of fire, collapses onto him. Sometimes it is seen as sexy. The Feminists, more accurately, just call it 'patriarchy'.

There are many women who collude in this view. They duck problems by agreeing that the man is powerful, that he knows best and even that violence is legitimate. This may be intended as love, even though it is encouraging responses which are wrong. But others establish countervailing patterns of power. There is quite an amusing public mythology of the sources of women's power. One, for example, is the ability to nag, to produce psychological pressure that will wear down the male in all circumstances. Another is the process of cooking; especially in the era before fast food, men who were hungry, would like Esau, give away anything for a mess of pottage. Then there is the great unwritten history of sexual strikes, where the women withdraw favours to achieve their own ends. Willmott and Young suggest that the wife's relatives and friends can sometimes make the home into alien territory for the male where he is perpetually outnumbered and from which he retreats to the pub. Threats, sulking and many other manouvres are used to assert the woman's will in a situation. One of the most destructive is the threat to leave, which leaves the man locked in patterns of fear and resentment. Later he comes out with a phrase like 'Anything for a quiet life.' and the terms of the power relationship go on. Often in this situation there is a weary awareness that this is not really love, but life is assumed to be like this. There is no real alternative. You just learn when to give in and when to assert yourself.

David and Gill fought over it. On the whole the kitchen and the bedrooms were Gill's domain and she did what she wanted there. David found them too feminine, but put up with it, while the main lounge was done to his taste, but the spot over the table was neutral ground. She had dropped his Jackson Pollock and had never bothered to repair the glass, explaining that it was out of date anyway. The moody poster had seemed OK when he bought it, but it was not the kind of thing he really

wanted to live with. Gill frequently covered it with elaborate flower arrangements, which apart from looking good also said, 'This needs covering up'. This was the final battle. Gill showed him into the lounge, and he saw this rich cascade of ochres, browns, greens and reds caught by the sun. It was beautiful, fitted the spot and had all the marks of Gill's hand. David trapped by the past was on the point of saying, 'OK, you win', when the churlishness of it hit him. He let go, enjoyed the work again and said how beautiful it looked. He also knew that this should not be another skirmish in a battle which should continue, but that his wife's taste deserved his respect.

The person who is subjected to control obviously suffers, often for long periods of time, but the deeper problems reside with the person who uses power. For they have decided the terms on which they will relate to other people and other people will relate to them. Normally, this involves excluding relationships with those who will not relate on the power terms which the person has laid down. The rich man will not know, let alone understand, those who do not give a fig for money. The teacher requires people about who will learn. Schoolboys bully those not interested in physical confrontation. But the power broker is more fully trapped by the terms in which he sees relationships. He has to be lonely, because the control required rules out freely given friendship, and it is not possible to receive help, because help implies weakness. How total is the isolation of the powerful.

This especially occurs when there is physical and sexual abuse. There are several aspects to this problem. One is the well-known phenomenon whereby a person who has been abused marries someone who is likely to engage in abuse. Although the person who has been abused may collude in the process, the dynamics of the situation usually work the other way round. The person who is addicted to physical abuse seeks out, identifies and pursues a person who has been subjected to abuse, cowed by fear and remains tied into these limited relationships. Love casts out fear, but those who use fear to construct the intimate relationships of their lives can know little of love, even if there are those who love them; their thinking travels on the railway lines of control and weakness, and love will be interpreted as weakness. Behind this pattern lies the loneliness of those who relate on the basis of domination. They can never know those whom they control. They can never experience freely given love until they untangle it from their power over people. They cannot even recognize love in their desire to fight through life. Often, too, the love which they especially need comes as opposition to them, as Jesus loved and opposed the Pharisees who were intoxicated with their own power. Thus, it is not that power wins, but it loses. Just as the Leninist-Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe 'won'

through the power of tanks, but lost as the empty brittle shell of lovelessness cracked, so too power-based relationships prove bankrupt.

Johnny said that he didn't love Mummy any more. She had smacked him when he had hit Amanda, and he was going to get his own back. At mealtime he spit all his food out. Mummy was a bit annoyed and said it was silly when she wiped it all up. Later he was hungry and made noises which Amanda did not like. He was very grateful for the milk and biscuits Mummy gave him before going to bed, but he stayed up just to spite her. When she came to kiss him in bed, he pummelled her with his fists and said, 'I hate you, I hate you.' He broke as he saw her face, and suddenly was saying, 'I didn't mean to hurt you. I didn't mean to hurt you.' 'No', she said, 'I know you didn't, but if you try to get your own way, you will hurt people. Now will you give me a kiss and a hug?'

POWER OVER LOVE.

Often, rather than replacing love by power, people try to use love as power. This position is more realistic in recognizing the importance of love in people's lives, but, however delicately, it uses love rather than submitting to it. It discovers that the most powerful of all weapons is the withdrawal of love. Old Sociology texts used to say that while the working classes punish children with smacks, the middle class punish their children with the withdrawal of love. Perhaps, many of us do grow up with such experiences. The power of this move is amazing. Suddenly, you no longer have to forgive, be patient and erase the memory of wrongs done. The other person can be repudiated and closed off. Dependence becomes impervious independence. All the weaknesses which are associated with love are removed at a single stroke, and especially if the other person needs that love, and who does not need love, the position of weakness is replaced by victory. But in this game of chess, the final position is now revealed. By using this powerful weapon in a relationship, its power is destroyed. It is important that we see the full implications of this move. God is love and commands us to love; it is the condition of our existence, and anybody who claims to take control of love, to give or withhold as they see fit, is playing at god and also denying the central truth of their existence. If the love which the Sovereign God shows to us and commands of us we take and make our own petty weapon, we stab ourselves. By asserting power over love, we win, but we lose, even that which we would win. Such fools we are.

Yet too often, like children playing with toy soldiers and guns, we play with this weapon and engage in the temporary withdrawal of love, especially so that those who have done wrong can be brought to their senses by the use of this 'power',

before love is resumed as normal policy. But it is not only that the weapon becomes ineffective and destroys itself, but also that the meaning of love becomes fundamentally misunderstood. Love becomes a namby-pamby, good weather phenomenon which only comes out when the sun is shining. During bad times it is replaced by scowls, tight-lips, withdrawal and coolness, which are deemed to be far more effective. Actually, of course, they are destructive and debilitating as they are meant to be. The alternative is love which is critical and committed, which faces what is wrong and sticks with the problem, which sees through the evil and places it in a bigger, good context, which, in Jesus' unforgettable terms, turns the other cheek. Love is capable of lasting through failure. It has the power to remake situations when it is given the controlling role. It can bring about new understandings. It can persevere through crises to new ways of living and seeing things. Yet we have to be very clear what this love is. It certainly is not the love which becomes subordinated to, or even dominated by, power relationships which fundamentally assert that my will be done. Something much more radical is required; it is love which perseveres and endures, takes no count of wrongs and lives in its God-given power.

Shirley had felt she had to fight much of her life. She had fought at school, with her brothers and for a decent job. It worried her that she would treat Derek the same way. She knew he was different, that he was completely on her side, but whenever she was up against it, she attacked him. It was just words and irritation, but he could always feel it coming and it terrified him. She hated herself for being so aggressive. One day she was letting fly and felt dominated by the need to fight for everything, but Derek just kept on hugging her and asking what he could do to help. He just ploughed through the verbal arrows and focussed on her and what she was feeling. She could see his love conquering his fear and it also defeated her. She couldn't treat Derek as the enemy, because he just hung on and was a friend for life, for better and for worse. Later she mounted a few verbal attacks, but there was no heart in it, and they petered out. It interested Shirley that she gradually learned to fight with people, to establish an underlying commitment for them, which was so different from her unbringing. If you fought on the side of the people you met, even if they were antagonistic, relationships were usually for the better.

THE USE OF SEX.

For those who have abandoned love for sex, there is yet another stage where sexual relationships themselves are used in power-directed ways. We have already noted the way in which pornography encourages addictive behaviour, and addiction is linked to weakness and dependence. It is therefore clearly possible for people to

use sexual relationships in the same power-based way. There are tales of film stars who have slept their way into top roles, and prostitution has been associated with blackmail down the centuries, but perhaps our concern should be with a more immediate and mundane matter. Many men and women must fear that sex has to be the way of keeping their girlfriend or boyfriend, wife or husband. 'If you won't go to bed with me, how do I know that you love me?' says the boy, and she gives way to the blackmail. There is the wife who desperately performs hoping that she can hold on to her man. There is the wife who uses her husband's 'need' for sex to achieve her own ends and purposes. There is the competitive use of sex to destroy marriages. But what is happening in all these situations is also fearful in its destructiveness. For it involves using sex as a weapon to achieve patterns of control, exploitation and domination. Sadistic and masochistic practices probably emerge from this view. The Dracula myth represents a horrible version of this attitude. He exercises power over a series of women victims until they are sacrificed to his bloodlust. Before good triumphs, right at the end of the film, the myth invites men who watch it to participate in the idea of total control and women to fear. Many other popular mythical idioms play on and excite the same fears. Underlying all of these examples is a meaning of sex which loses its inner connection with love and takes on another agenda. It leaves each person hugging to themselves a notion of their own power and treating the other person in the sexual relationship as the enemy to be overcome and dominated. Again the contradiction is frightening. In the act which should signify love and tenderness, it is possible that patterns of warfare are going on. Usually in these situations people are wearing underclothes, not armour, and are easily hurt.

THE BIG POWER LIE.

We now see the fundamental weakness of the view of power which this approach espouses. It is intoxicated by the possibility that control can be established over other people and they can be defeated when they try to exercise their will independently of the subject. The agenda to which love and sex are made subject is 'My will be done' and this distorts relationships and rides over people. It also hardens the heart of those who choose this master. They have sold their soul to a devil who will destroy them. By contrast, the truth of God's power throughout the whole creation is that it is used for our good, and not against us. This is the astonishing characteristic of Jesus' power. As God he did not need to be assertive and, rather than dominate, he respected the integrity of all he met and worked for their good. Whether by healing, warning or encouraging Jesus' focus was on what was best for the other

person. He showed attitudes of patience, meekness, longsuffering and steadfastness and stayed with the people he loved through their problems. This was the gentle power of working for good. This love was and is not defeated. It can love enemies and persecutors, and can erase the failures of the past with forgiveness. Our guarantee is that even when humankind loved darkness rather than light and killed the embodied goodness of God, God stayed with us. Now many people who have thought themselves defeated in love discover through Christ that God's power of love is far greater than the destructiveness they have experienced. They know that God's love has inestimable power over and for us.

LOVE AS ATTAINMENT.

SUCCESS IN LOVE.

Those who mix power and love normally have some idea of the contradictions between the principles they have chosen to serve. They are not quite trusting love as powerful enough a way to follow and they therefore opt for an alternative. However, there is another understanding of love which is normally seen by the adherents as the only meaning which love can have. It is given by the worldview which they follow in the rest of their lives, namely a belief in their own achievement and their ability to make their own world. Love here is something you work for and eventually deserve. This is Yuppie culture love. It is for the upwardly mobile. It involves having a successful man on your arm or a glamorous girl at your side. Love is what human beings create in their own lives and they either do it well or badly. Just as some people have high and low salaries, so some people are high and low achievers of love, and one of the skills of life is therefore being successful in love. The process is competitive, like jobs, exams or playing monopoly; those who win stand to be congratulated while the losers just have to make do with whatever comes their way. This is both a strong contemporary view and also one with historical roots.

Much of this has to do with the development of the idea of career. A competitive view of work focusses on top jobs which have high rewards. Younger people are encouraged to drive for them through the hope of success and the fear of failure. They are taught to focus on what will happen, and when it does, to see it in self-congratulatory terms. Feelings of success, achievement, desert, failure and expectation often become central in the emotional lives of the careerist man and woman. The signs of success are seen to lie in high salaries and affluence. In this context it is quite natural for love to be viewed the same way. Courtship and

marriage are a success story; the signs are, perhaps, a nice house, having an enjoyable time together, children and having a good sex life. Sometimes, of course, it doesn't actually work out this way. Yet because it has to be a success story, the cracks are papered over and ignored.

This way of seeing things has a media impetus. The sacred event which stands at the apex of this commitment is often a film or media award event when the great and the famous arrive in pairs, glowing and fabulously dressed with their consorts on their arms. The ceremony which follows is then an elaborate process of self-congratulation, partly of those who receive the awards, but also of all the others who attend the event. The popular media keep up a continual gossip commentary on those who are successful in love, or not. They parasitically feed off great media relationships, like that of Charles and Diana or Ronald and Nancy as if the love of these people were anything other than ordinary. The converse of this obsession with the success of love is a kind of cruelty towards those who are shown as fallible. There are reports on the latest wedding of Elizabeth Taylor or another star of love which are essentially bitchy in conception. Reports on the Prince and Princess of Wales almost seem to claim that they have let the press down. There is a populist reaction that those who claim to be successes in love are really just like the rest of us and mess it up. Thus, the media create that which they attack. They frequently use imbecilic horoscopes which include within their platitudes 'being successful in love'. They continually push the myth and the magic of the love achievers and plays with envy, which is a possible motive driving this view of the world. As the movie becomes the Star Wars defence policy, so what is presented on television becomes the model for love.

This perspective also has much to do with class. One of the problems which the rich and powerful have is their continual focus on their own achievements. They have therefore developed a need to see love in terms of success. In Britain there used to be a process of debutantes 'coming out'. They were thereby entering the marriage market. They would be portrayed in society magazines, and they and potential mates would attend series of events from Buckingham Palace garden parties to local hunt balls, where the underlying concept was Who would get Whom. The more formal criteria of success involved who had money, prospects and looked pretty, but other less formal criteria also applied. It used to be common in this culture to refer to women as 'young fillies' and to use the language of the horse sales at Newmarket. Within this idiom a person had to be congratulated on making a 'good catch'. It was almost a process of comparing CVs. Along with this way of seeing things has gone of process noted by Veblen and others whereby the woman is the man's trophy.

Indeed, one theory has it that the elaborate corsetry of the mid 19th century wife was part of the process of showing onlookers that she was incapable of work and therefore had many servants which reflected well on the owner of wife and servants. This seems a bit extreme, but certainly the women dressed as if they were being displayed on the sideboard. For decades their long skirts restricted the possibility of any active pursuits. The extent to which this view has constrained the lives of middle-class women and prevented them from being themselves is too well documented to need further comment. Yet it still continues in other forms.

ACHIEVEMENT IN MATING.

In previous eras the process of choosing a partner has been defined much more closely by where people live. You married the girl next door, the one in the church choir or the man in the next office or in the class above at school. Now the openness of the process is frightening and those of marriagable age look for categories which which they can order and organize this complex process. One of the most popular is the idea of compatibility which we have already examined, but another, perhaps even more influential, is the idea of dating success.

Its first expression is an idea which is sometimes referred to as 'scoring' with the opposite sex. Often it is meant sexually, and there is a well established but very destructive subculture within which young men especially believe their prowess and popularity is established through sexual 'conquests'. Here love has little or nothing to do with the process; it is more akin to taking scalps and is characterised by a shallow or nonexistent appreciation of relationships. A similar idea is that of flirting. Sometimes it just involves a need for attention, but often it involves a competitive use of sexual chemistry to achieve the end the person has in mind. It involves the use of seductive techniques, dress, self-focussing motifs, cosmetics and images which project a person. The magazines are full of them and so is our culture. An article in a magazine focusses on the idea that bald men are sexy. How? It might be based on the idea that sexual activity makes your hair drop out. Clearly, this is an area where fantasy, whether by bald men or by women, leads the mind. It is part of the mythology of sexual achievement. Yet those whose identity rests in their sexual attractiveness often set out on quests which are disasterous both for themselves and others. They suffer because their identity is so narrowly based and so dependent on unstable relationships. Others suffer because they are used and exploited in relationships which fundamentally are not concerned with them. They are merely a foil for the seductress or the woman-slayer.

A more ordinary form of this view is the one which sees mating in terms of making the best possible match. Relationships are therefore conceived in terms of the qualities of various potential partners have and what each can offer the other as a reward. Achievement is measured in our culture in terms of education, status, money, strength, appearance, popularity, and many other personal characteristics which are more imponderable like sense of humour, good manners, sense of fun and personality, and the understanding is that love is achieved by getting the best you can in terms of a mix of these criteria. Potential mates are therefore assessed very carefully to see what they offer and how this compares with the assets which the subject has to offer. Dating is a bit like the Stock Exchange with bids and counter bids, offers and trading until finally a merger is negotiated. Essentially the mode of attraction stays external. It is represented by a thousand corny images where the guy plays a great game of football and the girl falls wide-eyed on his neck. During this period each partner is under pressure to advertise all their best features and hide their worst. Then when the deal is clinched, the appearances can be discarded. If the problems of this presentation stage are overcome, then a deeper scenario moves into place.

There is an interesting convention of dating which seeks to avoid this attitude. It is the avoidance of competitive dating where one person could be seen to be compared with others. People are not comparable and marriage is not a process of shopping for the best bargain. In a situation where courtship begins the norm is therefore to pursue the relationship through to marriage or to friendship rather than engage in any kind of comparison with potential partners. It is a wise practice which many people follow automatically. Those who do not might question whether the idea of successful dating does not have them in thrall.

What happens when people present themselves as a good catch? Some just believe that they are, and are likely therefore to be involved in a set of status judgements about other people who are not up to the mark. Others are not quite so sure and become concerned with creating a good impression. They might feel that being liked and loved is something you have to work at. The internal cost is a fear I will not be loved unless I'm attractive. This is especially a problem if patterns of pretence and self-presentation have taken place during the formation of a relationship. The fear is that they must be fun, dynamic, successful or seductive if love is not to die. Sometimes the fear is entirely subjective; it occurs despite the unconditional love of their partner. The woman wonders whether he will still love her with these wrinkles. He fears the loss of his job, his aura of success, his ability to make money because he is not sure whether she will love him anymore. There is, tragically, more than one

man who has left wife and family on becoming unemployed because he feels he has let them down. The scenario invites love to remain externally focussed; it hinges on performance and whether each partner has a good deal.

FAILURE.

Another aspect of this attitude is the way in which it leads people to look at themselves. There are areas in the lives of all of us where we fail, and on this view these areas must be sublimated and buried, for they cannot be loved. But it is precisely this move which makes what are often quite simple problems intractable. For example, our culture leads us to believe that men must be successful with money. One of the idioms which many men have, especially in Greece where it is almost a requirement, is having a roll of banknotes, a fat wallet or many credit cards. Achievement is often linked with high spending, and some men bluff. The failure to handle money well is then covered up and obscured by patterns of pretence until the man and then his partner suffers more deeply for the self-deception. The idiom requires us to ride on success. Underneath all the time is the fear which leads failure to be buried, making it inaccessible to love. Clearly this weakness has trapped many couples and left them unable to address their problems.

Anita was worried at a level which had never gripped her before. The courtship had been exciting. She was vivacious and enjoyed the evenings out and planning the marriage. It was a continuation of College and her time at Inns of Court when she had continually lived on the frisson of life and the lapping of success. She had no doubt of David's love, but marriage meant moving into another world - one of home, housework, ordinariness and defeat. She remembered her Mother and the sense she gave of not really being anything. Anita had wanted to escape from this for years and now it was going to trap her. She wanted to share this fear with David, but couldn't, because he had not married a frightened housewife. The fear was not just related to her Mother, but also to housework; you could pass exams, but untidyness always attacked you again. So she bluffed, but with moods of depression which frightened David because they were so inexplicable to him. Curiously, the first way out of the depression came after a visit home. She suddenly saw Mum in a different light. She wasn't anything, but she didn't need to be. There was a lack of hype, which Anita found she needed. She hugged her Mum, thanked her for all she had done at the wedding and felt a bit more in touch with herself. Later when she and Dave cooked the evening meal together, David burned the saucepan. It seemed a crisis, but it was soon cleaned, and the rest of the evening was very pleasant.

Another related attitude is the decision that some men and women make to withdraw respect from their partners who fail. Sometimes there seem to be grounds for doing this - drunkenness, failure, aggression, serious criminal behaviour. Yet these actions may represent only a small part of a person's life and the judgement is harsh because it fails to honour who the person fully is. Most patterns of withdrawing respect are based on criteria which are limited by the view of the judging partner. She decides that his manners are not good enough for polite company and disowns him. He decides that she talks a lot of nonsense and should not be with him in public. She decides that he lacks taste. He that she looks dowdy. Withdrawal from love which is based on these and other such judgements merely points to the kind of love that must have been there originally. At first it involved a set of judgements which said, 'You are worthy of me' and these were later changed into the statement, 'You are not really worthy of me'. Thus, we can see the destructive effects of the underlying attitudes of self-glorification and self assumed status. The self-congratulation of many relationships produces its own mouldy fruit and real love remains the experience of the humble.

When Henry and Belinda met, she was rather taken with his friends. They were fast talking, high earners, full of fun and had an incredible social life. After they became engaged she realised she and Henry were seeing far less of them. One of the very things she had liked him for was no longer there. One evening they discussed it. Henry pointed out that the whole group had exploded. Recently quite a few of them had lost their jobs in the recession and didn't want to be around anymore, but he suspected that many of the others were like him; he was fed up with the artifice, sexual envy and posturing of the group. The need to be successful wasn't leading anywhere and just made relationships tiresome. He was very glad when he had met Belinda and they had been able to develop a good honest relationship which was free of all that stuff. When she next met members of the group, she received a couple of catty remarks which conveyed how accurate Henry was...

THE REWARDING RELATIONSHIP.

Along with the focus on the high achieving individual goes an emphasis on a rewarding relationship. Some people are popular, perhaps because they are pleasant and good people, but sometimes the idea of popularity contains another idea. The rich, the famous and the powerful offer rewards which are sought by others. There are webs of achievement woven into sets of people, many of which are at least tintured by self-congratulation. What these groups have to offer may seem from the outside very alluring. relationships have a similar pattern. Especially if a person has

a sense of void and veredundity, what another person has to offer can seem so great. Yet because the internal structure of this relationship is premised on what we lack, and on patterns of hope and aspiration for ourselves which have not fully been faced, it is likely not to work well. Especially in courtship and marriage these kinds of responses need to be opened up and shared. 'You always seem so at ease with everybody.' 'I'm not really much fun.' 'You are so much more intelligent than I am.' this kind of thinking is not only misplaced, but overvalues these characteristics. Intelligence involves different kinds of thinking, some of which most people have or can develop. What is often experienced as inadequacy is misplaced. Each of us can give a great deal, and this is always more than intelligence or a sense of humour.

The deeper question concerns the full relationship. How can we decide whether we are having a rewarding relationship? There is a perverseness in the process, for those who set out for the rewards seem to find that they either do not happen or are empty when they do. The career achievement of a partner which seems so important at one stage of life is merely that which makes him late home at another. The glamorous woman of one stage is the one who is a slave to her need for beauty later. Often the events which are planned as part of a rewarding relationship turn out to have a hidden flaw. Specific events may have their glow, but reward is too instant and superficial an idea to convey what is really involved in relationships. If the rewards only come from the things we achieve in a relationship, then they do not touch where each person really is.

A similar question is whether one person can be more rewarding than another? The very concept is so wooden. If two people live and grow together for 40 or 50 years, they are forming one another anew each day, week and month. The richness lies in the deeper growth of each person in love, beauty, wisdom and purity. Any achievement which is worthwhile will come from these deeper qualities anyway and will be based on co-operation and mutuality. To fix the vision of love on some supposed reward offered by various characteristics sticks in the shallows.

REWARDS OR BLESSING, BUT NOT BOTH.

Blessing is a far better word. It identifies the fact that we must not act to receive a reward, but must give in a relationship in a way which is pure and relies on God's unpredictable response. Many good relationships rely on and can only happen through suffering. It also underlines the sense that relationships should be good and wholesome. They should produce fruit. This can only happen if the real focus for each person is love and care for the other. The underlying fallacy of the achieving focus is its self-reference point. It clings to the idea that individuals are capable of

engineering their own rewards. This involves ignoring how deeply everyone depends on what they are given by others, by their parents, teachers, friends, nation, church and forbears. In particular it does not recognize how insubstantial are the achievements of any of us and how they turn to chaff when we believe in ourselves. Finally it does not recognize its total dependence on God's grace, which goes on when the performance stops, and does merely count achievement and success, but is given to all of us when we cannot offer anything of worth.

June was always slightly angry with Arthur, although she loved him. She was quite clear about the reason. She felt she should have married somebody better. Just before they had met he had decided to be an ordinary doctor and not go for surgery or better hospital work. She expressed her irritation occasionally but regularly through odd comments, although it did not really matter any more. She went to the surgery to give him a lift home, and as he came through the door he spoke to a young mother who was next in the queue. She got up, hugged Arthur and told him that the baby was fine. June froze. It was not that there was anything improper in the act of this heavily coated young woman; it was just that her love and gratitude to Arthur was unconditional, while she, June, in far more intimate situations always lived with the reservation. She realized things must change. She arranged with Arthur to come back in twenty minutes when he had seen the remaining patients.

THE ROOT PROBLEM.

REVIEWING THE APPROACH.

It is good to understand the spirit in which the previous chapters were written so that we can all be depressed in the right way! First, they were written by two sociologists keen to understand what is going on in man-woman relationships today. As such it is an exploration, because this is one of the most difficult areas to study. Although some research is relevant, social surveys which examine sexual activity and many other family studies do not fully engage with the questions of love which are considered here. People may make statements about love, but these often depend on other views and it is not easy to see how much they are their own. Magazines, novels, television and films are continually representing love, often without words. The domain of study is vast. A bigger problem occurs because it is quite difficult even to know what friends think about love. It is too big and personal a subject. It involves all of us closely, and many of us cannot even articulate what is happening at certain stages of our own lives. In this area it is easy to destroy what is touched. This study therefore relies on exploring a set of meanings of love. It uses sources,

cultural and personal, which present a pattern of meanings with currency in our daily lives. It is allusive, in suggesting to readers areas in which they might have had experience of these meanings, and invites the reader to discern whether and how any of the analysis might be relevant to their own relationships. In this sense it aims to be directly personal.

But this question is both personal and cultural. Although many people might feel their own experience of love is quite unique, they take part in broader social movements which are deeply formative. One question which the various meanings of love presented here raise is whether these meanings do cohere in people's minds and hearts. It is possible to deconstruct them further, but broadly they seem to be empires which can claim a lot of loyal subjects. Happiness, feeling and duty are conurbations around which the traffic of love gathers. Each of them has its own logic and language and expects people to pay taxes in its own currency. This broader cultural map has therefore been the main task of the preceding chapters. It suggests the overall geography of love in the last few centuries. Yet this analysis was undertaken to answer a question: - Why has love so often failed?

This, too, is a deeply personal question for many of us. Why does love fail in our relationships? As we mentioned at the beginning of the book, the personal question is too big a one to fully address here. Yet the subject matter of this book does allow one kind of answer which may be important to a lot of people. Our love fails because it is the wrong kind of love. These kinds of love have faults written into their design. Many people enter relationships with deep commitment and a full-blooded determination to love, but things seem not to work out. This may be because we are wedded to views which thwart these hopes. Part of the analysis in earlier chapters was concerned with opening up these problems so that they can be seen more clearly. If this is indeed a substantial part of the answer to the question, this should help us in our relationships to love more truly.

We should note that it is no purpose of this exploratory analysis to undermine all the real love which is expressed in people's daily lives. Real love is straightforward, and is marked by patience, kindness, a lack of envy and a desire for the other's good. It does not depend on reading books, makes the world go round and brings people in contact with God. The young and old, those with abilities and disabilities and everybody else can love at any time. Even when love is intended, but does not work out as it should, it remains real and was continually honoured by Jesus. Thus, although this book makes cultural judgements about certain models of love, it should not be used as a source of relational judgements. These will seldom fit and then only in a partial sense, and they could obscure love which needs nourishing.

Perhaps many of us are too close to the problems of our own love and could reflect more on our cultural location. Never before in the history of the world has the culture of a generation been so shaped by the media and education. Previous generations learned about love in the context of a few key relationships which they experienced as they grew. The people they lived with had views about how to live and love which largely framed their culture. Now, for twenty, thirty, forty or more hours a week children and adults receive teaching from the media which conveys among other things how they should view love. But it is transmitted as dogma; the media says through images, drama and incidental messages: this is what life is like. There is no other way of seeing things. The meanings presented in earlier chapters are widespread media idioms which are not held up to question. We are a generation who have been taught to love as no other, and often by those with no real interest in the subject, than using it for commercial ends. If we have been falsely taught, there is a need for some fundamental relearning. A mass culture can be destructively wrong. It may claim to be harmless, but if it has given false answers, we are dupes if we follow them.

SHOOTS FROM THE SAME ROOT.

Our culture has first offered models of love and then recorded their failure. The earlier chapters of this study looked at older models like ideal love, romantic love and love as happiness. They involved and contained within them an optimism about the fruits of love. They rang with the hope of a forward looking culture. If the previous analysis is approximately correct, this optimism foundered on the weaknesses which these views contained. As each generation pushed a bit further the implications of viewing love this way, they produced more bitter fruit. Later views of love focussing on attainment, power, consumption and compatibility had fewer pretensions. Some of their adherents would not even talk about love. They were part of a post-romantic culture. They were worldly wise and even cynical. This post-romantic culture has come to the conclusion that love is a failure. It does not work. It lets people down.

Yet the glaringly faulty logic of this conclusion has been exposed. What we have been examining in the past chapters has been the failure of certain kinds of love. But if, as we suggested, they are flawed views, it was inevitable that they should fail and let down the people who were influenced by them. This is only the failure of these kinds of love, not the failure of love, and especially not of christian love. Yet we are now in a position to ask why these failures have taken place and whether they have something in common?

There is an answer which lies under the ground which we have already raked over. All of these meanings which we have examined have grown out of post-Enlightenment humanism. This term needs explaining; it does not mean a narrow ideology or set of ideas, but an underlying religious conviction that humankind is the source of its own meaning and can discover its own truth. Since the 18th century Enlightenment western culture has in part pursued the idea that the worship of mankind is the best contemporary faith, and each of the views we have examined puts something human at the centre of the universe and of the meaning of love. All of the views we have examined have turned away from finding the truth about love in God and have sought it in various human ideals and hopes. Human feelings, happiness, duty, achievement, satisfaction and compatibility dictate the outworkings of love. If there is something wrong with all of these perspectives on love, it suggests that the root faith in humanity as the source of love is suspect.

Is this the case? Can we trust this humanity? Or more personally, can we trust ourselves? This is not just trust in a day to day sense, but in the deeper sense of allowing a faith in humankind to define the meaning of love. The answer has to be, No. Not just in the sense of recalling the millions of deaths which occur each year because of human evil, nor also in the sense of recognizing the scale of the failure of love in which we have all participated, but finally also in the sense that none of us can put our trust in what comes out of our own hearts. Our love is a failure; it is compromised both in conception and by the way we live. Even our ideals are corrupted. This faith has fed on the optimistic hope that the next definition of love, the next trial of romantic love will work, but it does not. The flaw is that it trusts the creature rather than the Creator. Now the basic falsehood of this faith becomes evident: our own faith in ourselves and our ability to construct the meaning of love cuts us off from any ability to root out the problem. We are the problem. That in which we have faith is the problem. The policeman we have brought along to sort out the murder of love is the murderer.

So that we can reflect on the this central question, let us look at six different levels at which the meanings of love generated in our post-Enlightenment culture have damaged and hurt relationships, moving from the less to the more serious.

First, we have scarcely noticed the changes which have happened to love. It would need a lifetime of very quiet watching to begin to see the pattern clearly. The way in which people now talk about love is confused. There is a disintegration in words like 'faithfulness' and 'lust', which previously did good service, and couples have to negotiate the meanings of love from the smorgasbord we have previously sketched. This faith has fragmented language and meaning into a post-modern

world of relativized values. The seeming impossibility of trust is postponing many marriages and couples who try to live with several different versions of the meanings of love are often at sea without a compass. In this book we have kept the chapters separate in order to examine their direction, but this ploy creates a false sense of order, because they are all experienced as a daily babble, claiming allegiance and spreading confusion.

Second, each of the models of love presented is internally defective; it fails. It takes some object of faith in humankind and makes it the core meaning of love. Yet what it puts its trust in is either mistaken or partial. The 'ideal' is a creation which is self generated and then is imposed on the other; it feeds our weaknesses into the relationship. The conception of love as power reflects our misunderstood need for control and the breakdown of trust. And the idea of sex as pleasure which is seen as so good and creative by its adherents does harm to and dehumanises many of those used by it. It is not just that concepts are defective, but that their falsehood leads to evil. The untruth is lived out in the lives of young men and women who suffer and are hurt, albeit often willingly. The tender relationship of sex becomes rape. A love relationship becomes a fight. Or a romantic attachment demeans a wife and children. These defective meanings also distort people's inner lives. They are torn by conflicting feelings, duties, ideals and ambitions. There is no peace in the routes they offer, because the meanings address only a bit of life. To respond to feelings, attainments, bodies, duties or wants is only part of being human and loving. Either for a person or in relationship these meanings let their adherents down.

Third, each of the models locates its faith either in the individual or in the other person. It introduces a basic polarity into the meaning of relationship. We can put faith in our own ego and find there the meaning of life, but then the partner becomes instrumental to myself. Or faith can be found in the beloved, who is idolised and becomes the source of identity of the lover. This is a choice which crosses many of the models we have outlined. Either my egocentric ideal can imprison my partner, or my romantic ideal can enslave me. Either my feelings dominate him, or his define the moods of my life. In each case the fundamental conditions for relationship are undermined. If the meaning of life lies with me, then the other person is external and instrumental to that meaning. If the other person is the meaning of love, then my identity only has meaning in relation to them. The inner ground for a mutual relationship of equal respect and integrity is broken. Either in Sartre's words, 'Hell is other people', or I have a dependent identity. Millions of us have learnt to think egoistically in dozens of daily thought patterns which snare us into false meanings of love. Or we are trapped in patterns of faith in the partner which will let us down.

In both cases our love is doomed by its failure to recognize how central is the command to love the other as ourself. Neither is to be idolised and neither disrespected. We are persons in relationship, not individuals first, nor worshippers of others, but children of the living God.

Further, and more serious, this trust in humankind, however it is expressed, cuts us off from what is good. Part of our culture is the idea that we are all good guys really, and most of us find it hard to believe that we do create evil. Yet we do, individually and in relationship, produce evil; the evidence is around each one of us. Most of us daily add to the sum of evil in the world; we are mixtures of indifference, love, faithfulness, hatred, selfishness, deception and weakness. But the mixture cannot be sorted out like oil and water; it is more like the mixture created by sugar, salt, pepper and soot. Even our good commitments are partially corrupted by our bad, and if we trust in them, then we are trusting what is defective. We have seen this in model after model which has turned out defective: duty which blames, happiness which ignores, achievement which is proud and feelings which attack. We and others have set out with hearts bursting with love and good intentions and produce the curate's egg, really bad all through.

Maybe we need to take the problem of our evil more slowly. Most of us think of quick patch-up jobs, a rapid change of policy or an explanation which firmly locates the problem somewhere else. But this problem is a bit pervasive, intestinal. It's not so easily externalised. Unless the preceding analysis misses the point, then we are most seriously mixed up. Nor is it easy to find a good bit of us which we can trust, an island we can climb onto while we drag our other failings out of the water, because we're swimming in the problem all of the time. In fact the only way out seems to be to stay in the water. The apostle John stated it more authoritatively. 'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn 1 8-9) In this sense, there is no good in us. We need some way of developing an awareness which can address our failings and allow us to separate salt and soot before they become so fully mixed. Only when we have a sure place to stand outside our self-deception and failings can we see ourselves with discernment.

Fifth, there is a narrowing of the meaning of love. Jesus addressed the same problem. The Pharisees and those around him focussed on very limited understandings of love. Those who believed in attainment saw a poor widow putting two small coins in the Temple treasury and thought, 'That's not much.' Jesus saw it and saw the richness of her heart, the openness of her giving and the real value of what had been put in. He saw the way people were able to ignore the love

built into the creation and cloud it with meanness. He showed how love could forgive and free people, heal them and make them friends. He showed that it was far wider than those with whom we have sex, or those we like, but could define every relationship. In our era love has increasingly been seen as involving sexual transactions, feelings or having a good holiday. It is being closed down and made redundant because our own conceptions are so narrow. We often no longer see the possibility of having most of our significant relationships characterised by love. Jesus brings these attitudes under judgement as fundamental mistakes in human understanding and opens the boundaries of love; we can love anybody anywhere - blow kisses at traffic lights or say, 'after you' in the rush hour.

But the overwhelming mistake of all these views is the way they have persuaded people to turn their backs on God and seek their own ways and meanings. We have seen enough to suggest that these meanings are counterfeit. But you only grab hold of error when you have lost your hold on the truth. If the truth of love does not exist in opinions or human constructions, but in God's relationship with us, then our culture has started in the wrong place. How could we do this? Perhaps the most astonishing event of all history is the reaction of the cultural leaders of the day to Jesus. No reader of the Gospels can easily avoid the conclusion that this man, healer, teacher and friend of the weak, was overwhelmingly good. Yet the leaders had to hound him to death. The light shined in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it. The human ability to miss the point is way beyond what most of us believe. We tend to assume that occasionally people get a few ideas wrong, but we do not believe that we and others are deeply perverse. Yet these constructions about love are many of them perverse; they succeed brilliantly in coming to the wrong conclusion. Of course, the reader may be free from this perversity. Or it may be present, at base in a determination not to recognize God as the source of love and its meaning.

We can see love in the way God has created each of us, the care which is lavished on our eyelashes, tastebuds and immunity systems, the way we are provided with parents and through the sky we are given each morning. We can see it in the precepts given for our daily life, showing how we are meant to live and love. We can see it tested out in the life and teaching of Jesus. Especially then we learn that love is given by God, rather than being self inspired. The strength of our love therefore needs to lie with the gentle power of God. Self-generated love and its own meanings gets no further than its own weak terms of reference, but living in response to God is the way of living in love.

These six levels of weakness are played out daily in our cultures and we all suffer from the consequences. The scale of this failure is frightening, but it can only be recognized if we are prepared to critically examine ourselves in relationship to God. The humanism in our culture will continue to say, 'There is no problem.' So, as the wise Irishman said to the humanist who asked him the way to love, 'I wouldn't start from here'. There is a better place to start.

MY FAILED LOVE.

This is not just a great cultural failure, but also an individual one. It often feels very complicated. As Tolstoy said in the first sentence of *Anna Karenina*, 'All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' Sin is complicated, no less when it occurs within love. Basic problems hang around and generate subsidiary ones like sleeplessness, depression and fatigue. Nor is it easy to unravel the knot of the history of a relationship. Going back to the place where something went wrong is only part of the picture because all kinds of things may have gone wrong. Yet there are a number of moves which are central to constructing a relationship of love.

One is an awareness of the failure of my love. Each of us often in declaring our love also trust in it. Yet often it is a weak plant living in poor soil. To recognize these weaknesses is to deepen our commitment. The trust belongs with God and from the soil of God's good Word we grow out of failure.

Another is rediscovering our integrity before God. Often we are strung out on feelings, sexual urges, our own elation or depression and what we want from life. These pull us in different directions and there is no centre to our lives. We need to allow all these dimensions of our life to come back into relationship with God, to dwell in our personhood before God.

'But I have stilled and quieted my soul;
like a weaned child with its mother,
like a weaned child is my soul within me.'

We have also to throw away many levels of self-obsession. We are concerned with our love, success and feelings. minute by minute our thought processes focus on ourselves and weave patterns in which we are god or goddess. In Christ's unforgettable words - 'whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.' This process of losing our life and 'our' love is the only escape from our egocentricity.

Another is learning the language of genuine, heartfelt love. This involves starting with the simple. Your great gesture of making love to a person had best begin with

praying, cooking, listening and waiting for them. Big gestures are no good when they do not fit with daily care and concern. Whether love is true cannot be hidden from God, or really from one another. Like Peter, after he had denied Jesus, we are given the opportunity of saying 'Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.' As we move from mixed motives to the simplicity and openness of heartfelt love, the transparency of love will emerge in our relationships with one another.

Above all we learn of Christ and open our lives to God so that the central highway of love in our lives is open to traffic. This we shall spend more time doing in the final chapter.

ANOTHER WAY.

Much of our love is reactive; we give love because we are given it. Or the relationships we have around us demand love; they expose our previous failures and demand something better, something more obviously true. And yet the truth of love does not dwell in our hearts. Our love is compromised and often quite pathetic. This is not because we do not want or intend to love, but because it does not work out in the context of all these pressures and attitudes which clog our arteries. And, more than that, it is so complicated. Handling and responding to these meanings leads into convolutions which just cannot be understood. We think about love in bed, on the train, in the car, on television and it does not seem to work out. We are flippant, cynical, emotionally cool, suppress the question, live with compromise and failure or just suffer privately. Nor is the way out straightforward. These patterns have a grip which is deep in our lives, and they need to be converted into something different which will make love normal and strong, rather than an aberration.

CHRISTIAN LOVE.

The transition is a massive one. It is away from egocentric visions of love to one which lays hold on the love of God and recognizes it as the core truth of life. Here is the central truth to which our failings can be tied and which throws into relief all the twists and turns of earlier chapters. God's love is not an idea, or a feeling, but the very ground of our existence which is evidenced in what we daily experience. This truth reinterprets us, so that we see ourselves and our relationships with splitting hair clarity. The first thing that strikes us is the sheer scope of God's love in our lives. There is the care invested in the creation, in the cellular structure of a blade of grass or the oxidation of minerals or the construction of our digestive systems. There is the glory of each morning and the exquisite variations of a bird's song, whose feathers show a lavish display of creative brilliance. The creation delivers food and

more exotically than in a packet of knitted protein. It comes as mangoes, celery, beef and wholemeal bread. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. The so-called problem of evil has a very simple answer. God continues to love those who are evil, despite the wrongness of their actions. That love is direct, personal, open and unmanipulative, and can straightforwardly be seen by the way Jesus treated those around him. The sheer transforming vitality and variety of Jesus' love is amazing.

It led a woman to throw herself in public at his feet and kiss and cry over them and wipe them with her hair, and he, although "defiled" in the eyes of the onlookers by allowing a prostitute to touch him, honoured her above those onlookers. He loved a rich but despised little man who was trapped by his wealth, received his hospitality and transformed his outlook. Zaccheus then breathed a generosity which had shrivelled in his lungs before. He healed a man who was deaf and dumb, so that the man's friends were overwhelmed with amazement. Their testimony was, 'this man has done everything well.' Twenty centuries ago he saw two women through a preoccupation with housework and freed them to recognize the importance of their full relationship with God and what they could learn about living in it. He was known and criticized as the one who was friends with prostitutes, publicans and drop-outs, but they were never exploited or shown disrespect by him. They enjoyed his company and returned his love. He travelled a long way to meet the insane and cure them of their affliction and worked to exhaustion to heal young and old. He did not select his students on the basis of intellectual qualities or wealth, but showed each of them personally how they were God's children. And the children loved him. The adults told them off for praising God in the temple (as Jesus had shown them they could), but Jesus honoured, welcomed and made the children well. This man gave blessing, told the truth, never sought his own advantage and yet was hounded to death.

Jesus understood people with love, and especially their distorted motives and weak attitudes. He recognized that many of those following him around were after bread or a new miracle and were not really engaging with him, and yet he did not respond with bitterness or cynicism. He encouraged every show of love, however weak. He never laid burdens on people that were not light and easy. He took people through failure. And his love was tested to suffering - travelling to see people, being hated by the powerful and eventually being crucified through totally unjust procedures. This situation he met with the words, 'Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.' The reaction to Pilate is even more acute. Pilate had Jesus beaten and attacked with thorns to show who was boss, and in the subsequent interview Jesus makes allowance for Pilate, recognizing the pressures on him which came from

Rome and the Jews. It is the little things which show Jesus' love. When Judas was going off to betray him, Jesus knew what was going on, and could easily have made a fuss, manipulated his feelings, or used his position of power to stop him. What he actually did was to give a general warning about how terrible it would be for the person who did such a thing, giving Judas the opportunity to change. (Matthew 26 20-25) Then Jesus explicitly gave Judas permission to go and do what he intended to do, but without conveying to any of the other disciples what was involved, so that Judas would not be subject to any retaliatory behaviour. The disciples thought he was going to do some shopping. (John 13 21-9) Central is Jesus' commitment to love through sin and failure, and through atonement and forgiveness to establish the triumph of love over them. So God's love to us is steady, not hitting back, not vindictive, not shallowly returning evil for evil, but making the sun shine on bad and good alike, loving enemies and turning the other cheek. As Christ showed us, God's love is uncompromisingly for us all the way.

It also addresses us as a command. This is because it is the way we are made to be. The central truth about ourselves and our relationships is that we love our neighbours and especially our partners as we love ourselves. This is no external command but expresses what we are truly meant to be. This central respect for ourselves and others in full personhood is the place where our true meaning is revealed. This love banishes fear and hatred and opens up the longings and questions of the heart. Even when we fail it comes back as a gentle insistence that we obey the command to love. When we feel wronged seventy times seven times, we are still commanded to love. This is, as Christ has shown us, the ground of our being.

It is also fully personal, involving every aspect of a person's life. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and so we are to love our neighbour, husband or wife. Love incorporates body, hunger, health, emotions, relationships, rest, truth, peace, faithfulness and hope. This is shown in all kinds of incidents in Jesus' life, which showed that he loved people where they were at. If they needed food, healing, forgiveness, respect, comfort or criticism, that was what they received. The disciples learned the pattern from Jesus. When a cripple asked Peter and John for money, Peter answered, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk.' So this is love with awareness. It listens to where the other is. It discerns the need. It prays for understanding and wisdom, and it puts the other person in the full light of God's purposes for their lives. Its pleasure is in what is good for the other person.

The focus is the other person and their good. Many of our perceptions of what is good for the other person are tainted with our pride and sin. We think we are good for a person when we are not, and our love becomes mythical and ineffective. Jesus went through layers of immediate needs, like food and healing, to the central needs of those he met. The thief dying alongside him on the cross was able to face up to his wrongdoing, address his own death, trust Jesus and know with certainty the promise of eternal life. While on the cross Jesus gave John to his Mother as an adoptive son who would provide a home in Jerusalem and share her grief and later amazement. Jesus' love is directly and completely of each of us.

But at the same time this love is not idealistic or sentimental. Jesus told the Pharisees, 'You are trying to kill me.' They were trying to kill him, and later they did kill him. Yet at that stage they had not fully opened up to their own motives and twisted desires or identified how they were trying to defend their own empire and dominance. Jesus directly faced them with the truth and gave them the chance to come to terms with what was wrong. This love faces up to what is wrong and exposes it to the light, not to gloat or condemn, but so that good can be restored. It does not delight in evil or keep a record of wrongs. It does not take wrongs to its own heart to stir into anger, but it is love in truth. It is not to be deceived, not to take the easy route and pretend that things are fine, but to persevere and hope in the face of properly identified failure, so that in the end it may rejoice in the truth.

Nor is it love which we possess. Our weakness does not allow us to focus on our love. To be truthful we must know how deep our failures to love and understand one another really are. Even good and healthy marriages contain appalling levels of ignorance and failure in love. But then beneath that failure is God's perseverance and patience with us. As Jesus taught it is the love which is as close as the child to the breast and also waits through long years for the wayward person to return to an open relationship. It is God's love on which we depend daily and hourly. It is to be within us as streams of living water. It is, as we ask of God, no longer reactive love, but that which gives and suffers gladly. Those who have it will be given more. It does not dwell on what we deserve, but is marked by undeserved grace. Nobody can crow and say, 'Look at my love', but each of us faces whatever love we experience with gratitude to God, humbled. We must receive and be healed.

Yet part of the glory of love is the richness it uncovers. Unloved we shrivel, but loved we grow and flower. There are many people who are rushing superficially from one person to another, looking for their best deal. Yet in our experience men and women who have been rejected are rich and precious beyond estimation. There are fools around who have thrown away the crown jewels because their lack of love

has blinded them. To love is to see, to open up the incredible richness of this other person, which is enough to last a lifetime. To love is to garden. God supplies the sun, the rain, the earth and the plants, and we merely tend one another. But who does not flourish from tender treating?

Most centrally, this love is of God. Jesus gave the love of the Father to the disciples and showed us God's love. It is from God to us, the truth of our existence to which we respond. We cannot find it anywhere else but by opening our hearts and lives to God. If we worship or serve any idol of our own creating, it will fill our hearts with limscale and make them brittle for love. On the contrary we lay our lives in the hands of God each day, for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. This is love: not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to suffer from and disarm our sin. Jesus has gone through the worst failures of love and given them the coup de grace. We are beyond our failure into God's bonus time.

And finally, we remember this love is also far wider than the man-woman union which has been our focus here. Now we face fully now narrow has been the framework for the rest of this book. Because so many of our relationships have become loveless - retailer-customer, banker-customer, employer-worker, driver-pedestrian and many others which are often devoid of real care - we have retreated to the one relationship where we hope at least that love and intimacy will be real. Those who especially experience loveless family life especially seek this elusive love. Everything is vested here. Were love more normal, and this is not to talk down where it really occurs, then much of the tension and apprehension surrounding male-female love relationships would dissipate. Thus, the wider adventure of Christian love whereby strangers move into bonds of trust and openness is the bigger response to our specific quest. There is none of us who is not looking for love at all kinds of different levels and all of us are capable of giving love in unique and valuable ways which draw on God's love. Many of the answers in the quest for love are not found in the special partner, but in all the daily contacts of life and our prayers for them. But since this has been the specific concern of this study, let us finally focus on this more specific form of love called marriage.

MARITAL LOVE.

Marital love has the same truth and steadfastness, but is held within the union which involves a mature man and woman giving each to the other fully, two persons sharing one another for life. This is a union of body, emotions, thinking, relationships, work and money; it shares faith, hopes, failures, sickness, poverty and suffering with joy and reliability, because each partner loves the other; there is no

other reason. Sexual union says truthfully, 'I love you', and the message bears much repetition. In this intimacy two persons are able to read one another, sharing new pages every day. They practise love on the security of God's love for them. They learn to be patient, kind, not to envy, boast, be rude or seek their own happiness first. They are not self congratulatory, don't get angry, and don't store up the wrongs and weaknesses of their partners to use later. They enjoy truth which is not degraded by evil, protect, trust, hope in and persevere for one another. They recognize that love is a command; there is really no other way of living a humane and good life. They trust in God to make the obedience to this command a reality in their lives and to see it through until all the other ephemera of life drop away.

Chris hovered in the doorway near the foot of the stairs. Dad was slowly climbing them, leaving his stick hooked over the bottom of the bannister on his way to bed. She was worried about Mum, who was climbing up behind him with one hand resting on his back for support. Twenty years of Parkinson's disease had slowly taken their toll and although Dad's arms were strong, if he fell Mum could do little about it except fall too. She was worried that all this caring was too much for Mum and moved forward out of the doorway, full of anxiety. It took her a while to take in what was happening. She hadn't heard clearly, but Dad must have said something like, 'Your turn now', and Mum moved ahead of him on the stairway and he put his free hand on her back while pulling up strongly with his other hand until they reached the top and turned into the bedroom. Their love, respect, patience and trust of one another swept over Chris's fear; all their anxieties had been passed onto God in prayer, and she had no right to create problems which had been conquered. She felt hers drain away. When Mum came down a quarter of an hour later to make up the breakfast tray and kiss her goodnight, she felt as chirpy as Mum undoubtedly was.

This love is 'ideal', but not out of reach; you just go ahead and do it now with a kiss, apology or some work. It is 'romantic', but only in the sense of realising repeatedly how wonderful this person is whom God has given you to share for life. It is neither 'Platonic' nor 'feeling centred', but involves thinking and empathising with the beloved, until the feelings are tuned up to what is good and ignore all the pathetic emotional hiss which is received from other frequencies. This love is 'dutiful', but not in an impersonal and behavioural way. Rather it reaches steadfastly for the person wherever they are and pulls them onto good ground. It does what is really needed and carries on loving when there is no reward. In this love there is 'happiness', but not such as is based on a shallow euphoria or ways in which our ego has been indulged. Rather, it is joy which grows out of the truth of the relationship

and the astonishing experience of God's overflowing generosity, the sense of a 'good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, poured into our laps.' Here, there is a sharing of bodies, but not in lust, exploitation or a blind search for sexual experience. By contrast, it is a cherishing, a giving to one another and an affirmation of how good it is to be together. Here, also, there is 'liking', but not such as demands a made to measure partner who will fit first time, but such as comes when the shoes have grown on the feet, are warm and never felt as something separate. There is also power in this love, but no need of assertion. It always wins, but neither partner does. It attains many things, but always with the haunting awareness of how God patiently interferes in our lives, and how that man, Jesus, always did it first.

How stupid we are to play with counterfeits. The search for love is the same as the search for God and we find both in Jesus Christ.

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