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A Radical Phenomenology of Love: Divine Love as Understood by the Radically
Orthodox John Milbank

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the MA in Religious Studies:
Areas of Specialization: Philosophy and Theology

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March 9, 2009

ABSTRACT

The topic of Divine love is no longer taken seriously. In some sense it is difficult for one to even utter the words “God is love” without an accompanying mawkish sentimentality. One’s concept of love in general, and Divine love in particular, is a linchpin to all other theological, ethical and social spheres of life. This thesis considers how John Milbank, the “father” of Radical Orthodoxy, understands Divine love, and some ways in which his work may be positively situated in the Ecclesial Community and lead individuals into deeper experiences of such love. Since Milbank has very few explicit words concerning Divine love, his consideration of such will primarily be drawn out of his most prominent theological and philosophical understandings. That is, this paper will, in some sense, extract Milbank’s understanding of God’s love from his most significant and over-arching structures of thought (e.g. his participatory ontology, considerations of “the gift,” and his Doctrine of Divine Simplicity).

I would like to thank the chairman of my thesis committee, Dr. Ed Martin, and the mentor of said committee, Dr. Thom Provenzola, for their wise counsel, patience and generosity throughout this endeavor.

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INTRODUCTION

For what reason would there need to be another lackluster study on the topic of Divine love? The topics of love in general and Divine love in particular are old hat and have become tritely familiar -- they appear to have been thoroughly inspected, ad nauseam. The topic seems exhausted and has been covered, at least tacitly, by an insurmountable number of thinkers.¹ Prima facie, it does not at all seem as if there is anything new to contribute to this topic, therefore the aforementioned question deserves attention - - why the topic of Divine love here and now?

In one of his very rare moments of clarity on this topic of love, Milbank offers explanation for why it must be reconsidered:

Love is the proper topic for the early 21st century because in the personal field there is a crisis over its meaning; in the religious field there is an increasing substitution of violence for loving persuasion and finally in the world at large the global tightening of human bonds is not accompanied by an equivalent increase of solidarity secured through the exercise of charity.²

¹ E.g. Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Max Scheler, Jean-Luc Marion, Heidegger, Derrida, DeLubac, Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Schleiermacher, Paul Tillich and Kant.

² John Milbank, "The Future of Love: A reading of Benedict XVI's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*," (http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_TheFutureOfLove.pdf), Date Accessed April 24, 2008, 1.

For Milbank, it is clear that love has been horribly misconstrued, and such false impressions have resulted in significant losses for everyone: the individual, the religious community and all of society. If love, when misconstrued, has such catastrophic consequences upon society, then how much greater the consequences when *Divine* love is not properly considered?

Perhaps this topic of Divine love is no longer taken seriously. In some sense it is difficult for one to even utter the words “God is love” without an accompanying mawkish sentimentality. The phrase no longer carries with it a profound earth-shattering sort of power that affects people significantly - - it is no longer considered dense, rich or fecund. This topic of Divine love has, *as an expression*, become socially empty, stale and void of theological potency. The phrase is tired and has been so oversimplified that it has become insidious, banal or simply irrelevant in the minds of many in the ecclesial community. Why has this become the case? Should not this idea that “God is love” carry with it a formidable, existential sort of consequence upon those who consider its meaning and ramifications? Perhaps the phrase lacks such a presence because society in general, and the ecclesial community in particular, has been so shaped by modernity that Divine love is no longer considered a *mysterium*.³ Perhaps the secular considerations of love - - overtly influenced by modern thought - - have seeped under the cracks of the doors of the Parish in such a way that the mystery and *aporia* have been removed from the ecclesial considerations of Divine love. Left in the place of mystery is the presupposition that there is no real substantive difference between God’s acts of love and finite ones - - the two are univocal. If there is no real substantive difference between finite and infinite

³ This is, as we shall see later, the primary contention Milbank has with his good friend Jean-Luc Marion.

loves, then there can be no significant interest and intrigue in God, for God is left looking like the average joe.

It should go without saying that the Christian narrative entirely depends upon its pronouncement of the presence of a loving God. Without a loving God, there can be no incarnation, no “highest good,” and no significant Christian professions.⁴ It is clear that much is riding on this concept of Divine love; so much so that it would be imprudent to presume that the topic has been fully understood and exhausted.⁵ For to presuppose so much is to assume a full, complete, pure and certain understanding of God as he exists within the God-head; to assume that he has revealed all of himself to humanity and that finite persons are capable of fully understanding such revelation. Instead, this topic of Divine love must be taken to be as vast and as infinitely dense as the very God who possesses “it” and acts it out.⁶ Therefore, Divine love must be carefully reconsidered in

⁴ The incarnation, as we understand it, could not be possible for a number of reasons, but here we will only point out that in order for God to place himself in this world, there must be a sort of care for it and for humanity. The absence of love is the presence of indifference or hatred. Jesus would have no reason to enter the world and be present among a creation which he hates or is indifferent towards, much less offer any sort of message of hope. Additionally, there can be no “highest good” because such good must have origination in a good God. Without a God of love, there can be no God who is good for goodness must be expressed outside of a person to others.

⁵ Perhaps this *topic* of Divine love, *as understood by finite persons*, is constantly changing or transfiguring in some way. This is *not* to say God is in process (as found in John Cobb, Griffin, A.N. Whitehead) or even that our collective understanding of him is growing, progressing or becoming greater in quality. Instead, what is suggested here is that each person should express love and desire differently, and if such love and desire originates in God, then Divine love is expressed uniquely and differently in the world along with each individual. Every person offers something singular and unique to this finite world; a unique voice to this symphony of voices, and with it, another distinct and exclusive way of perceiving The Divine and love. Each individual brings into the world her own remarkable, God given expressions and perceptions of Divine love. This is not to say that what has been considered or believed about Divine love should be overthrown or discarded, but simply that it is, *as a phenomenon*, in flux -- there is an ever present inundation of differences which each individual may offer. Every person may contribute something unique to how Divine love is seen communally. This is not to say that Divine love as understood by finite persons is constantly under revision or progressing towards perfection, but instead as movement in and through finite persons, as the Divine action of love is and moves.

⁶ There is, in Milbank’s thought, a sort of equation of God and his love. This is due to his Doctrine of Divine Simplicity, which lends to his understanding of God as a person who is eternal action in general and love as such an action in particular. Milbank sees love as an incredibly fundamental action which God expresses in his *esse*.

order to circumvent serious distortions of this fundamental component to the Christian message.

Another reason for further consideration of this topic of Divine love is that one's concept of love in general, and Divine love in particular, is a linchpin to all other theological, ethical and social spheres of life.⁷ How one perceives herself as being loved will, perforce, affect her comportment and influence how and what she loves otherwise. That is, if she believes that God does not love, then she will have difficulty handling the disappointment of other's failed loves. One's choice to not recognize and believe in a God who loves should necessarily lead one to a nihilistic, and therefore grim outlook on life and humanity. One's recognition (or lack thereof) of being loved by the Divine is an integral component to her comportment and being in the world. Paul Tillich, a relatively modern thinker, points out that "most of the pitfalls in social ethics, political theory, and education are due to a misunderstanding of the ontological character of love."⁸ That is, love is such a fundamental "concept" that it has a viral effect upon all other spheres of life. Do not such implications of a misconstrued concept of Divine love merit another careful consideration of this topic? There are questions and answers within this topic which have been infinitely deferred, and yet it seems to remain true that there is more to be found and discovered - - more questions and answers that are available here and now.

At this point it has been made clear as to why it is prudent to reconsider Divine love, but a foreboding question remains to be answered: why John Milbank? He has been the repeated interlocutor of a great number of articles, essays and theses as he has gained

⁷ Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 25.
 "life is being in actuality and love is the moving power of life."

⁸ *Ibid.* 24.

overwhelming attention. Generally, John Milbank evokes one of two responses from scholars in the field: he is either (1) questioned for his frequently suspicious readings and treatment of Augustine, Aquinas and other prevalent historical figures, or (2) praised as the father and ringleader of a new and exciting theological movement which is attempting to rekindle the Christian flames which can be traced to the historical, primordial Christian message. The virtue of Milbank's theological presence is still debated, yet one thing is certain: regardless of the direction from which scholars consider Milbank, he evokes and awakens new and fresh dialogue. As a result, many trace his every move with a quivering pen and the result is a heady number of writings that consider Milbank the prime subject (or in many cases, suspect). Therefore, why yet another reflection upon John Milbank and his theological influence?

John Milbank is the father of Radical Orthodoxy - - one of the most fascinating theological movements today - - and as such he has gained admiration, notoriety and widespread popularity. John Milbank has influence. Because of this influence, it is important that we become aware of how he sees this topic of Divine love that is so fundamental to the Christian tradition. He is presently engaged in the most influential theological circles and his work is finding its way through the doors of the church, therefore it is imperative that we better understand in what ways Milbank's thought (or re-interpretation) may help (or as some would suggest, hinder) the church.

Additionally, there is a very small handful of people who have such a vast knowledge of pre-modern philosophy and theology as well as contemporary postmodern thought- - John Milbank is one of these people. Generally, Milbank's technique for replacing modern establishments is to renovate the framing and foundation of pre-modern

ideas with postmodern updates and a flashy exterior. It is helpful to consider how Milbank does this with the concept of love, for if the idea of Divine love has been popularly misconstrued, and modern ideas are the culprit, then such a corrective should find root in pre-modern sources. Because Milbank wields such knowledge of these sources, he seems to be one of the best individuals through which we may gain a fresh, or at least an unearthed, perspective of Divine love. If there is going to be anyone who is to provide a corrective to the aforementioned problem of Divine love, it seems as if it is going to be Milbank. Though many of his positions have been considered, this present topic of Divine love is unlike any project yet to be drawn from his writings. Enough justification has been given in order to necessitate this project, for we have established (1) why Divine love is an essential topic, and (2) why John Milbank is the ideal candidate for such a consideration. It is now necessary that we illuminate what this thesis intends to show.

The aim of this thesis is fourfold: This paper means to (1) indicate the significance of the concept of Divine love and how it has been popularly misunderstood; to (2) clearly show Milbank's understanding of Divine love, and its distinction from modern, popular versions; to (3) suggest that Milbank has a truer grasp of Divine love, and that his understanding provides something of a corrective to the present, misguided considerations; and to (4) pose some ways in which Milbank's understanding of God's love may be positively situated in the ecclesial community and lead individuals into deeper experiences of such love.

This paper attempts to pack a one-two Milbank punch: not only is Milbank the prime subject of this paper, but he is also the inspiration for its style and motif. There are

three ways in which Milbank has prompted this thesis: The first is that this thesis is born out of a recognition that there needs to be a theological re-narration of Divine Love, and such a reconsideration has come from the model provided by the Radically Orthodox community. Milbank's theological ambition arises from the desire to re-vive and invigorate the Christian story for the present milieu through re-consideration and re-narration - - this paper has similar aspirations. In Milbankian fashion,⁹ This paper intends to show that a reconsideration (or re-narration) of the Christian understanding of Divine love is necessary as humanity's understanding of it has undergone a sort of de-vivification which has left the concept lacking in significance for the contemporary audience.

The second way in which this paper is rightly Milbankian is found in the thesis that Divine love has been popularly misunderstood to some degree and a number of such false impressions have come about through modern thought. Much has been forgotten amidst the modern products of empiricism and philosophies limited to finite confines. As a result of modernity, the phrase "God is love" has been stripped of imaginative, powerful and potential meanings as all sense of mystery has been removed. Milbank generally begins his works with problems he detects in theological discourse; issues that are the result of negative influences of modern thought - - this paper begins similarly.

The third way in which Milbank's thought has shaped the construction of this paper is found in the promotion that certain pre-modern understandings reflect a truer grasp of Divine love. This thesis supports Milbank's continuous claim that there are

⁹ Albeit, this paper will not be quite as polemical, heavy-hitting or dense as Milbank's own theses combating modernity, and, hopefully, this thesis will not be seen as imprudently blaming modernity for all social problems in general, and a misunderstanding of Divine love in particular.

specific pre-modern theologies that we should employ to speak to our contemporary predicament of a misconstrued Divine love. Milbank's overt disposition towards pre-modern thought will be definitively obvious throughout the paper. This paper will be reflective of such sentiments.

Now that we have considered the purpose of this paper and the style through which it is to be gone about, it would be helpful to see the way in which the purposes will be achieved. Since Milbank has very few explicit words concerning Divine love, his consideration of such will primarily be drawn out of his most prominent theological understandings. That is, this paper will in some sense, extract Milbank's consideration of God's love from his most significant and over-arching structures of thought (e.g. his participatory ontology, considerations of "the gift," and his Doctrine of Divine Simplicity).

Chapter one will consider the theological landscape, features and texture of Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy (henceforward referred to as RO). Prior to delving into his understanding of Divine love, it will be indispensable to consider his approach to language and his theological agenda and ethos. RO merits far more attention than will be addressed here in this thesis, and this chapter will only highlight some of the general features of RO, which significantly color and affect Milbank's thought.

After understanding Milbank as RO, the second chapter will consider what Milbank means in speaking of love in general, and Divine love in particular. This chapter will also explore a bit more how this topic of Divine love has been misconstrued in contemporary theology. In general, the modern theological understanding of the

attribute or act of God's love has lost its potency as it has been stripped away from his other attributes. Too much emphasis upon one of the attributes, results in the diminishment of other major perfections, thus leaving God narrowly pinned down to acting in and through one attribute at a time. Another way of examining Divine love in contemporary theology is to see the polarity between the considerations of God as strongly immanent or as extremely transcendent.¹⁰ An over-emphasis on either of the two poles has resulted in disparate, and erroneous views of Divine love. Both the strongly immanent positions and extremely transcendent ones each have their own unique considerations (or disqualifications) of Divine love, and such views, if found erroneous, must be reconsidered. Therefore, it is hugely important that this perfection be considered further, especially within a "sensitivity" that is gaining such attention - - albeit notoriously at times - - and respect.

Chapter three consists of how Milbank's understanding of Divine love may be tacitly drawn from his participatory ontology - - a significant feature of his theology. Milbank would agree with Augustine in his suggestion that "God does not know all creatures, spiritual and corporeal, because they exist; but they exist because He knows them."¹¹ In other words, God even sustains humanity's existence - - every breath is allowed by God. This sustainment is the basis for Milbank's participatory ontology. Such loving provisions are God himself, as he makes himself known and perpetuates a

¹⁰ This sort of imbalance between transcendence and immanence is most prevalent in process theology (by way of A.N. Whitehead, John Cobb and Griffin), liberation theology and more emphatically, Open Theism (this topic of love seems to be the very thrust behind this theological movement. Greg Boyd and Norman Pittenger seem to be leading the way here). On the other hand, there have been strands in modern and current thought that kick God out of the phenomenal realm (e.g. Deism, Bultmann's Demythologization, and on a much smaller scale, Karl Barth's theology) and leave humanity to fend for itself in a world without an immanent God.

¹¹ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), XV, 13.

relationship with humanity in general, and individuals in particular.

In the fourth chapter we will see how Milbank considers the concept of “the gift” and its relation to this topic of Divine love. “The gift” is not so much an ontological category, or a strictly phenomenological presence, and this lends to Milbank’s fascination with it. “The gift” may be considered as a way to speak of love, God, and God’s love. This chapter will consider the connection between God’s expressions of love as it relates to his giving of the gift(s), and humanity’s reception of it/them in relationality. Milbank’s concern for Marion’s proposed univocity between finite and infinite loves will also be considered in this section, for it is precisely within this realm of giftedness that the concern rears its head.

The fifth and final chapter of this thesis will emphasize the infinite distinction between humanity and God. Since the Divine is infinitely and, in Milbank’s case, wholly other than man, God must retain a mysterious nature which is exclusive from humanity’s perception.¹² Since, for Milbank, all loves are ultimately an *aporia*, then we should consider Divine love to be at least doubly ambiguous, for it involves both the infinite, mysterious God and love - - an ultimately puzzling and mystifying subject. Milbank speaks of Divine love somewhat reticently; that is, he takes great care in drawing conclusions on this topic. A proper devotion to understanding Divine love is, ironically, found in staying committed to its mystery and obscurity, and yet open to and hoping for

¹² The Greek work used in the Septuagint for “mystery” is *sacramentum*, which best translates as “the secret counsel of God.” The word is also related to “sacrament” which is best described as something “set apart.” For a deeper consideration of the living tension between revelation and mystery, see John Milbank “Only Theology saves Metaphysics: on the Modalities of Terror.” (www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/~Milbank_OnlyTheologySavesMetaphysics_final.pdf), 55. Milbank points out that “Of course, there is the problem of how we can recognise radically new things or search for unknown ones, but Plato and Augustine recognised that our strange anticipation of the unknown is radically aporetic, and requires an appeal to transcendence (in terms of recollection or illumination), on pain of denying the arrival of the new as something still rationally coherent.”

generous revelation.¹³

¹³ See Pascal, *Pensees*. trans. A.J. Krailsheimer. (Harmondsworth UK: Penguin, 1966),125. Pascal recognized finite limitation and recognizes humanity's arrogance in understand and expressing love. In efforts to highlight the significant transcendental character of God, and to suggest that humanity pales in ability to rightfully perceive God and the love he *is*. He suggests "all bodies together and all minds together and all their products are not worth the least impulse of charity. This is of an infinitely superior order. Out of all bodies together we could not succeed in creating one little thought. It is impossible, and of a different order. Out of all bodies and minds we could not extract one impulse of true charity. It is impossible, and of a different, supernatural order."

CHAPTER 1

JOHN MILBANK AS RADICALLY ORTHODOX

Once again, it is helpful to understand Milbank as he is Radically Orthodox, for in his qualification as such we may gain a significant amount of insight into his means, method and style in theology. This chapter will begin with how Milbank considers theology in general, then we will see how his considerations apply to his theological endeavors. As this chapter progresses, we will see the project of RO more clearly, where Milbank is situated within such a project, then we will slowly progress into considering some of the more broad features of RO as they are related to the particular thesis in question: Milbank's understanding of Divine love.

We must be careful not to assume we understand what Milbank means in using the word "theology," or else we may end up missing a great deal of his contributions to the discipline. It is first necessary that one consider the what character of Milbank's theology in order to understand what he means in speaking *of* theology. The task of theology is to pinpoint the peculiarities of Christianity and to untangle them. For Milbank, theology is a practice of finding a new language for these differences "less

tainted with the over familiarity of too many Christian words which tend to obscure Christian singularity.”¹⁴ This position is clearly reflected (albeit not always so clearly stated) in Milbank’s often-esoteric writing style. What is clear in his writings, however, is that theology, as an imaginative enterprise, must be done with efforts not to conform or theorize, but to create and imagine. The task of the theologian is to keep theological discussion fresh through a sort of re-narration of the Christian story. Milbank would not suggest that the story must change, but rather that the story must be retold with meaningful language for the present society.¹⁵

“Radical Orthodoxy” is radical in the sense that its adherents attempt to capture the *radix*, or “root,” of Christianity, and it is orthodox in the sense that they wish to live within the basics of Christian belief, which have been traditionally accepted in historical Christianity as right and true.¹⁶ Though Milbank embarks on his theological projects in

¹⁴ John Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short Summa in Forty-Two Responses to Unasked Questions,” in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 267-74. The idea that this practice is essentially ‘music’ would be an example of this ‘making strange’ which Milbank sees the need for. Theology must be approached with a realistic concept of how a human, finite being might go about this within her reality; a reality “suspended between nothing and infinity is a reality of flux...composed only of relational differences and ceaseless alterations.” Milbank wants to draw attention to the reality that there is no formulaic wisdom one may magically invoke and thereby avoid the difference within society and the Church. This, for Milbank, is to attempt to escape from true human discourse which should include new occurrences stemming out of true differences. These differences, which are so essential to human-ness are held in contempt in modern society, as they may get in the way of the contemporary virtues of ease, comfort and power (and perhaps violence). For Milbank, this variability within human discursiveness must be valued, and is valued by The Divine, for the “atonement means that the flux is permitted to flow again, that the Logos only really speaks with its real intent in the ever-different articulation of our responses. The Holy Spirit is associated with this diversity of answers.” Of course, Augustine, in *De Musica*, does not have as strong of a reaction against the fixed essences as does Milbank, but there is here a sense of difference within community and a harmony of those differences which must be pursued and enjoyed. This is much more like what Augustine seems to be getting at.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 267-74.

As discussed in the opening remarks of this thesis, this topic of Divine love may be, for Milbank, one which has become so overly familiar that it needs a re-telling more fitting for the contemporary ecclesial community.

¹⁶ Graham Ward. “Radical Orthodoxy and/as Cultural Politics,” in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming, (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000), 106.

“There is not one Christian tradition...for orthodoxy is broader than might at first be believed... [for] views on the Eucharist or even the sacraments more generally, may differ, but these are not grounds for

an avant-garde sort of way reflecting a certain freshness, he is also clear about intentions to retain the antiquity of Christian thought and orthodox tenets of belief. Therefore, Milbank is on the cusp of two theological curves – one which holds to traditional orthodoxy and another, seemingly more risky endeavor, which attempts to redraw the Christian faith in a fresh language.

RO is not a corrective erected as a movement in order to offer fundamentals or systematics, but rather constituted as a “loose tendency”¹⁷ a “theological sensibility”¹⁸ or a “hermeneutic disposition and a style of metaphysical vision; it is not so much a ‘thing’ or ‘place’ as much as it is a ‘task.’”¹⁹ This style of considering RO is reflective of Milbank’s persistent polemic against a modernity chock full of theories and systems. The simple thesis for Milbank and RO is that everything -- every sphere of life -- is either theological or anti-theological.²⁰ All ideas in society are theologically prompted; that is, all of the ways in which one views him-self and his world stem from his conceptions of God -- one’s perspective as a finite being attempting to perceive the infinite. One’s understandings of God will overlap into all of her other facets of life. For R.O., this onto-theological vantage point should lead to the revisions of philosophical thought void of theological discourse and claiming independence from the religious and theological

heterodoxy.” Ward continues to point out that there are some core beliefs which, if questioned, would remove one from being considered orthodox.

¹⁷ Catherine Pickstock, “Reply to David Ford and Guy Collins,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* (54, 2001), 405.

¹⁸ Graham Ward, “In the Economy of the Divine: A Response to James K.A. Smith.” *PNEUMA: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* (25, 2003), 117.

¹⁹ Catherine Pickstock, “Radical Orthodoxy and the Meditations of Time,” in *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy. Challenges in contemporary theology.* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 63.

²⁰ It seems as if Milbank uses “Anti-theological” as opposed to “atheistic” to draw out the ever present theological reflections of those who would consider themselves a-theists. Milbank subtly suggests that even those who are a-theists still have a sort of theology, just one which does not claim the existence of a God.

spheres.²¹ Because of these demands RO places upon philosophy they see the need to more closely consider the continuum between philosophy and theology. Milbank suggests “theology generously supplies to philosophy a dignity higher than mere autonomy.”²² This sort of dignity which Milbank speaks of allows philosophers to (1) not check their theological considerations at the door of their philosophical pursuits; and (2) allow those who practice philosophy an infinite reserve; to posit a creator being into their reflections. Orthodox Theology posits that there is a supernatural beginning and ending to all things; and one who considers herself in that narrative must see the evocative influence it has on philosophy. This necessitates the philosopher to place all of his theological cards on the table, so to speak. To see the necessary continuum between philosophy and theology is to discard the raw reason of modernity and to reclaim reason as fused with faith. This reclamation of reason leads to a revival in the philosophical enterprise - - a taking for granted core Orthodox Christian belief.²³

Radical Orthodoxy as Recovery

Milbank is opposed to the modern consideration of theology’s antithetical disposition to other disciplines and social strata - - the societal compartmentalization of disciplines is a prime product of a society knee-deep in a vastly modern era. Therefore, a central part of the R.O. manifesto is to point out that there was an historical period in which society and its civil structures were in recognition of the finite connectedness with

21 Interestingly, Milbank is presently (February 2009) considering Heidegger and his relation to RO’s present tasks.

22 John Milbank. “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. By Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 308.

23 This is a sort of presuppositionalism which takes Christian thought to be perfectly within the limits of reason as there has been no de facto defeaters to such beliefs.

the infinite. Smith concludes that the material world “of nature itself was not simply ‘nature’ but creation-- a materiality or ‘charged immanence’ curved toward the transcendent.”²⁴ That is, until Duns Scotus introduced a univocity of being, as opposed to the prior ontological framework characterized by the consideration of an analogical nature of being, a framework last touched by Aquinas.²⁵ As we will discuss in chapter four, Milbank opposes Marion’s univocal understanding of love, for it does not attribute enough infinite difference between The Divine and human persons.

Augustine will be laced throughout this thesis as we see his influence upon Milbank’s work. Here it is helpful to consider Augustine’s relation to RO in a broader sense. Milbank and RO have been collectively criticized for hijacking Augustine for their postmodern agendas. On the one hand, the RO community exercises a fair amount of freedom in their use of Augustine, and Milbank applies him to a broad range of theological matters and subjects almost incessantly; but on the other hand they do seem to be getting at the heart of Augustine’s message: that of God’s love and the effects of such love upon the ecclesial community.²⁶

²⁴ James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*, (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2004), 88.

²⁵ Surely R.O has a much more complex explanation as to who, when and why Modernity, as a time period, is generally the whipping boy for the suggested ontological problem. R.O. traces this problem back to beginning exclusively with Duns Scotus.

²⁶ They seem to interpret Augustine somewhat liberally – to spread him thinly across a variety of topics. Would Augustine have difficulty with how RO seems to interpret his text? Perhaps it may be prudent to consult Augustine’s “theory” of textual interpretation for insight into how he would like his text(s) --any text -- to be interpreted. It seems as if Milbank and RO would be confident that they are interpreting Augustine in such a way that they are building the *caritas Gemini* (the double love of God and neighbor) and are hoping to help others in such in pursuit of such loves. Augustine seems fairly lucid in explaining his theory of interpretation to be polysemiotic so long as the interpreter finds meaning which builds up the double love of God and neighbor.

See also Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Trans. D. W. Robertson, (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958).

This quasi-polysemiotic position is most clear in his *On Christian Doctrine*, where he poses that text is meant for a reader to find a lesson useful (i.e. the most important part of understanding is the outcome) in

Though the primary thrust of RO is the recovery and reclamation of a lost orthodoxy, RO both commandeers and demeans postmodernism to achieve their goals. RO embraces the idioms and dialects of postmodernism and pays homage to its continental ancestors (e.g. Heidegger, Derrida, Nietzsche, de Lubac).²⁷ However, they also wield a polemical -- almost sharp -- tongue towards some strands of postmodernism for being still too modern and inevitably nihilistic. Nevertheless, for the members of RO, postmodernity poses a wonderful opportunity to once again redeposit the transcendent and infinite concerns --vis-à-vis the Divine -- into philosophy, largely because it recognizes the “unknown and indeterminate in every reality.”²⁸ This reinsertion of a Christian metaphysic will necessarily be more potently philosophical.²⁹ In order to remove the modern death grip on philosophy, it is essential to identify the modern ontological blunder, for one’s understanding of being and ontology churns her philosophical framework. Milbank points out that “on a non-‘Scotist’ understanding of esse, we only *are* as we love and remain in love, whereas God who *is* love cannot not be.

the building of love for God and for humanity. The goal of understanding is to locate meaning which proves to be helpful to the individual in her ability to find the good in the Divine and in humanity. One’s going about textual interpretation in search for personal meaning is “like a man who leaves a road by mistake but passes through a field to the same place toward which the road itself leads. But he is to be corrected and show that it is more useful *not* to leave the road...” Clearly Augustine is not implying some no holds barred view of text; instead he recognizes what the goal of interpretation is, and the he has realized the reality of misinterpretation due to both human finiteness and depravity. Nevertheless, Augustine sees the significance of an interpreter’s efforts to understand the author, for when one does this, the text is most potent and significant.

See also Augustine of Hippo, quoted in *An Augustine Synthesis*. by Przywara, Erich. (New York, NY: Harper & Bros., 1958), p.335.

Augustine claims that “charity, therefore, is the law of God.”

²⁷ RO looks most like the *nouvelle theologie*, those who were concerned with turning the modern tables of modernity over within the church in order to retrieve the theological vision of the ancient and medieval sources, and thereby an Augustinian influence was laid bare.

²⁸ Unknown author. “Radical Orthodoxy: Twenty-four Thesies,” thesis 7. Quoted in James K.A. Smith. *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2004), 43.

²⁹ Though, of course, no one needs permission to establish their philosophy upon the transcendent God, there is currently, through a postmodern window, much more of a willingness for one to allow his philosophy to rest upon an infinite resource for explanation.

God loves-to-be.”³⁰ For RO, being is necessarily hooked to love, for to-love is to-desire, and in order to exist one must love some-thing or desire some-thing. The Divine gives man existence through an expression of love; love to be taken and love to give; love to participate in.

A Radically Orthodox Ontology

Milbank, in opposition to the strict ontology of immanence, proposes a participatory ontology that posits the finite’s dependence upon an ultimate transcendent source. In the place of a strictly immanent understanding of God, there is, within historical Christianity, a stream of thought that suggests a graceful dependence upon the transcendent giver. A consideration of Milbank’s ontology is necessary in order to better grasp his perspective of God’s love, for such an ontology is fastened to, if not contingent upon, Divine love. The modern ontology of immanence is countered by Milbank’s participatory system that is “attended by an ek-static, transcendence-oriented anthropology and an account of social relationships that begins with peace.”³¹ They want society to function without violence, as does Augustine’s city of God. Part of the R.O. agenda is to see this participatory ontology take root and see the ideas grow legs and enter society.³² Through this ontology, R.O would like to provide an account of “intersubjective” relationships that are centered around the virtue of charity and love as they stand against the vices of unbridled power and might. For if there is a community in

³⁰ John Milbank. *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 49.

This reflects Milbank’s Doctrine of Divine Simplicity, which we will look further into later in this thesis. *Emphasis mine*.

³¹ James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*, (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2004), 188.

³² *Ibid.* 186. This is an alteration of James K.A. Smith’s “ideas have legs.”

which God and his love are the focal point, then this is the ideal society: one in which reciprocity occurs between individuals who are participating with the loving God.

The Sacred and The Secular

Milbank is embroiled in a polemic against forms of thought that claim human autonomy from The Divine. For Milbank, the concept of “the secular” was not originally a fabrication of modernity, but its presence today is thoroughly modern as modern thinkers have carved it up to be a rather misinformed version of secularity. Through modernity, social theories in general, and political science in particular, have claimed autonomy from the sacred. Thus, the sacred has been insidiously purged from the secular fields of the modern life. The modern premise of secularity is that one may live autonomously without any dependence upon The Divine or his love.³³ In fact there are certain spheres of life which should be void of God and one’s conception of him. Reno picks up on Milbank’s sentiment quite well in his consideration of the earthly, modern, secular city. Reno points out that in such a city, a “natural human being” is one who is no longer “natural” for Milbank sees a “natural” human as having been created “for citizenship in the heavenly city.”³⁴ The most organic component of humanity is built-in inter-relatedness with God; this is, in large part, what makes humanity as such.

Milbank indicates that there should be a reconsideration of the sacred-secular split so prominently featured in contemporary society. This sacred-secular division is

³³ See also T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), 60.

Torrance poses that in the wake of Kantian epistemology, theology had become the “predicate of what is essentially and universally human and hence even revelation could only be acknowledged and handled as a confirmation of man’s own latent possibilities or of his own analysis and self-understanding.”

³⁴ R.R. Reno “The Radical Orthodoxy Project.” *First Things*. (Feb. 2000, http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=2542).

presently stark in western culture in general and, in Milbank's case, the United Kingdom in particular. As an Anglican, Milbank has seen the constitutional monarchy of the UK shape and affect his ecclesial community; a secular society attempting to banish sacred parish life to its own corner of society.

Though the secular realm did not begin in the modern time period, Milbank still polemicizes the secular, for in it society lives in a make-believe world in which there is no sacred influence or effects of God's existence. Upon the creation of this secular realm, attempts were made to kick God out of its affairs, for God had nothing to do with the finite ambitions and societal governance it created. Milbank traces this dawn of a secular society and claims that it was the beginning of an ontological system that "both flattened the world and unhooked it from the transcendent thus creating a new space untouched by The Divine and an autonomous reserve of reality outside the religious."³⁵ This led to the emergence of the secular domain in society and man's independence from God, an independence necessarily leading to nihilism for without the material's suspension from the transcendent, it is left to dissolve into nothingness. This is the product of a philosophy void of theology. Being and knowing cannot work independent of Christ and Divine love. For Milbank, The Christian God is not simply one who is a first cause, but one who loves his creation and invites them into the triune inter-relatedness. He loves though they have sought to live independent of his presence. Not only does man attempt to be independent from God, but his independence is prolonged by degeneration and underpinned by sinfulness. Smith points out that for R.O., "the

³⁵ James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*, (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2004), 88.

effect of sin is found in man's loss of an original supplement."³⁶ This original supplement is presently absent in the *relata* between man and God. Such a supplement in relationship is the adhesive that keeps the finite in touch with reality. A participatory ontology, which is nourished by the authentic doctrines of redemption, sin and creation, can alter the ways in which man necessarily recognizes his contingency upon the infinite. As the Radically Orthodox Graham Ward points out in his *Cities of God*, "nature cannot be natural without the spiritual informing it at every point."³⁷ That is to say, the most normal and regulative way of life for the finite is one constantly informed by the Divine life. The "spiritual" sense is always manifested in the corporeal sense, and RO hopes that the Ecclesial community may pay more attention to such spiritual senses.

The Benefits of RO upon the Ecclesial Community

While John Milbank and The Radically Orthodox are not particularly in the business of doing practical theology, they anticipate their work finding its way to the broader ecclesial community and eventually to those outside that community. Milbank and RO are optimistic about the direction the church is headed, as they have hopes for some practical parochial changes and reversions. In what ways does Milbank, as RO, provide a better understanding of Divine love to the Ecclesial community? Does his consideration of Divine love offer any positive contributions to the church? There are two ways in which Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy may contribute to such a community.

The first is found in RO's hope for ecumenism. Milbank claims that RO is persuasively ecumenical and as such, attempts to re-unify the Church based upon its

³⁶ Ibid. p. 157.

³⁷ Graham Ward, *Cities of God*, (New York NY: Routledge, 2002), 88.

primordial heritage.³⁸ Albeit not a reunification that establishes a new catholic or universal order, or by denouncing the differences among protestant denominations, but instead a re-unification that attempts to draw all persons closer to the roots of Christianity and consequently Divine love which *is for* all persons. Milbank wants to be as ecumenical as possible, and claims that RO has a particular diagnosis and “a set of specific recommendations” for how the Church must return to the primordial roots of Christianity.³⁹ He sees RO as the sensitivity that may very well be the first truly ecumenical theology in modern times. RO claims to reflect both Catholic and Protestant traditions, and has set its sights upon re-unification around primary tents of belief that do not necessarily favor one of the traditions over the other. RO is able to do this, whereas neo-orthodoxy was specifically Protestant and *nouvelle theologie* mostly Catholic. For Milbank, RO may be helpful to any communities or denominations seeking out the roots of the Christian tradition, and hope for a new ecumenism.⁴⁰

Generally, when a corrective or critique is provided, it is narrowed - - geared with a certain particularity - - towards a specific audience. For the more particular the corrective, the more heavy-hitting and significant it may be for its intended recipients (e.g a denominational group, a school of thought, a political party). However, Milbank claims

³⁸ When considering the primordial nature of Christianity, it is necessary that one have in mind a time period, certain figures who are to be regarded as fundamental, and some significant events that make it the beginning. There seems to be a debate over when, who and what best represents the most pure and fundamental form of historical Christianity. Generally, protestant thinkers trace roots back to Pentecost and Paul’s writings, while Catholic thinkers find the purest roots of the tradition at the writing of the first Christian creeds. It seems as if Milbank finds rootedness in both significant events.

³⁹ John Milbank, “Alternative Protestantism: Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition,” *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*. Ed. James K. Smith and James H. Olthuis. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 25.

⁴⁰ See Pope John Paul II, “All Must strive for the Goal of Full Unity,” (<http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/jp950712.htm>. Date accessed: March 2, 2009). He poses that “the commitment to ecumenism is of primary importance for the Christian. [...] Jesus prayed at the Last Supper for the unity of his Disciples, with heartfelt intensity: 'as you, Father are in me, and I in you, I pray that they may be [one] in us, that the world may believe that you sent me' (Jn 17:21).”

RO to be much broader in its scope and further reaching with its message. The broad scope of RO lends to its being a corrective for the entirety of the Church; Milbank wants RO to help everyone see the primordial roots of Christian history and juxtapose them with Christianities present today. RO is not a rival church, nor is it a critique that stands outside the church doors, instead it is a set of ideas and propositions which are aimed at the church in its entirety, from within. This is incredibly significant for the Church, as there has been so much division within it, and such little dialogue between Christian communities. There is a need to recognize the universal heritage of orthodox belief, and RO is hoping to draw attention to such; to reinstitute the solidarity among Christian persons on the basic components of the gospel that have been lost along the way.

The second way in which Milbank's RO helps the Church is found in his wishes to see the Church find freedom from a "secular" state and re-establish the participatory communion between themselves and the Divine. The latter is dependent upon the former in this case. That is, such a freedom from the secular may only be established once one recognizes the all-pervading nature of the Divine upon the totality of life, not just the "spiritual" parts. The world is one of Divine constitution, God maintains a power over the whole of reality and this is a message that once again needs to be given to the Church.

Though, generally speaking, there is recognition of Divine sovereignty in the Church, there seems to be lacking the acknowledgement of Divine presence in and among all matters, not only the sacred ones. Milbank and RO may be a corrective to this disconcerting issue in the Church, for RO overtly emphasizes a return to recognition of participation with, and dependence upon, the Divine. Reconsideration of this concept of Divine constitution could lead to a re-vivification of dependence upon God and growth

from and out of finite autonomy. The Christian tradition speaks to God's involvement in all human affairs (and gifts) and such affairs necessitate a certain level of reliance upon God.

Recognition of freedom from the secular should be encouraging for The Ecclesial Community. The church should not shudder under the modern claims that the Christian tenets of belief are irrational, but should instead find comfort in its rationality, as the Christian faith's rationality is not subject to the skewed empirical scrutiny which demands proof for all belief.⁴¹ A freedom from the secular should also help persons reconsider their role in the ecclesial community. That is, each person has a specific role to play within the Church, and one's liberation from secular confines should open one up to the polis of the heavenly city, the City of God. Such an opening would lend to persons having richer Christian experiences with the living God in community. Perhaps Milbank would see Christian experience similarly to Hart, as "more of a process than a distinct event, that it is invariably mediated... and interpretation is integral to it at every level."⁴² Christian experience, for Hart, is "for the most part an experience of non-experience, that is to say, of faith. To be a Christian is not to live at the limit of experience but to realize that a limit passes through all experience."⁴³ This view of Christian experience places emphasis upon Divine dependence, faith and trust, not simply *past experiences*. This turns the concept of experience from emphasizing something done *to* the subject, to something participated *in*, emphasizing a responsibility on the part

⁴¹ This is not to say that one should adopt a fideistic view of faith in God, or a disinterest in evidences for the rationality of Christian belief, but adopt more of a recognition that the ideas of rationality and reason have been so skewed that the Church does not need to shudder under the wrath of de jure claims to irrationality directed at the Christian tradition.

⁴² Kevin Hart, "The Experience of God." in *The Religious: Blackwell Readings in Continental Philosophy*. Ed. John D. Caputo, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 163.

⁴³ Ibid. 163.

of the subject. Surely we can see Milbank supporting this sort of thesis, as participation with the Divine opens up this sort of faith through experience. Milbank, et al, consider the church to be running rampant with Modern philosophical ideas of autonomy versus the theme of faith. Because of this, RO has spoken out about what changes the Church must make in order to most fully experience Church life in its purest form. RO sees itself as a thoroughly Christian, faith seeking “movement,”⁴⁴ one that hopes to lead others into such faith.

⁴⁴ As mentioned earlier, RO would not consider themselves to be a movement. This seems to be because they prefer to emphasize their orthodox heritage over some of the more unique R.O. manifestations and such an emphasis upon traditional roots reflects not a new theological beginning, but a reclaiming, redeeming and retrieval of such roots.

CHAPTER 2

PHENOMENOLOGIES OF LOVE

“Talking about love may be too easy, or rather too difficult,” as Ricoeur suggests.⁴⁵ If love is going to be considered at all, these tensions must be recognized. On the one hand, when one considers this topic of love, there is the enormous task to not fall prey to trite considerations or reflections; on the other, there is the ever-present difficulty of love’s elusiveness, and its, at times, intangible non-theorizable nature. This may leave one stumbling in the dark, but this dark should not be thought of as a void, but a sacred mystery. This topic of love is vast, and in effect shapes all things. Love is both the answer to the questions that humanity poses about life and the reason for which those questions are asked. In Chapter five we will discuss how Milbank is convinced that Divine love may only be discussed analogously, yet, in this chapter we will highlight love as an act manifested in the world, and therefore available for finite beings to experience through the discipline of phenomenology.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, there are limitations to these

⁴⁵ Paul Ricoeur and Mark I. Wallace, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 315.

⁴⁶ Perhaps, for Milbank, Divine love may only be experienced when one performs something of a phenomenological reduction upon her life experiences (e.g. smelling a flower, enjoying a friendly embrace, or feeling love in most any other experience). Milbank has been quite influenced by what seems to be Heidegger’s early phenomenological work. In Heidegger’s thought is the sentiment that phenomenology

endeavors, and we do not want to make the “modern” mistake of restricting God’s movement to the natural world, nor do we wish to presume that there are not preconceived notions of love which we, as finite persons, restrict God to. For whenever we speak of Divine love “we use our experience of love and our analysis of life as the material which alone we can use.”⁴⁷ This does not at all discount all considerations of Divine love; they are not necessarily corrupt or insipid because of finite consideration, however one can never be too careful in this discussion of both the breadth and limits of a phenomenology of Divine love. One should attempt to situate herself along the continuum between what is too easy and what is too difficult vis-à-vis Divine love -- between that which has been revealed and that which is still, and may forever remain, indeterminate. This chapter will consider how Milbank understands love in general, and how such an understanding is different from modern phenomenologies of love.

should take over philosophy as it exists. We are to go back to the “things themselves” and to consider life experience in a new -- ultimately anti-Kantian -- way. For Heidegger, to take a world view is to de-vivify (de-life-ness) life experience. The aim of phenomenology is not to simply set up a program or theory of experience, but to experience life itself. Therefore, for Heidegger, to theorize is to take an experience and remove the life from it. True religious experience (not the Kantian sort of experience) is only found in life and contemplation. When one recognizes a phenomenon giving itself to him, he should perform the phenomenological reduction in life, in a pre-theoretical experience. Perhaps this idea has colored Milbank’s consideration of divine love and its ultimately aporetic nature. In Milbank’s thought we have a very serious hesitancy to theorize divine love as well as a vigorous emphasis upon individual experience of God.

⁴⁷ Paul Tillich, *Love Power, and Justice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 110.

Tillich goes on to suggest that “We also know that if we apply it to God we throw it into the mystery of the divine depth, where it is transformed without being lost. It is still love, but it is now divine love. This does *not mean* that a higher being has in a fuller sense what we call love, but it does mean that our love is rooted in the divine life, i.e. in something which transcends our life infinitely in being and meaning.” *Emphasis mine*.

Perhaps, here there may be a correlation drawn between Tillich’s to Marion’s views of finite love as it is considered to be univocally similar to the Divine love. Though this passage reflects Tillich’s panentheistic leaning, here Milbank may be charitable to Tillich because of the emphasis upon participation or “rootedness” in the divine life. All sorts of finite loves can and must be traced back to the Divine, but a participatory ontology which suggests that finite beings *collectively make up* the Divine doesn’t seem to be at all what Milbank wants to affirm.

Milbank's Phenomenology of Love

Infinite love is available to humanity, yet only detectable in part. Though Divine love is discoverable through the phenomenal realm, it is wholly other than humanity's version of love - - the two may only be compared analogously. Divine love may be perceived, yet only and always fragmentarily. For John Milbank, if it were possible to fully understand and comprehend love, then we would also fully apprehend God, as his love is an act of his nature; his very being, if you will.⁴⁸ Though it is helpful to discuss love, it can seem precarious to attempt to box Divine love up, package it and present it as a fully disclosed phenomenon. Though it is beneficial to qualify what is meant by *love*, we must hold the qualification loosely and in tension with how we qualify God.

This consideration of Divine Love cannot solely be a phenomenological enterprise, though it "is certainly an unavoidable gesture since all that is, by token of its excess over nothing, shows itself or gives itself."⁴⁹ An essential part of humanity is the ability to perceive and respond to what is perceived - - to apprehend and arrest a phenomenon as it gives itself. The human is always affected by what is sensed irrespective of his or her wishes on the matter, yet it takes effort to not merely recognize a phenomenon, but also pay attention the experience the phenomenon may bring. To perform a phenomenological reduction on Divine love begins with a certain thetic relation to such love, a certain interest which one finds in a phenomenon. Perception plays a large role in one's understanding Divine love, and it may very well be that one chooses not to identify such love (to not perform the phenomenological reduction),

⁴⁸ Much later in this project we will discuss Milbank's subscription to the traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity, which is so fundamental to his understanding of Divine love.

⁴⁹ John Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror" in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. By Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 277.

however, the human ability to perceive should not lead to an assertion of autonomy from the Divine. On the contrary, to perceive and do phenomenology should lead one to more dependence upon the Divine, the one who gives. To perceive is to receive and to give, to take in and to release. If this is true, then one must conclude that phenomenology cannot simply be an independent enterprise of perceiving but also one which posits a Divine being at the heart of what is being perceived. This is where Milbank enters the conversation, for if we may posit a Divine being into creation as we go about our phenomenological endeavors, then we have an opening up of The dialectic between phenomenology and ontology – an ontology that posits a reserved being into its framework who gives and sustains. The significance of such a consideration should lead to recognition of Divine mystery and the consecration of Divine love.

Therefore, in Milbankian fashion, we will proceed with this topic of love as if it is discussable but also as if we should not be too sure of ourselves in the discussion. Because Milbank has not defined love clearly, then, in this thesis, we will operate likewise. For to attempt to define something Milbank considers indefinable seems presumptive. Instead we will begin with what Milbank has considered to be valuable in the discourse of Divine love, and we will later consider his need to see it, ultimately, as an *aporia*.

Divine Love, by Definition

In the obvious, more strict sense, human love is defined by Divine Love, yet in another sense, our experiences of human love provide a definition or outline for what

Divine Love is like. This is what makes phenomenological projects seem so elusive, for in our finite perception, everything begins with what we see, sense or have been given. By our senses we determine how the world is, and though this is true for Milbank, our senses cannot be the final say on all that is. This is because the transcendent God moves in ways unperceivable to the finite – there are things going on in the finite realm which are not able to be perceived by finite beings. So Milbank takes God’s existence for granted and allows his phenomenology to give way for supernatural intervention as all of nature is always being sustained by The Divine. Milbank sees God as the cause of man, and therefore, the one who gives definition to finite loves. This definition, sustainment and intervention calls for Milbank to recognize the need for a concept of being which is strictly influenced by The Divine act of love, for “human love can only be defined by Divine love, in which it remotely participates. This is why charity is a grace, a supernatural infused virtue.”⁵⁰ Even finite love between persons, as an ability, is a gift, for it opens us up to seeing and being capable of perceiving Divine love. However, we do not know how exactly to define Divine Love because there is so much our finite senses have not perceived, so much sacred love that we cannot assume we understand. Therefore “we can only define it as we remotely see it in nature, amongst humans,” and this definition must be held loosely, always reflecting a Divine love which is infinitely more than we can ever experience or say.⁵¹

In his work *Le Phenomene erotique*, Jean-Luc Marion affirms that humanity is first loved before ever taking the risk of loving another.⁵² Milbank seems to accept

⁵⁰ John Milbank, Personal communication to J.W. Alvis. August 19, 2008.

⁵¹ John Milbank, Personal communication to J.W. Alvis. August 19, 2008.

⁵² Jean-Luc Marion, *Le phenomene erotique: Six meditations*, (Paris: Grasset, 2003).

Marion's premise that "God *is* not because he does not have to be, but [because he] loves."⁵³ This, for Milbank, is to say God *is* precisely because he loves, as he loves to be. That is to say "God is love," and operates out of and within that love. Love has always been, and it must begin in God. This is one point on which Milbank agrees with Marion, for one cannot create love on her own, *ex nihilo*, but must depend upon a Divine love which is first given. Now, this perception or recognition is not what actualizes the love, but love, as a gift, existed prior to the creation of humanity. Even in humanity's post-lapsarian state does love remain, though fragmentarily. Milbank suggests that if man is not first loved by God then man could never be able to love him-self, others or God. For how can a being posit that he is caring if he does not recognize his being cared for? Love, then, for Milbank, could never spring out of an evolved being who stands at the end of a chain of causes; desire and love are, perforce, human characteristics established by the Divine. An evolved humanity would look quite different from the humanity that we have, perhaps human life would look much more like a fungus or an amebic parasite that simply *is*.⁵⁴ However, though finite love is possible, it is not necessarily actual - - it involves labor, and is always limited to discontinuity. Finite love comes in waves.

It is difficult to love ourselves properly, though there is an inherent selfishness around and within us. Milbank confesses that he (Milbank) is "inherently hateful and can

It would be interesting to know if Marion consider's love similarly to Augustine and his concept of things. If so, then man could not even exist as he does, for without Divine love there would be no desire in man for any-thing or person; there would be no loves at all.

⁵³ Jean-Luc Marion quoted in John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), footnote 157, emphasis mine.

⁵⁴ This once again emphasizes the significance of Divine love upon human existence, and perhaps love's overpowering ontology. For if ontology is the most basic structure through which we are to study human life, and the means through which that life is lived is love and desire, then such an account of being must be colored by love.

only come finally (as the most difficult act of love) to love myself because miraculously - and without reason, without any recognition of anything in me that is objectively good and so lovable - - someone has first loved me.”⁵⁵ This Divine love provides a baseline for humanity that allows one to see herself as lovable. It is within finite love that we interact with Divine love for “to love is to proceed within a process of love that reflexively contemplates and actively gives – a process that begins before us, flows through us, and continues on after us.”⁵⁶

Modern Phenomenologies of Love

Within Modern society there have sprung up a number of ways to perceive love. It has been considered, quite broadly, as an emotion, a chemical, a state of mind or even a language. Perhaps it is not so easy to place love into one of these categories. Once love is removed from emotion it becomes stale. When it is no longer chemical, it is detached from the physical. If love is not, in some way, a state of mind, then it does not take cognitive labor to focus upon it and develop it. At best, these secular attempts to qualify love have not satisfied Milbank. Love has become both disparaged and praised all in the same breath. Because the word “love” is culturally difficult to interpret, it is imperative that the Christian populaces further consider how finite love is determined by a Divine love. Love, as expressed in and through God, is not simply a commodity, but a necessary part of life for man, and there must be a way in which God has inserted himself (and ipso facto his love) into finite history. The only way in which the Christian God can be loving

⁵⁵ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 301.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 292.

is if he crosses the immanent/transcendent divide. This means that The Divine would need to be both drastically transcendent and piercingly immanent (though, at times, Milbank has been criticized for erring on the side of a more transcendent God). The most singular and perfect example of God's harmonious transcendence and immanence is found in the incarnation of Christ -- the gift of presence but utter, and wholly other, distinction.

The Incarnation

The incarnation is the quintessential, phenomenological instance of Divine love. Divine Love, as the *summation* of all things good, can be considered phenomenologically, but only because of Christ' incarnation.⁵⁷ For Milbank, *agape* is an interpersonal event - - an institution of connectedness, and therefore man can both understand and practice a love that is related to that of the Divine. This is because man is "given the true shape of love in the form of love..."⁵⁸ and it is Christ, as the revealed Word of God, who exhibits love and provides humanity with the example of how to love. The fall of humanity is the refusal of Divine love and therefore no one can "in any way

⁵⁷ Kevin Hart, "The Experience of God" in *The Religious*. ed. John D. Caputo, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 170.

Kevin Hart puts Jean-Luc Marion's "Saturated Phenomenon" to task in describing Jesus as the Word of God. The Word of God is a saturated phenomenon "for here intuition exceeds intentional correlation: no horizon can contain it, no subject can constitute its meaning." Hart agrees with Marion's assessment of the incarnate Christ: "Marion speaks of being dazzled by a saturated phenomenon, and regards Christ as the saturated phenomenon *par excellence*." Hart, however, prefers to consider Christ as a "disruption" over Marion's consideration of the Christ as a "dazzlement." This is because the word of God is a disruption "in our everyday lives; it refigures the subject of experience and what this subject will value in experience." The saturated phenomenon of the incarnation has disrupted not only the course of history but also the way in which individual's perceive phenomena, however a subject's experience of God cannot be constituted in a way similar to an individual's phenomenological reduction of other phenomena, for "nothing is given to us in an experience of God except a calling forth of love and a desire for God."

⁵⁸ John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic" *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), 150.

know love without reference (conscious or unconscious) to the event of the full arrival of love in time, which is the Incarnation.”⁵⁹ For Milbank, it is precisely because of the incarnation that love can even be spoken of. In the fall love was in some sense lost, but the incarnation restores human ability to love properly and is “in a sense already there immediately after the banishment from Eden as the New Testament and the Church Fathers make clear.”⁶⁰ Perhaps, for Milbank, love has never skipped a beat because Christ is always present in time past and time future and thus positing a prevenient grace after the fall. This very well could be Milbank reflecting his claim to Augustinianism, as Augustine views time not through a linear lens but instead more synchronically as events do not evolve throughout history but instead stand alone in relation to other occurrences *in history*.⁶¹

The negative debt of the fall has been repaid through the God-Man entering our world and the incarnation is the point at which Divine love enters into the finite realm in a finite, human body. The incarnation is the most potent theurgic work, a powerful phenomenal result of divine operation. It is through this act of incarnation “alone we learn what love is.”⁶² That is, for Milbank, love can only be experienced by finite beings as it has been expressed by the Divine, infinite being. The Christ came because humanity needed an example of love, and in the Gospel narratives, Christ built his church upon

⁵⁹ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*. Ed. By Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 309.

⁶⁰ John Milbank, Personal communication to J.W. Alvis, September 16, 2008.

⁶¹ Perhaps Augustine views time in a more synchronic way, as opposed to a diachronic view of time which sees event’s coming to a head in an evolutionary way as a result of other events.

⁶² John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. By Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 309.

This idea is most potently found in Augustine, *De Trinitate*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), XIII. 13.

Augustine suggests that it is the Incarnation that we have been given the greatest proof of God’s love towards humanity. God’s humility shines clear in the act of Incarnation, and this is, for Augustine, representative of God’s perfect goodness, for “all goodness is made perfect in humility.”

“the practice of love that alone discloses its reciprocal and distributive nature.”⁶³ The incarnation is, in Milbank’s version of love, an historical turning point. Of course, this is an act of Divine love, for both the message of Christ and the act of incarnation are persistently described as gifts.

Within our finite understanding of ontology, we can begin to consider what relation being has with love, and how ones consideration of them should be colored by a reconsideration of the one who expresses them in their most pure forms. As father of Radical Orthodoxy, John Milbank suggests that there is much more to be understood once we consider Divine revelation through The Christ. Humanity’s deepest need is Divine love, however, humanity is often blind to this love and, as we will later discuss, bent towards the rejection of it. Therefore man is in need of Christ to reincarnate his most organic desires.⁶⁴ Humanity is sick and loves things improperly, most frequently ignoring the desire for relationship with God.⁶⁵ Milbank would suggest that only the incarnate Christ could remedy this ailment.⁶⁶ This remedy is found in God’s stepping into the world in order to aid man in recognizing him. Christ brought opportunity for

⁶³ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. By Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 309.

⁶⁴ A great conversation between the RO and some reformed thinkers is found in James K.A. Smith, and James H. Olthuis, *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

Perhaps Milbank’s position on this issue can be considered antithetical to reformation theologies, which posit that humanity is thoroughly deprived and bent from the original design.

See also J. Todd Billings, “John Milbank’s Theology of The Gift; and Calvin’s theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison,” *Modern Theology* (21, 2005).

⁶⁵ Perhaps what makes improper love for a thing as such is located in its ultimate directionality. What qualifies an improper love as such may be that the love ends in the thing itself, not in God. Is the loving of a thing qua thing - - or the thing in itself as it is only in relation to itself - - the standard or qualification of an improper love? If so, then is the loveliness of a thing founded upon how one pursues it out of a love for God and the thing’s relation to God? That is, is the nature of an improper love founded upon such a love’s disconnection with any sort of love intended for the Divine?

⁶⁶ Here we must ask Milbank the question: What about people who lived on the earth before the incarnate Christ? Could we consider some of the characters of the New Testament narratives to be pre-Christ incarnations (e.g. Joshua, Moses, Noah)? Or is there simply a prevenient grace supplied to all persons pre-incarnation, death, burial and resurrection?

finite man to live with the infinite God. Milbank suggests that “‘incarnation’ means that participation in the divine relational life is restored.”⁶⁷ Incarnation, then, should be a signpost of the love and holiness of God, and *as an event*, “revises the ontology of the finite world, conjoining it through the body of Christ eternally to God.”⁶⁸ Therefore, there is a need to view ontology in light of Christ’s advance toward man, not inversely as humanity has autonomously attempted. A total recall of ontology must be made for “God is constituted as love *also* by his advance toward humanity, also by his experience of identification and abjection in the Incarnation and his ascended return from this to the relative formality of spiritual presence among us.”⁶⁹ Such an ontological recall would revamp how humanity views itself and God because it properly frames love as a gift - - one of advance, identification and presence. It is in this vein that Milbank views the incarnation, for God must cross the abyss man has created and God must worship himself in time - - as Christ - - as the exemplar for humanity.

Jean Luc Marion’s Ontological Blunder

Milbank critiques Jean Luc Marion (a contemporary of the *nouvelle theologie* movement) for having an ontology that is far too detached from his Christian theological

⁶⁷ John Milbank, “The Shares of Being or Gift, Relation and Participation: an Essay on the Metaphysics of Emmanuel Levinas and Alain Badiou.” (<http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers.php>), 33.

⁶⁸ John Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity Part Two: Reciprocity Granted.” *Modern Theology*, (17:4, 2001), 486.

⁶⁹ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*. Ed. By Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 276.

understanding.⁷⁰ Marion's is an ontology bent around a univocal understanding of being and it doesn't seem to reflect the difference between the essence of God and that of man. Marion has devoted much of his work to the development of a phenomenology of love - - one which is Christian and ultimately unambiguous due to his univocity between the infinite and finite loves. As a result of having further considered Marion's supposed univocal concept of love, Milbank concludes that "God is alone the stable and infinite lover,"⁷¹ and as such has a completely remarkable love. Milbank points out that there clearly is a difference between how one may speak of humanity's love and how one may speak of God's love. Though finite love may be considered as a reflection of the infinite love, it is nonetheless a pale comparison to Divine love. This sets the separation between Marion and Milbank, for if God *alone* is the one who truly loves, then God's *love* must be wholly other than man's - - though we have a sort of trace of that Divine love in our own loving and being loved. Therefore,(as Milbank suggests) we do not have a univocal concept of love as Marion purports. Milbank denies Marion's univocal understanding of love because it does not account for the difference between humanity's love and The Divine's. A consequence of Marion's univocal understanding of love would be that the topic of love (human or otherwise) may be fully exhausted through phenomenological means. This, for Milbank, poses an infinite number of problems because it does not allow God to reserve mystery with a love different than our own, nor does Marion's account take into consideration of God's simplicity. So Milbank properly frames the question:

⁷⁰ Milbank's accuses Marion for having a univocal understanding of *being* that is strikingly similar to Duns Scotus'.

⁷¹ John Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror" in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. By Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 276.

If love applies univocally to God and to us, and if only God redeems us from the problem of love achieved in language that is at once too formal and yet too out of control, then who will redeem Marion's ontic God who is like us in structure, only infinite – in other words, Marion's *onto-theological* God – from what one must presume to be God's *own* predicament of negation of incarnate negation that must *also* remain at once too formal and unidentified and *too* threatened by contamination by the abjected bride of Israel or the church in her whorish aspect?⁷²

Here, Milbank points out a problem in Marion's ontology: God's love is claimed to be just like humanity's love. Marion's God, as he relates to human entities, is simply an infinite version. Marion cannot recover from these issues and in the end cannot offer any real phenomenology of love, but instead "only another metaphysics of nothingness and absence."⁷³ For Milbank, Marion has not taken an understanding of given-ness and applied it to his ontology. Alternatively the result of Marion's phenomenological project ends in nothingness because it doesn't allow God to have an essence other than our own. In other words, God cannot stand outside of Being, is trapped within and thus bound to it.

What then is a proper replacement to Marion's univocal understanding of *esse*, and consequentially, love? Milbank poses that only a Platonic, analogical, participatory ontology can allow for God's love to differ distinctly from finite loves. Additionally, this ontological revision, must be balanced with a semiotic (the study and interpretation of signs and symbols) reconsideration of "given-ness." That is, an at root grasp of how even humanity's existence is given by God. In the place of Marion's univocal concept of love is one that Milbank purports to attribute similarities, but most importantly, differences between the finite and infinite loves. There must be a difference in loves; a difference that promotes participation and reciprocity.

⁷² Ibid. 276.

⁷³ Ibid. 276.

Milbank's Phenomenology of Love and its contribution to The Ecclesial Community

In this section we will consider the significance of phenomenologies of love in general, then we will discuss how Milbank's phenomenology of love contributes to the good of the Church. This topic of love has a significant worth to the Christian community. Whether it is one person attempting to love another, or it is one's having a personal experience of Divine love, the Church may benefit from further considerations of love. Love is both the *telos* and object of all desires.⁷⁴ This topic of love should not to be taking too lightly, and it would be beneficial for everyone to hold loosely their considerations of love. What we may learn from John Milbank on this topic of love is that it is something everyone understands through lived experience, whether such experiences of love are mostly attended through broken-heartedness, or through ecstatic desires that lend to positive memories of loves fulfilled. Words have a significant handicap in this topic of love; and yet it is prudent to consider the theoretical nature of love, as thetic features affect lived experience.

It is always beneficial to consider and reconsider this topic of love unless, for example, one understands love to simply be an inner, unalterable impulse which one may only simply respond to. Instead of such a deterministic view, this thesis presupposes that there is a sense in which one's thoughts - - and in particular, thoughts of love - - will, perforce, show themselves in her loves, desires, relationships and professional life.

Under this assumption, Milbank's phenomenology of love may help us reconsider the

⁷⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, Trans. Stephen E. Lewis, (New York: Fordham UP, 2002), x. Marion poses the question, "What do you think of, reader, when you read? Not of this book, nor even of what I want to tell you (surely not of love as an academic subject, neutral and restrained for the sake of an elevated discussion), but rather of whether, one day, you will succeed in loving and being loved, and whether or not this book might help you."

various strata of love and, as a result, have our thetic perspectives turned in such a way that our lived experiences will also turn. In other words, the truth (of love) will set one free. One's life should and will change as a result of her having her very own phenomenology of love.

We will now begin to discuss how Milbank's phenomenology of love is significant for the Church. Milbank's is an ontology that places love at its heart. By doing so, love becomes the be-all, end-all standard for one's being. For one's status as-being is only because she loves, she desires. This would call for a change in how the Church understands love and humanity. The Church has been, in large part, considering humanity primarily in terms of his being. That is, it seems as if the Church is primarily focused upon man's ontological nature, and what Jesus has done to re-organize that nature.⁷⁵ In the Church, for example, rarely do discussions of sin ever include considering the object of one's love while in-sin. Instead, this topic of sin is only discussed on the terms of how man's very being is infected by said sin, or how Jesus transforms one from being inherently sinful to being spotlessly redeemed. Sin, when discussed in the Parish, is only considered in terms of its "what character," the ontological effects of sin upon humanity - - man's being-in-sin. Milbank would surely agree that the church, as well as the theological community, have a limited ontological vision that began in the modern time period. Milbank is calling both communities to a drastic ontological re-vision that re-inserts love into our considerations of being. For humanity, to-be is to-be-in-need, to desire.

⁷⁵Of course, this is not to say that the Church should cease considering humanity through an ontological lens. Instead, the point here is that discussions of love and desire are all too often not present within the Church.

Love (and likewise desire) is both something to give and something to receive. For Milbank, love is both a resource (*poros*) and a deficiency (*penia*). To lack is to desire, to want more, to hope to receive. The Church should consider such desire as a part of being-in God's image. Perhaps a recognition of love-as-desire would lead the Church to having a new and fresh desire for desire. That is, the Church should take this concept of love-as-deficiency and in effect, become more aware of present desires, direct desires towards the good, and thus re-ignite its hope for becoming more Christ-like.

Even so, love is a resource to be channeled to other things and beings - - to-love is to-give. Love has a lasting affect. And is, in a sense, self replenishing as it is a cycle of giving and receiving. Milbank points out that love must be more than lack because it would otherwise be unable to be sought after, to be known. Love must bear a trace in the cosmos, and Divine love must still prevail in man, at least in part. Otherwise, there would be no such thing as love for, as Milbank proposes, "love must be always already actual in order to be possible."⁷⁶ Love, as it should be, exists in God as an action and is, in part, attainable for man to experience. In order for love to be actual at all, it must be an integral characteristic of God's intra-Trinitarian relations. Therefore, the Church may take this concept and choose to act as if there is more potential to love and to give; to enter a cycle of *poros* and *penia*.

If a significant component of love is desire, then this needs to be introduced into the Church. In doing so, the gospel message presented by the Church would rightly

⁷⁶ John Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror," in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 290.

reflect both components of love.⁷⁷ Perhaps the church would then see the dynamic nature of love and likewise Divine love. In addition to considering God's love as something to rest in, as a static and simple concept in which one believes, there should be a refocusing upon the dynamic nature of such love as well. That is, there should be a re-ordering of parish life around the dynamic and mysterious nature of Divine love - - one that would result in seeking said love in fresh ways.⁷⁸

Another way Milbank's work may help the Church is found in his qualification of finite love and his expansion of sacred space. Divine love penetrates all things, and every human love first finds its origination in Divine love. God is not bound to sacred spaces or the religious sphere.⁷⁹ Thus, Divine love may be found everywhere, even in the most seemingly unsightly places. The Church may benefit from this by seeking out Divine love in such places, and having greater experiences with that love. No matter what the conduit, Divine love is always the same in significance and power. Perhaps this love may come through a Jewish politician, or a Muslim street-vendor. Irrespective of the source, The Church should affirm every place through which Divine love shines through,

⁷⁷ Desire (*desiderare* "long for, wish for,") is founded upon one's ever-present need; to have a need. Therefore, to desire is to be-in-need; to be "poor" for some-thing. Perhaps there is a sense in which one's need or state of being poor for something propels love and desire. Not only is love an ever-present need, but it also has a unique relationship *to* need, for it is dependent upon it. There is some-thing that one wants - - why does one need or want it? One needs/wants the thing because one is lacking it, is poor *for* it. Perhaps this should open wide the church's definition of "the poor," for all are poor and needy, all hunger and thirst. If to-be-loved is a fundamental desire of man, then it most principally represents human poverty. This understanding of love should re-arrange how the church goes about outreach to the impoverished.

⁷⁸ This is not to suggest that Divine love "changes" in the sense of its quality or direction towards persons, but rather is "in flux" in such a way that there is a newness and freshness in the relationships between the infinite and finite. Such movement would result in an ever-increasing stirring of love within individuals, as well as a recognition of the constant re-filling of love in the ecclesial community.

⁷⁹ The church should put on its phenomenological lenses and search for Divine love in both the sacred and the "secular" realms, for as we have already noted, the secular realm has been misinterpreted by the modern mind and is actually a place where God reveals himself.

into the phenomenal realm - - all in order to have greater lived experiences with God.⁸⁰

The Church should not limit its perception of Divine love to the Christian faith community or necessarily private prayer, for this love surrounds and envelops all of life, every lived experience. When the Church is appropriately seeing, perceiving and experiencing that love, it is also participating. Such a re-ordering of how the Church experiences Divine love would lead to a re-discovery of the natural reciprocity between God and humanity - - that which occurs indefinitely.

⁸⁰ This is not to say that in every instance of perceiving Divine love one should condone all person's lifestyles, behaviors, religions, etc. Instead, the Church should be more aware of Divine love coming through all persons, whenever and however they love, for all finite loves originate in Divine love.

CHAPTER 3

MILBANK'S ONTOLOGY OF PARTICIPATION

What exactly does Milbank mean when he speaks of “participation?” It is a highly flexible word in theological and philosophical dialogue, and Milbank seems to employ it in a variety of settings. J. Todd Billings has offered a very helpful, concise chronology of participation, and proposes that Milbank most frequently uses the notion of ‘participation as deification.’ Billings concludes that “this doctrine is taught by various patristic and medieval writers, and was recently re-attributed to Augustine...”⁸¹ The employment of “participation” runs in the Anglican family, which is Milbank’s tradition.⁸² The most essential component of “participation” though, is that it is rooted in a “loose set of Platonic metaphysical claims” which attests to an ontology of creation participating in the creator.⁸³ The simple premise of this sort of participation is that if

⁸¹ J. Todd Billings, “John Milbank’s Theology of The Gift; and Calvin’s theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison,” *Modern Theology*, (21, no. 1 2005), 93.

Billings claims that “Milbank makes no secret of seeking to reclaim Augustine *from* Reformation interpretations.” P.98. [*emphasis mine*].

⁸² E.g. Richard Hooker and John Henry Newman, among other Anglican theologians.

⁸³ J. Todd Billings, “John Milbank’s Theology of The Gift; and Calvin’s theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison,” *Modern Theology* (21, 2005), 93.

there is a good being who created man, then that being sustains man in some way and that creator being merits credit for that which he does. Though not thoroughly comprehensive, these qualifications of ‘participation’ aid us in becoming streetwise with Milbank’s uses of the word, as we consider its relation to Divine love.

The Modern Problem

The current appeal to an autonomous reason can be considered a product of the modern mind-set. This autonomy can be best traced to Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason*. An essential premise of Kant’s work is that man can survive on his own using the *categorical imperative*⁸⁴, by which he can (though with tension) act as he thinks he should. Man can discipline himself and become a person who is consistently active in bringing about the good and progress in society as a moral person. For Milbank, it is clear that this sort of finite autonomy has poisoned the branches of modern, secular philosophy. This is why R.O. wishes to re-establish a philosophy under the Christian banner - - one which does not fall into the popular presumptions of modernity. Milbank proposes that “evil is self-governing autonomy - - evil is the Kantian good, the modern good.”⁸⁵ It is this very human problem, this autonomy that drove - - and still drives - - man to choose exile from God. This sort of independence was the central motive in the Genesis account of man’s fall into deprivation.

⁸⁴ Man must follow the moral law, and do so with a sense of duty.

⁸⁵ John Milbank, “Darkness and Silence: Evil and the Western Legacy,” in *The Religious: Blackwell Readings in Continental Philosophy*, Ed. By John D. Caputo, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 291.

Reciprocal nature of Love

Milbank poses a counter-ontology to these modern sorts, one which consists of a Christian metaphysics assuming reciprocity between God and man. One which “suggests a state of being that pertains between two or more persons and therefore seems to require an ontological description...”⁸⁶ Love is an interpersonal phenomenon which doesn’t simply exist as a subject receiving or a subject giving. For Milbank, love occurs in, among and between people; there is an interpersonal and inter-ontic nature of love. Love cannot exist solely within the parameters of an individual void of an object of love, for there must be a beloved. Milbank proposes that if it were possible to love without a beloved then the lover would “appear merely to be in love with the idea of self-abandonment.”⁸⁷ There must be an object of love, otherwise love is reduced to nihilism. Also, love must be considered within the scope of a participatory ontology, for “without a continuous overlap with Being, love can never refer to something or someone loved...”⁸⁸ The presence of a God who loves must drive us to a drastic revision of ontology. Without considering love as it relates to ontology, love can only be a sterile and stale idea - - only conceptual but never virtual. Milbank argues that love, void of ontological considerations, would then be reduced to a formal structure that is never actualized.

For Milbank, a participatory ontology that places God at the helm has as its foundation the logic of creation as gift and a robust restoration of such a gift. Creation is a gift given out of love, and as such necessarily affects the intrinsic nature of humanity.

⁸⁶ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 303.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 300.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 284.

See also Paul Tillich, *Love Power, and Justice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 18. “All problems of love, power, and justice drive us to an ontological analysis.”

All of creation was brought about *in* love, therefore it has its being *in* love (*ex amore*).⁸⁹ This event of creation was an event forged in love, but love is also a permanent state or reality of those created; that is, they are permanently inter-related with the creator. To consider an ontology of love is to recognize that “to-be is to-be-related. Creation is then conceived, not as *ex nihilo*, but as *ex amore*.”⁹⁰ Participation and *ipso facto* love, relies on the very fact that there is something given and returned between two persons - - a gift given and received.

A Neo-Neo-Platonism

Augustine is primarily responsible for taking this neo-Platonic concept of participation and making it distinctly Christian. Tom Jacobs poses that this sort of Christian neo-Platonism “makes it possible to overcome a strict division between God and world, by understanding everything as participating in the divine.”⁹¹ Though the division is necessary for Milbank, it mustn’t compromise the revelatory immanence of God. In order for Milbank to maintain a dynamic Christian God, he must deny the static, solely transcendent one of the former neo-Platonism. In order to account for this potential pit fall, Milbank employs Augustine’s concept of the Trinity to account for the dynamic difference. God is not a unity of being *beyond* difference, but is instead “superabundant being” unified in difference.⁹² Therefore, creation is invited to

⁸⁹ The author of Acts 17:28, suggests that it is in the Divine that we “live and move and have our being.”

⁹⁰ James H. Olthuis, “A Radical Ontology of Love,” in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, ed. James K.A. Smith and James H. Olthuis, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 292.

⁹¹ Tom Jacobs, “Flirting with Premodernity. John Milbank and the Return of the (Christian) Masternarrative,” *ARC the Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies* (34, 2006), 147.

⁹² *Ibid.* 147.

participate in the differential life of the 3 persons of the Godhead.⁹³ As three persons, God is an eternal, constant loving and inter-relating.

From here, it should not be a difficult task to see the relation between Milbank's concept of participation and his position on Divine love. For Milbank, participation is a mark of the Christian's identity, for one cannot love "of one's own originality and without necessarily seeking any communion."⁹⁴ That is, a communion between God and man; one which establishes man's loves upon The Divine love. This concept of reciprocity reflects Milbank's position on *the gift*, which we will consider more fully in chapter four. God gives, and the greatest gift he gives is himself, and this prepares man for his presence - - his final and beatific kingdom. Love is essentially bound up in one's making himself present to care for another – this is the gift of reciprocity. It is meant to be a relationally charged ontology through which God's love is recognized as being at the helm of every interaction between God and man.

Love and the good are intertwined. For Milbank, in order for love to exist at all, there must be a participatory ontology that recognizes the-good of being and how such good is also being participated *in*. If the good (in this case love) cannot be participated *in*, then it does not exist, for it must be shared. This is one of the most recognizable attributes of love.⁹⁵ Participation establishes the roles of man and the role of God in the creative and redemptive processes. Milbank's highly platonic system aims to readjust the

⁹³ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991.), 423.

⁹⁴ John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), 150.

⁹⁵ Most explicitly in *De Trinitate*, Augustine establishes this point, as well as proving that Divine love has existed between the three persons of The Trinity before the creation of man. This Intra-Trinitological sharing of love is eternal.

modern mindset of autonomy. A mindset that is highly resistant to recognizing any sort of dependence upon the Divine. In contemporary theology, there is, on the one hand, a community who denies finite dignity and ability apart from Christ, and on the other hand, Christian strands that attest to man's ability to pull himself up by his own theological boot straps. Neither of these polarities seem to be certified by Milbank. Instead, a theological system that is founded upon the relational connection between the finite and the infinite drives Milbank's structure of reciprocity - - reciprocity that is not made up of two equally sharing and giving parties, but one in which humanity depends upon and borrows from The Divine. We are to respond to the gift of love donated through loving as we are loved (John 15:12). In his Gospel account, John indeed suggests that we must respond to being loved and to "give what is initially *not* in our possession."⁹⁶ For Milbank, this implies that there is a sense in which man's love must be first donated by God, and is thus an exchange. When man loves in the right direction, he is being donated such love by God.

The central theological framework used by R.O would be a platonic⁹⁷ scheme of 'participation,' but in a new wineskin. This participatory casing sets man in a position of dependence upon God, not in turned position. Though this system sets God at the fulcrum, it does not deny finite things dignity but instead properly sets the finite things in a position of living out their full finite potential. Milbank's participatory ontology does not inhibit finite persons, but actually allows for the finite to be most truly finite and to live in the most-true, naturally human form as a result of the sharing which the Divine

⁹⁶ John Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror," in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*. Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 312.

⁹⁷ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon, Radical Orthodoxy Series*, (London: Routledge, 2003), ix.

initiates. Such an emphasis upon participation necessitates that persons may only truly *know* through participation in the Divine, and would be, otherwise, reduced to a bare existence, one of finite autonomy.⁹⁸ Milbank borrows much of his ontology from Aquinas who also seems to find such an autonomy out of place in a world which is sustained by God.

Participation and Aquinas

Milbank is calling for a serious revival in philosophy that would result in the shattering of philosophy's autonomy, for, as he suggests, philosophy should be reorganized due to Christ's existence and redemption. Here Milbank appeals to Aquinas - - one who did not have an autonomous philosophy void of theological concerns. There are ways in which Aquinas had an exclusively Christian Philosophy, one which expressed starkly different dependencies than those upon which Modern philosophies have been founded. Milbank has concluded, "the metaphysics of participation in Aquinas is immediately and implicitly a phenomenology of seeing more than one sees, of recognizing the invisible in the visible."⁹⁹ This sense of participation with the Divine, or "seeing more than one sees" is surely a linchpin in Aquinas' theology. Perhaps Milbank, here, is mostly taking contention with the broader philosophical community that does not attempt to incorporate God in the process of understanding the fundamental nature of

⁹⁸ John Milbank, Graham Ward & Catherine Pickstock, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 7.

Perhaps this participatory ontology also necessitates that one may only truly *love* when in participation with the Divine.

⁹⁹ John Milbank, "Intensities," in *Modern Theology* (15, 1999), 473.

reality. Milbank's understandings of metaphysics and ontology are, by and large, shaped by Aquinas'.¹⁰⁰

In word and deed, Christ claims to be the "testimony to the truth"(John 18:37). However, though Christ embodies the infinite truth, man's activity in the finite world is lived in half-truths. Because man is meant to live informed by the infinite, he is unequipped to live a truly finite life without the Divine. Milbank points out that "to be in truth is 'to correspond' to God in whom we participate."¹⁰¹ This participation is, at root, an agreement (*correspondere*) between God and man, built upon a Divine promise to answer and respond. The two parties are constantly agreeing upon what *is*, and what is good. Truth, for Aquinas, does not restrict, but enhance one's life of finitude - - truth is always freeing. If man chooses to live autonomously, he cuts himself off from the source of truth; from the Absolute. Similarly, Milbank sees knowledge as something we can only grasp in part; at times we may see it more clearly, at others more dimly. This is the necessary finite situation as "crucially, there is only one guarantee of truth – only one source of light – which is God's own knowledge."¹⁰² Therefore, to fully know all truths is to fully know the source of said truths. Milbank also seems to hint that the only truth one may find confidence in is that humanity may not fully attain truth and knowledge. However, there is a way man may experience knowledge - - he must participate in the Divine knowledge. For man may only have knowledge of the world "by participating in

¹⁰⁰ Or, as many have suggested, Milbank's interpretation of Aquinas has led Milbank to inappropriately attribute some of some metaphysical positions to Aquinas.

¹⁰¹ John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas, Radical orthodoxy series*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 4.

¹⁰² John Milbank, in *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation*, by Rupert Short, (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2005.), 119.

its constant generation, as gift and return...”¹⁰³ for to have knowledge is to interact with truth; to live coinciding within reality. On this matter of truth, Milbank appeals to

Aquinas:

[There is] no judgment of truth without assessing a degree of appropriate participation in the transcendental attributes proper to divinity, though this is not to say such an assessment need always be carried out with full reflexive consciousness of the *proportio* between creature and creator. But were one to attempt to comprehend a finite reality not as created, that is to say not in relation to God, then no truth for Aquinas could ensue, since finite realities are of themselves nothing and only what is can be true.¹⁰⁴

Aquinas’ “light of faith” is in reference to creation and its participation with the divine light. That is, as man receives the light of faith, he is moving from obscurity and variation in thought toward pure intuition; toward a lived experience with truth (though still in a dimly lit room). Put simply, in participating one is growing in knowledge. This is not the doing of man but of God, who is infinite. The finite is contingent upon the infinite, and man’s pure intuition hinges upon his connection with the Divine, for, as the Psalmist wrote, “...in your light we see light.” (Ps. 36:9). God, then, is the fountainhead of light, in that he is constantly creating and recreating such light for the world *to* see, and *by which* to see. The Divine makes truth visible for man, stimulating finite sight to detect authenticity. If God imputes and sustains all truth in the world, then the finite may only borrow truths and live out of them through imitation and impression.

One’s participation in God necessarily limits her autonomy. Instead of attempting to theorize within one’s own mind as to how to live in the world, the finite can learn and develop the ability to imitate the Divine. Imitation is then the means by which man

¹⁰³ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*. Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 298.

¹⁰⁴ John Milbank, “Intensities,” in *Modern Theology* (15, 1999), 449.

interacts with himself, God and the world. For Aquinas, “borrowing is the highest authenticity which can be attained. One must copy in order to be, and one continues only as a copy, never in one’s own right.”¹⁰⁵ It is in our imitation of the divine that we receive truth and participate with the Divine as image bearers. However, the image is not reflected as it should be. Milbank interprets Aquinas as understanding the post-lapsarian state of man to be one of dire significance, for man’s ability to participate has been ruptured. This ability must be restored, and it is through the Incarnation that one can once again participate in “the divine understanding.”¹⁰⁶ Truth and participation correspond with one another, for inasmuch as man participates with the Divine, he is interacting with truth accordingly. Necessarily, then, things can only be true as they are conjoined and sustained by the Divine.

For Aquinas, it was not necessary for God to be appeased through the incarnation; however, this was fitting and supremely suitable for God’s intentions. Milbank refers to Aquinas’ consideration of the incarnation as ‘convenient;’ that is, an appropriate action selected by God, but not the only means through which God *could* have brought redemption to humanity.¹⁰⁷ This somehow turns the logic of the Incarnation on its head, for within such a view the aesthetic gesture of the incarnation may be more significantly appreciated. Aquinas’ concept of participation reflects this view of the incarnation as aesthetic. Milbank suggests this convenience, “as applied to the divine economy of creation and redemption signals, in Aquinas, an aesthetic construal of participation: God

¹⁰⁵ John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas, Radical orthodoxy series*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 10.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 60.

¹⁰⁷ Milbank would suggest that something much like the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus would be necessary. He is only pointing out that God could have done it another way, if it would have been a more powerful symbol.

creates, and is partially disclosed within, appropriate proportions which radiate according to their inherent *integritas*.”¹⁰⁸ Hence, participation, as an aesthetic gesture, is designed to give pleasure – a pleasure found in experiences with truth and love.

Aquinas utilizes “the neo-Platonic legacy and the metaphysics of participation to show that he regards our capacity for thought not as a ruefully humiliated endeavor, but as a partial receiving of divine intellection.”¹⁰⁹ Man is capable of thought, inspiration and action. All of these capabilities are dependant upon the Divine. This is love, for these capabilities are a gift and should be identified as such. Additionally, though humility is a virtuous quality, Aquinas’ participatory framework is not intended to point out man’s deficiencies, but rather God’s sufficiency to supply humanity with all of its needs; to be sufficient in all its concerns.

Participatory Ontology and The Material

The created order is “a plan that is ordered to praise,” for “all the world is a sacrament,” and “this generates a sacramental revaluing of the material.”¹¹⁰ This esteem of the material is refreshing and significantly distinct from the devaluation of the material found in Platonism and the dualistic Manichaeism. God has wrapped man in a material body that was originally intended to channel love into the world. For if embodiment is essentially good, then the body is a gift given to channel goodness and consequentially,

¹⁰⁸ John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas, Radical orthodoxy series*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 61.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 12.

¹¹⁰ James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*. (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2004), 223.

love. A corporeal God who also gives bodies is not the *Deus ex Machina*,¹¹¹ but the one who has created humanity with a unification in mind, a reciprocity. Instead of being the divine puppeteer of Deism, who may only create nihilistic beings, God created the finite with a contingency upon himself with, and for purpose. As discussed earlier, Milbank, et al., wish to have a God that is both transcendent and immanent.¹¹² Catherine Pickstock suggests that if reality were to be considered within a hierarchy, transcendence would be at the top of such a scale, where all other forms of reality would be at the bottom. However, this doesn't mean that God, in his transcendence, isn't connected in some way with that which is on the lower rungs of this hierarchy. Pickstock points out that God is ever present to the ants and even down to "the ants legs."¹¹³ Though God is beyond being, finitude and all limits, "there simply isn't a place that transcendence cannot be" because "it is beyond all limit, yet it works in and through every limit that we have."¹¹⁴ That is to say that God can enter the finite and interact with it, but he is far beyond being finite. He even transcends man's understanding of infinitude as he cannot be categorized according to finite nomenclature.

However, God reveals himself in nature –the material - through that which is beautiful. Beauty, for Milbank, is the mediation between the invisible and the visible. Beauty is the platform on which the invisible makes itself available. God uses his beauty

¹¹¹ *Deus ex Machina*, or "God of the machine," is the understanding of a god who stands outside creation and only intervenes in the world when, or if he wills.

¹¹² Though this seems true, RO is as a corrective, and as such hopes to correct a society shaped negatively by a modernism that has backed God into the immanent corner, where he has been for far too long.

¹¹³ Catherine Pickstock, in "On Radical Orthodoxy," *CBC Radio: Ideas*, with David Cayley, Audio recording, May 2007, http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/docs/mp3/ideas_20070604_2421.mp3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

to appeal to the natural desires within man; it is a gift, just as man, himself, is a gift.¹¹⁵ This beauty is for man to participate in, but not to necessarily take as his own (which he accuses modernity to have attempted). This gives shape to Milbank's ontology, for if the gift of beauty is meant to point man's attention back to the giver, and man can only be the steward of that which God has given and man is, himself the gift of beauty, then one's existence must be, in some sense, necessarily sustained by God.

Milbank's Participatory Ontology and its relation to The Ecclesial Community

This concept of participation should have immense consequences for the Ecclesial community. Milbank wants to see parish life re-organized around this sense of participation, for "the central theological framework of radical orthodoxy is 'participation' as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity, because any alternative configuration perforce reserves a territory independent of God."¹¹⁶ Milbank wants this participation and exchange - - that God has established with humanity - - to affect all sorts of social exchange. What then, would be the implications of this sort of participation for the Church? What might parish life look like after this re-insertion has found its footing? Here, we will consider two ways the church would be different if it thoroughly adopted Milbank's participatory ontology: The first is that, instead of the mirage of autonomous ecclesial survival, there is a sense in which the Church recognizes its dependence upon the Divine order. This is not so much of a revision to how the

¹¹⁵John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Edith Wyschogrod, *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty: Rockwell lecture series*, (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 2003).

¹¹⁶John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, "Suspending the Material: the Turn of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, (London: Routledge Press, 1999).

church considers the sovereignty of God, but rather its *relation* to such a God. This destructive autonomy may not always be blatant, but rather subtle at times, coming in the shape of human potential, progress and development. This autonomy has also found root in formulaic conceptions of how one may become holy by his or her own rite. Though holiness an obvious virtue, it should not be confused with morality. Holiness may only be brought about by God changing the individual, whereas morality is a product of ones own desires, initiative and discipline to become a better person. Though morality is a value for society, it may be achieved independent from the Divine. Morality (*moralis*, “manner” or “character”) does not necessarily require any sort of faith, trust or dependence upon God, and should be more cautiously considered.¹¹⁷ The church, therefore, should be encouraged to pursue true holiness that may only come through faith and trust in the Divine - - not the self. Holiness is brought about through relationship with the Divine, there is an appropriate sort of self-abandonment that comes in such participation and relationship. Instead of violence, dependence and faith upon the Divine results in, and perpetuates peace. Such peace leads to an appropriate vigorous spirit to aid others, to lead them to the good, and to the source of such peace and goodness - - the Divine.

The church may also see, through this lens of participation, that in such reciprocal interaction, one is taking a part, playing a role, in the greater good, the common good.

One is, in a sense having a stake in the good that is being brought about in the world.

¹¹⁷ If (1) morality does not, perforce, promote dependence upon God or point one towards the need for God, then it promotes autonomy from the Divine; and, (2) autonomy is self-sufficiency, self-dependence that leads to going to any measure to protect the self, in self-defense; then anything that threatens the self or the autonomous campaign is an enemy, and autonomy necessarily leads one to, in some sense, violence. Autonomy leads one to self-protection and self-preservation which will be done at any cost. Therefore, morality, as described here, leads to autonomy that then leads, necessarily, to violence and the use of force to protect said autonomy from those who threaten it.

One devotes and invests her-self, her being-in-the-good. The church exists in order to promote the good, and in order for the Church or the Christian individual to be *in* good, they must participate. That is, the good may only be achieved through participating with God, in the heavenly city (not in the earthly one characterized by finite autonomy). Therefore, the church's very existence is circumscribed by participation, and the church should re-organize its benevolent acts in the community around this idea of participating with God, in the good.

Milbank's understanding of participation also helps the church to have greater communal experiences. One who is actively participating with God is also participating with others who are actively participating with God. This is what the Christian concepts of community should be formed around. The church exists in order to tear down societal structures and groups that characterized by their exclusivity. That is, the Church should embrace difference and deny the secular format of structuring around similarity that results in exclusions. There is a sense in which secular society is negatively built around such compartmentalization (e.g. social class, financial status, profession, physical appearance, abilities, etc). The church should not allow such forms of societal exclusion to enter its doors. Instead of the church organizing itself around exclusive similarity comparable to secular organizations, it should embrace difference and promote all person's participation in the Divine, not exclusively, but inclusively. One's participation with the Divine should be the defining characteristic of her communal participation. This is the sort of conversation that Milbank's participatory ontology should awaken within the Church. We will now turn to Milbank's understanding of "the gift," where we may easily trace his disposition towards exchange and reciprocity *with* the Divine.

CHAPTER 4

MILBANK'S UNDERSTANDING OF "THE GIFT" AND "THE GIVEN"

Milbank's conception of the "the gift," as it relates to the Divine gift, will be the focus of this section. One can better grasp the Divine gift through phenomenological consideration of "the gift." What though, qualifies as a gift? If a gift is given solely with the intent of receiving something in return, then does said gift lose its qualification as such? This section will consider the qualification of a gift as such, as well as some ways gifted-ness is a gesture of Divine love.

For Augustine, "Gift" is the name for The Holy Spirit, and this is a starting point for Milbank.¹¹⁸ Through The Holy Sprit, man is invited and ushered into the Trinitarian "exchange." And Milbank confirms that God, in giving his Spirit (*the* gift), fully gives himself to the Son and fully "consigns himself, as giver, to *this* infinite form, shape or image of his donation." The Spirit brings persons into this Trinitarian exchange yet man

¹¹⁸ Todd Billings, "John Milbank's Theology of The Gift; and Calvin's theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison," *Modern Theology* (21, 2005), 88.

must choose to participate in this love.¹¹⁹ For Jean-Luc Marion -- Milbank's inspirer on this topic of giftedness -- Husserl *began* to develop the insight "that, in its basis, every phenomenon surges forth as a gift, and therefore that all phenomenality comes to pass as a donation."¹²⁰ Marion is undertaking a project after Milbank's own heart: that of re-pairing theology and philosophy. More specifically, Milbank borrows Marion's development of the gift and love as such a gift. All phenomena are gifts and Milbank, as a theologian, most often considers "The gift(s)," in the context of the Divine's giving of them. God holds the perfection of love and expresses it as a gift, without fault. This should escort the finite into worship -- or ethics -- and recognition of Divine infinitude. However, the gift-exchange between God and man has been ruptured because of humanity's improper loves. These improper loves have created an unhealthy distance between God and man and the relationship needs mending, thus forgiveness and repentance are necessary. Forgiveness, the quintessential example of a gift, will be a central topic within this chapter. This section will also survey Milbank's perspective of finite gifts, as they reflect the Divine gift. Milbank gives us his phenomenology of forgiveness and this perception of finite forgiveness sheds light on how he sees the infinite form. This gift provides a limitless example of Milbank's conception of divine love.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 88.

¹²⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, "Reponses a Quelques Questions," in *Revue de metaphysique et de morale* (1, 1991), 72.

See also John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 36.

Milbank considers Marion to be uniquely correlating 20th century theology of the "Word" with a radical reworking of phenomenology in order to almost "be both Barth and Heidegger at once."

Ontology of the Divine Gift

The gift, for Milbank, is not so much of an ontological category, as much as it is a way of understanding ontology.¹²¹ Albeit, ontology informs the gift correspondingly, for to accept the gift is to honor *being*. The Divine gift established creatures' being, but this is being *as* a gift.¹²² *Es gibt*, or "it gives," to say that all of creation - - including humanity - - is a gift. However, the Divine gifts are not univocal to finite gifts. As we will see later, the finite gift is bound to reciprocity, and this is due to the necessary distance between the giver and the receiver, a territory that belongs "neither to donor nor donee." However, the Divine gift "passes across no neutral abyss" and is not bound to space between the giver and receiver. This is because God owns all territory; there is no neutral - - or secular - - space which would result in a delay of the gift. The Divine gift,

¹²¹ For Heidegger, being is the category through which the subjective is to be assessed, for Levinas, ethics. Perhaps for Milbank and Marion, the gift isn't actually under the reigns of ontology but an all-together separate category for understanding the subjective. How then does the concept of love fit into this category of gift? In what ways has love fit into the categories of ethics or ontology? If love is best understood *as* gift, then does it gain a certain sort of potency or a means to be better understood, which ontology or ethics cannot attribute to it or aid in the understanding of it? These seem to be some very important questions regarding this topic of love vis-à-vis gifted-ness.

See also Paul Tillich, *Love Power, and Justice*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 21.

From a slightly different angle, Paul Tillich posed that love does not depend upon or belong to the "discipline" of ontology, it does not perforce find its home in being. Instead, "Love, power and justice are, metaphysically speaking, as old as being itself. They precede everything that is, and they cannot be derived from anything that is. They have ontological dignity."

In what ways would our considerations of Divine love change if we grant love independence from ontology? Are there any ways in which we must perceive Divine love differently because of this autonomy of love? Or is it the case that God is simple and not susceptible to such scrutiny as are complex, finite persons?

¹²² Finite beings *are* gifts; they are given and not just created. As given, the finite have a limited autonomy. Milbank does not consider limited finite autonomy on deterministic terms, but on relational ones -- he wants to acknowledge the finite's relational attachment to the Divine.

then, begins with God and goes directly to the receiver. The lack of distance between The Divine and his intended recipient lends to the steady and continuous flow of the gift. There is no shut off valve to God's gift; it is inexorable. God does not hesitate in gift giving because, in his omniscience, there is no uncertainty. This certainty allows him to be most freely giving and freely loving.

Divine Love in The Divine Gift

Milbank recognizes God's gift as the infinite, perfect "return of himself to himself" and as such, "grounded in an intra-divine love."¹²³ Intra-Divine love has always been exchanged between the three persons of the God-head. Instead of a circle of love, this community looks much more like a spiral with the ends attached through which love is constantly flowing in, around, and emanating through to the finite. This emanation is a gift to the finite beings, as they are invited into the play of love in the spiral, the infinite intra-trinitarian love.

Now, it is necessary that we see the reason for why Milbank focuses on the finite gift exchange – all in order to show the boundaries of finite gifts and, by association, finite loves. This in turn highlights Divine love as a beacon - - a wholly-other love which is unbounded yet impenetrable. Milbank concludes that only can God's gift be considered the pure, exemplary gift, "whose absolute gratuity and spontaneity removes it

¹²³ John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), 136.

This seems to reflect Milbank's Augustinian influence. See also Augustine, *De Trinitate*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963).

from all taint of exchange.”¹²⁴ This is clearly a distinction from the finite gift giver; one who is bound by exchange. Divine gifts do not *necessarily* exist as reciprocal, they need not be because all Divine gifts, in one way or another, return to him.¹²⁵ Milbank agrees with Marion in his suggestion that “the giving traverses distance by not ceasing to send the given back to the giver.”¹²⁶ God’s gift avoids neutral territory and whether accepted or not, it returns back to him. The gift necessarily represents and refers back to God as the giver; it is self-disclosing. It is God who reveals himself, as love, as the gift and interested in reciprocation with a recipient. A central component of the Divine gift is that it not only represents the giver by its composition, but also its direction or intended recipient. The Divine gift, though not necessarily, has recipients, and as such is intended to be reciprocal. Milbank considers this reciprocity to be infinite gift-exchange.

Gift Exchange

God’s *giving love* should not be considered antithetical to his *receiving love*, for “even within his own Trinitarian life, God is not just a free-giving; he is equally a constant receiving.”¹²⁷ It is absolutely essential to not simply see God as the quintessential giver, but also the exemplary receiver, for his gift giving must always have a gift return. Perhaps it is more difficult for one to receive than to give, for reception and acceptance forges an increase in one recognizing her state as one who is in need, or one

¹²⁴ John Milbank, “Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), 126.

¹²⁵ Unless, of course, there is a sense in which all gifts given by the Divine are also passed through, and return to all of the persons of the God-head.

¹²⁶ Jean Luc Marion quoted in John Milbank, “Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), 126.

¹²⁷ John Milbank, “The Future of Love: A reading of Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*,” (http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_TheFutureOfLove.pdf), 3.

who is willing to accept the sacrifice of another. When considered seriously, a humble reception seems to be, at times, impossible. Nevertheless, our finite categories of giving and receiving cannot apply to the infinite God, who is not bound to finite classification. The Divine expresses both giving and receiving simultaneously; and this points to the chasm of distance between these acts of God and those of man.

There is an organic distance between God and man, as they are wholly others; yet there is also a distance created by depravity, which results in a rupture in the gift-exchange.¹²⁸ We do violence to reality - - and to our gifts - - when we attempt refuse the gift. In the act of love, God provides a connection between himself and man in order to prevent this violence and harm. It is the gift of an inter-relatedness; a correspondence and reciprocity. The specification of what or who something is will be shaped by his or its giftedness.¹²⁹ And the question of what a gift is will be shaped by who the giver is - - who, in this case, is the Divine. For if man is a gift, then *being* as such will be under a constant revision, always changing, always being given. This understanding of being will be quite distinct from the modern ontologies on offer today. Different in that this concept posits a creator and sustainer of being; distinct because modern ontology asserts

¹²⁸ God, as the “wholly other thou,” is entirely distinct from human persons. Perhaps man could be considered to be “wholly other” from God as well? Surely there is an infinite qualitative difference between God and man, but if God is wholly other and does not embody human persons (with the exception of Jesus), then human persons are also exceptionally different and completely – wholly – other than God. This would not nullify or undermine God’s identification with man, instead man’s wholly otherness underscores Divine love, as it is a present reminder that God is transcendent and established as infinitely and unmistakably distinct.

See also Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 69.

In his chapter/essay “God and Philosophy,” Levinas highlights the transcendence of God: God is not “simply the ‘first other,’ or the ‘other par excellence,’ or the ‘absolutely other,’ but other than the other, other otherwise, and other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical obligation to the other and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of his possible confusion with the agitation of the *there is*.”

¹²⁹ The context in which a gift is given is what establishes its identity. Every gift harbors a boundless number of intentions, qualities and originations out of which it is born.

an autonomy of created beings to a fault. Instead, for Milbank, all actions of finite creatures which occur through *dilectio*, or rightly guided love, are in a sense hooked or fastened to the infinite. They must occur through him. Milbank suggests that “God alone fully gives without contrast and gives, unilaterally, a reciprocity, nevertheless every finite gift to some extent anticipates and starts to provide, through educative influence of the other, its own counter-gift.”¹³⁰ All gifts which man may give first originated as gifts *to* him. Love is an endowment one may give to others simply because Divine love was, and is, first given. All of man’s love, then, exists as a *counter-gift*.

Gifts must replicate themselves “in cycles of gratitude and obligation;” this is what perpetuates love as gift(s) and gift(s) as love. Also, Milbank’s gift-exchange must always feature delay and non-identical repetition.¹³¹ Gifts of humanity can only occur because of God’s first gifts of love for, as Milbank concludes, “this is the one given condition of the gift, that we love because God first loved us.”¹³² Milbank seeks to establish that “human generosity belongs within the context of prior attachments,” and therefore “a reflection upon erotic love is not irrelevant to an elucidation of agapeic donation.”¹³³ There is a way in which the erotic love can inform us of Divine love, for it is a form created by the Divine through which his love may be expressed (intensely) through people. Milbank wants to show the continuum between “*agape*, a giving love, and *eros*, a desiring love,”¹³⁴ for on the contemporary theological scene, there is far too

¹³⁰ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 299.

¹³¹ Todd Billings, “John Milbank’s Theology of The Gift; and Calvin’s theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison,” *Modern Theology* (21, 2005), 88.

¹³² John Milbank, “Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), 154.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 124.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 124.

sharp a contrast between the two. He appeals to the human *eros* –this *eros*, this desire, is itself a gift – which is only possible because of gift exchange, for it exists as a reflection of *agape*. This necessarily links the two, for desire is facilitated and fulfilled in the instance of giving and reciprocation.

Milbank suggests that perhaps one of the first gifts God gives humanity is a mirror; a reflexivity through which he can receive the gift given. This gift is the ability to look upon oneself as a gift and be thankful. On this topic of reflexivity, Milbank summons Claude Bruaire, who argues that in the moment of creation the first gift was given and received, and as such, subsists “as the reflexive reception of itself as gift, which means the giving of a gift to itself, in an inadequate attempt to make the return of gratitude to the ultimate source.”¹³⁵ That is, in the moment of the *ex nihilo* creation, man was able to recognize, to perceive himself as gift and offering. This sort of recognition was the natural response for man, that is, until he began looking for places God was not. For Milbank, this refusal marked the beginning of human deprivation.

Humanity’s Post-Lapsarian Need

Milbank is concerned with “the restoration of a refused and ruptured gift,”¹³⁶ as our world is one of fallen-ness. Man is diagnosed with a sort of disease in this broken world and his depraved state is only truly known through Divine love as grace.¹³⁷ Grace

¹³⁵ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 278.

¹³⁶ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon. Radical Orthodoxy Series*, (London: Routledge, 2003), xi.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* xii.

gives that which is lacking to the finite who are in need of reconciliation with the Divine. Instead of humanity needing to be *destroyed*, Milbank would suggest that humanity needs to be fulfilled, regenerated and set free.¹³⁸ Milbank here appeals to Henri de Lubac's understanding of grace as it is "a Divine gift that supplies a supernatural lack basic to our very nature and yet prior to our natural being."¹³⁹ "Basic" because it is most authentic for man to live in accordance and interaction with the supernatural, and "prior to our natural being" because grace has always been within The Divine. That is, he did not evolve into a being who developed into being graceful once humanity was born - - no, God, as a simple being who acts in the world, has always been this grace. Though humanity is inorganically bent towards deviance and immorality, one can turn from this iniquity into his most natural –yet still finite -being, an existence of being in communion with the Divine.

This is why Milbank sees the theurgy of the incarnation as God's breaking into the world and reintroducing love in a new way. This incarnation is the preeminent gift, for through it God seeks to counteract man's selfishness and death. However, even selfishness is a form of love, for Milbank.¹⁴⁰ Like Augustine, Milbank would pose sin to be a form of love inappropriately bent towards targets of non-value or things which do

¹³⁸ John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), 135.

"For the sinful self is left merely with the empty gesture of freedom, an absolute control over its own illusory and contentless stability, and robbed of the freedom to do this or that, which is inseparable from a freedom for this or that, involving receptivity. To refuse Being as a gift is to refuse the condition of all receptivity as such, and turns out to mean a refusal of the gift of Being."

¹³⁹ John Milbank, "The Shares of Being or Gift, Relation and Participation: an Essay on the Metaphysics of Emmanuel Levinas and Alain Badiou," (<http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers.php>), 8.

¹⁴⁰ A selfish act is love gone wild, it is love let loose of the other transcendentals and virtues. It is the result of addiction(s).

See also Seeburger, Francis F., *Addiction and Responsibility: An Inquiry into the Addictive Mind*, (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 3-15.

Seeburger considers the phenomenon of addiction as one's giving up control and responsibility. He calls this "dis-own-ment," and considers addiction as a form of surrendering to a master.

not perpetuate one's communion with God; improper loves. Sin then, is a love in which "one has cut oneself off from the source of life which is God; out of a weak fear and need for security founded in self one has established the kingdom of weakness which is death and dying."¹⁴¹ Sin is the refusal of the gift of love donated by God. Therefore the result of humanity's refusal of the gift is an attempt at autonomous survival and defense against the gifts of God. This "kingdom of weakness" perpetuates the problem of injurious independence as it makes man feeble and weak. All of these - autonomy, security and defense - are the responses of the refusal of the gift. Part of the agony of this refusal is that man is in need, and clearly so, for God gives to restore man's ability to receive. Milbank poses that "creation and grace are gifts; Incarnation is the supreme gift; the Fall, evil and violence are the refusal of gift; atonement is the renewed and hyperbolic gift that is for-giveness."¹⁴² This refusal of the gift correlates with the very logic as to why humanity needs the gift. This is man's circular search for love; he is looking for the very love he consciously and unconsciously rejects - - a love that is only found in the incarnation and atoning work of Christ. This is an act of true forgiveness, but as gifts they must be received.

Forgiveness

Milbank is convinced that theology, beginning in the high mediaeval period, has been posited with a legacy of forgiveness that is primarily a positive endeavor; that is,

¹⁴¹ John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 224.

¹⁴² John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon. Radical Orthodoxy Series*, (London: Routledge, 2003), ix.

forgiveness has come to be understood as only the imputation of righteousness in a human who has fallen from it. This is only a half-truth, and as such, is to the detriment of man. This is in high contrast with the antique understanding of forgiveness as a solely negative gesture.¹⁴³ One which sees forgiveness to solely be God taking away the sins of the world without the creation of a positive debt. Instead of forgiveness being either one or the other, Milbank sees it to be a two-sided venture. He seems to agree with the early Christian ideology, which posed that “negativity was doubly qualified by something positive. In fact, the positivity of forgiveness was the counterpart to the negativity of evil.”¹⁴⁴ So here, within Milbank’s line of thought, there is both a negative component and a positive component to the act of forgiveness, and because of this, forgiveness should not be considered as a gesture of either solely removal or simply attribution. Instead, remission should be considered in way in which both are intertwined and occur mutually, for in the negative gesture a positive one is found and vice versa.

Forgiveness must be an act against sin in general, and the individual violations in particular. Divine love does not simply nullify misdeeds but properly negates them by paying the debt. Milbank poses that “perhaps forgiveness, since it gives up, or forswears a legitimate ground of complaint, suggests a kind of negative giving which benignly removes – the giving of a gift which fortunately destroys.”¹⁴⁵ Forgiveness is, in part, a negative gesture, or “giving”, that restores by expulsion. Man subsists because God inexplicably removes the debt of sin. It is a gesture that leaves the individual unmarked and clean in the newness of God’s creation (II Cor. 5:17). The negative gesture

¹⁴³ Ibid. 48.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 45.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 44.

miraculously brings presence out of absence. It de-creates and in the same instance recreates. Though forgiveness is, in part, a negative gesture that takes away, it still maintains its status as a gift. God's cancellation of the debt accrued by the violator is a negative gesture packaged as a gift to the violator: a gift that removes the malignant offenses from the individual and newly recreates her; a gift that institutes a positive debt, gladly received.

1. Augustine's Understanding of Time and its relation to Forgiveness

For Augustine, there is a supreme gift which man both desires to receive and to give the most. For charity, or love, is "indeed the supreme gift."¹⁴⁶ If this love comes from God then such love is both exemplary and supreme. Forgiveness is a reflection of this supreme gift, it is essential in Divine love vis-à-vis humanity; it is charity, bearing the burden of sin. Without a forgiving love, there can be no giving love as the two are inseparable. Both forgiveness and time will forever remain as a *mysterium* as neither can be fully understood phenomenologically, but in order for forgiveness to be more clearly understood, the aspect of time must be examined. Milbank suggests that Augustine realized "forgiveness in time demanded drastic ontological revision, if certain *aporias* were to be overcome."¹⁴⁷ That is, if forgiveness is to be understood at all, there must be a dialectic between time and being. In order for any event of forgiveness to occur, the one who forgives must traverse, in a certain sense, the distance of time past. Milbank recognizes the relevance of Augustine's understanding of time as it relates to forgiveness,

¹⁴⁶ Augustine of Hippo. "De Trinitate," in *Augustine: Later Works, Vol VIII.*, Ed. John Burnaby, (Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1955), 127.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 52.

as Augustine sees God as capable of having a unilateral relation to time. That is, God is not simply moving along with the rest of creation through the hours of the day, but may return to points in time and leap forward to others. In order for forgiveness to occur at all, there must be a recreation of the event in which one offended another; enter God's time warping abilities. This enterprise of forgiveness is not humanly possible as Man cannot recreate the past any more than he can manipulate the future. A finite looking back cannot lend to true forgiveness for true forgiveness, in some sense, requires a total recreation of the past event, not just a re-narration, or depth of understanding. Therefore, human forgiveness must depend upon the Divine forgiving love. A love, which comes as a gift, through infinite means into the phenomenal realm, originating in God.

The present is quite different for God than for man. For as Rogers concludes, "Augustine, in his classic treatment of the nature of time and eternity in his *Confessions* describes God's eternal present as being like a present moment of time, but entirely immutable."¹⁴⁸ Instead of God being bound to the finite, linear, chronological process of time, which humanity is bound to, he is capable of being in an eternal, infinite present. God's acting synchronically in time makes forgiveness entirely possible. Man does not have the ability to go back into the past and relive it as a present moment, and he is therefore unable to commit the negative gesture of forgiveness – the disinfection and wiping away of the misdeeds of the violator.

As considered earlier, the goal of forgiveness is not simply to cancel negative debt but also to create a positive one which results in the reinstitution of reciprocal gift giving.

¹⁴⁸ K. Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies*, (1996. 32, no. 2), 165-186.

See also Augustine, *Confessions*, Trans. Edward B. Pusey, (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1961), XI, 11-14.

The *telos* of forgiveness is not simply to express love in the act of forgiving, but also “restore that order of free unlimited exchange of charity which was interrupted by sin.”¹⁴⁹ Forgiveness is an active love that restores the flow of love between two parties. Divine forgiveness reinstates man’s ability to love by breaking through his iniquity and actively pursuing the restoration of his relationships with others, and this makes the forgiveness of humanity possible, subsisting in Divine love. Humans are incapable of truly forgiving in the way God does, but there is a sense in which one may forgive appropriate to her finite possibilities.¹⁵⁰ All forgiveness is dependent upon God because of humanity’s finite limitations and our problem(s) of sin - - this is a critical aspect of God’s love, for he understands this infestation within humanity. For God, the quality of love is not strained; it is a love without regard and fear of sins effects upon him. Therefore he does not fear forgiveness - - he does not hesitate out of concern for himself, as man does. This is precisely why man must depend upon God for true reconciliation and harmony.

2. Forgiveness: A Reflection of the Ontological Bond

Man cannot adequately dispel evil and consequently must depend upon God to defeat it. Milbank once again appeals to the participatory system of forgiveness (and ipso facto, love) that is established in order to both cultivate the bond between God and man, and to deal appropriately with evil. For Milbank “charity is...the ontological bond

¹⁴⁹ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon, Radical Orthodoxy Series*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 57.

¹⁵⁰ Surely Milbank’s concern for Marion’s erroneous univocal understanding of love spills over into Milbank’s consideration of forgiveness. Man’s ability to forgive is not similar in quality to God’s forgiveness, yet it still bears the name. Here, I do not call man’s forgiving ‘ability,’ but ‘possibility’ because forgiveness depends upon The Divine as he supernaturally traverses the distance of time in order for any and every human act of forgiveness to occur. This reflects the participatory interaction between finite and infinite persons, and the contingency of the finite upon the infinite.

between God and creatures, whereby creatures only are as the receiving of the divine gift and the unqualified return of this gift in the very act of receiving.”¹⁵¹ This participation necessitates the passing on of the gift given, for it *requires* a return upon reception. Reciprocity is demanded in the Divine gift, and this creates a union. The ontological bond between God and man is *delicto*, or love, and it is only through man’s recognition and acceptance of Divine love that he can love as originally intended. Forgiveness, as a specific gift of love, is the ideal topic to consider this ontological bond. To forgive is to re-establish the reciprocal relationship that was, foremost, intended by God in the original creation of man. Therefore in God’s forgiving of man there is an ontological ambition, one through which The Divine re-hooks himself to man; that is, the act of God’s forgiving restores one’s being and doing with God. Therefore, both the means and the result of this restoration is love. Man receives the gift and by doing so, loves. This also results in one having love and forgiveness for others, which builds up the double love of God and neighbor, for man accordingly, after being forgiven and repentant, can begin to love others properly.

3. Man’s Participation in Forgiveness

God has given man the ability to participate in the act of forgiveness: to consider and reconsider the evil acts committed towards him; and to be forgiven - - to accept the charitable gift and to actively pursue repentance and rapprochement throughout. Milbank

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 57.

See also Paul Tillich, *Love Power, and Justice*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 86. Divine forgiveness is always restorative; it always leads, in some sense, to a returning to the point in relationship in which the highest good was being attained. Paul Tillich considers forgiveness to be a reunification: “Forgiving love is the only way of fulfilling the intrinsic claim in every being, namely its claim to be reaccepted into the unity to which it belongs.”

recognizes that one who is offended by another is warranted to be so as he has a vital reflex to turn from evil and act against it.¹⁵² This should not be ignored. An offended one One should have an appropriate reproving response to the evil act, and she should see this response as a built-in way to deal with this human problem of depravity. However, it is essential for one to handle this response properly, for he has, himself, labored against sin and offended others. The victim is also a violator, though perhaps not in this specific circumstance. The victim is not far from committing the same misdeeds as his violator, and he must take this into account. This identification opens is what connects the victim and the violator and vice versa. Without identification one may not step into another's shoes and see – albeit dimly – an occurrence through another's eyes. This sort of kinship makes for the possibility of forgiveness, as it opens up the possibility of understanding another. The victim cannot turn a deaf ear to his prior detestation and must “situate and qualify this hatred in relation to a renewed understanding of the deluded motives of his violator.”¹⁵³ Milbank recommends that a victim can only find redemption in a relationship through re-narration, or a re-telling of the story in which she was wronged. This re-narration posits within the story the perspective that the violator is wrenched and deprived, and must be donated, through grace, the gift of forgiveness. Though a victim may play a role in the forgiveness of another, she cannot create contrition in the violator.

Milbank employs a Thomistic understanding of repentance; one through which he suggests that only Divine forgiveness can produce repentance. This Divine forgiveness, when accepted by the violator, necessarily produces repentance, or *metanoia*. This

¹⁵² This warrant, of course, excludes the circumstances in which one's being offended is a result of his personal depravity or misunderstanding. The word “warrant,” here, is used to suggest that there are circumstances in which one may be offended, yet not have any sort of proper justification to take offense or consider another's acts unruly.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 57.

repentance is the positive act of forgiving and it is to the detriment of evil. Though man cannot excite repentance in another, he must hope for it, otherwise forgiveness will only be a finite venture, which doesn't perpetuate any reflection or change in the violator.

When one forgives another, she must see the act as cooperative with the Divine. Milbank proposes that in the Middle Ages “the aim of forgiveness was not a lone, self-righteous certainty of the will to exonerate,” but rather to pay attention to the circumstances and repentance of the violator through charity. This was a time period in which charity was “regarded less as a performance than as a state of fraternal, friendly and harmonious co-existence. The aim, in other words, was reconciliation, where the bond of love is an exchange of infinite love.”¹⁵⁴ The trajectory of forgiveness was not to simply say that a violator was no longer accountable for his actions, but that there was love shared between the two which excites rapprochement and an interest in restoring the interrelatedness. Milbank supports this type of forgiveness: one where there is an equal amount of forgiveness in both parties and where they go to and return from God with a proper love for the other. Divine love is then shared between and amidst people, because this sort of forgiveness necessitates direct involvement with The Divine. This seems to line up quite nicely with what we know of God's interest in forgiving humanity. That is, there are correlations between his forgiveness of man and man's forgiveness of others, just as there is commonality between man's love and God's love. Man's participation in forgiveness is totally dependant upon his being forgiven and his trust in God, for forgiveness may only subsist through Divine love, grace and “as real by human faith.”¹⁵⁵ For Milbank, forgiveness can be considered as a matter of dependence. Instead of one attempting to

¹⁵⁴ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon, Radical Orthodoxy Series*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 47.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 45.

absolve with another in a finite way, one must trust that God loves her enough to provide reconciliation through repentance and a restoration of harmony between parties. This dependence upon The Divine must necessarily revivify love between the two parties as it existed before the violation.

Forgiveness also has communal implications. Forbearance, as an offering, “ensures the perpetuation of *ecclesia*, the agapeic community, as a series of settlements out of court (Matthew 18:15-17; I Cor. 6:1-8).”¹⁵⁶ As God’s forgiveness of man infiltrates society, and man in turn participates in forgiving others, there is a way in which The Church becomes a community of forgiveness, and thus driven by a new desire or repayment of a positive (no longer negative) debt. That is, a new desire, or love, which shapes all other desires. A Christian desire that is not only preemptive of sin but also a desire that is free giving. The Radically Orthodox Graham Ward points out that “Christian desire is always excessive, generous beyond what is asked.” This desire draws upon the Trinity as an enclosed society - - a community within God which is determined upon giving. Therefore Ward concludes that Christian desire is “ultimately founded upon God as triune and, as triune, a community of love fore-given and given lavishly.”¹⁵⁷ The Trinity is to be the model for the Church as a forbearing community and as a model for giving, for within the Trinity is a grand narrative of giving and contribution. A narrative which perhaps came to the climax in the supreme gift, the incarnation.

Humanity’s Gift Giving: a Finite Phenomenon

¹⁵⁶ John Milbank, “Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology*, (11, 1995), 119.

¹⁵⁷ Graham Ward, *Cities of God*, (New York NY: Routledge, 2002), 77.

As one could suspect, Milbank's position on finite gift giving pales in comparison to that of the Divine. The human gift, though it can be given with liberty, is "most free where it is *yet* most bound, most mutual and most reciprocally demanded."¹⁵⁸ This goes to say that on finite terms, without a receiver's acceptance of a gift, it cannot be a gift. The *offer* of a "place at a university" is not a gift. It only becomes such when it is accepted; when one begins his study at the university.¹⁵⁹ On finite terms, a gift must necessarily change hands; it must pass from one to another through neutral space; this is what marks a gift as such. If a gift does not change hands in a way that shifts the ownership of the gift, then there is no instance of gift giving. Also, a gift must involve reciprocation, and this can be found even in the acceptance of the gift, for acceptance means that one says yes to the gift, takes it, and agrees to be the new owner of said gift.¹⁶⁰ This marks, for Milbank, a necessary condition for finite gift giving, and will be a distinguishing factor between the infinite and the finite gifts. The finite gift must be accepted, and is therefore in some sense a bond or agreement.

Gift and Contract

There is, within the current milieu, a sharp distinction between legal contract on the one hand, and gift on the other hand. It is predominantly accepted that a gift can be

¹⁵⁸ John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), 124.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 136.

¹⁶⁰ John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language and Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 230.

This can be seen in Milbank's concept of the gift exchange between man and God, in particular, where he suggests that "without the virtue of worship there can be no other virtue, for worship gives everything back up to God, hangs onto nothing and so disallows any finite accumulation which will always engender conflict."

given with no prior attachment or agreement, and can essentially be a “free gift” with no strings attached. There is a sense in which a gift in modern society is understood to be “non-compulsory” and the giver may be unaffected by the response of the recipient. The difference between the modern sentiments of liberty and those of Milbank is that for Milbank’s finite gift there must be reciprocity; and for the modern thinker, there is a unilateral openness to finite gift giving. Here, gratuity paid at a restaurant provides a sufficient example. A tip to the waiter is a gift – one in which the customer may choose the amount and give generously more than one could anticipate.¹⁶¹ Nonetheless it is an *expected* free gift, so much so that the waiter works his personal budget around receiving this gift. This type of gift is a reward for a deed well done, yet it is always within the power of the giver to restrain from giving it. However, though it is expected, it does not compromise the tip’s identity as a gift freely given because of the choices wrapped up in its donation.

In considering the somewhat compulsory aspect of a gift and the obligatory status of a contract, Milbank recognizes the necessity of juxtaposing the two, and in doing so, appeals to Pierre Bourdieu’s two features of a gift.¹⁶² The first is that in order for a gift to be such, there must be a delay of return. For example if a sick mother in the hospital were to receive flowers, then her response should not be to immediately reach under her bed and donate flowers in return. This actually implies a lack of thankfulness as a result of the bed-ridden individual’s impulse to repay the favor and remove the debt accrued as a result of receiving a gift. The second of Bourdieu’s features of a gift is that the counter-

¹⁶¹ John Milbank, “Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), 126.

This example is borrowed from Milbank.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* 126.

gift must have some dissimilarity from the gift originally given. This does not overrule equivalence or similarity between gifts, but simply rules out a counter-gift being the exact same gift originally given. For example if one were to receive a pony, named Flash, from a friend for his birthday, then the recipient's counter-gift cannot be Flash. This would make a parody of the gift exchange, and would insinuate that the recipient either didn't accept the gift or had the pony on loan. Both of Bourdieu's features help distinguish the gift from the contract, but nonetheless even "the freest gift is still 'contaminated' by contract."¹⁶³ This leads to some sort of gift-exchange because of the expectation in the giver and receiver. Milbank suggests that the only way to maintain a gift as such and not hold it as euphemistic for contract is to see that gifts are given with elements of gratuity, and this gesture makes it irreducible to contract.¹⁶⁴ If the gift cannot be distinguished from contract then all is obligation, and love cannot be a burden or duty, it must be free and celebratory.

Milbank's conception of the Gift as it relates to the Ecclesial Community

What should the *telos* of the Church be as it relates to humanity? The aim of the church should be to love the poor. Who then, are the poor? What qualifies one as impoverished? As considered in chapter two, perhaps all persons are impoverished in the sense that they desire and love out of necessity, out of need. When one needs, and lacks the ability to fulfill said need, there is a sense in which the need may only be filled by

¹⁶³ Ibid. 126.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 126.

someone or something on the outside. This person or thing on the outside must give a gift to the one in need.¹⁶⁵ This concept of “the gift” is intimately connected to need, and consequentially, love and desire, and this is a concept that persons in the Church should take, receive and give to others.

There is a sense in which the Church - - and society at large - - does not pay attention to gifts as they are constantly and persistently given, re-given and sustained. Instead, once something has been given, it is owned and possessed by the receiver, and this is the end of exchange as it relates to that specific gift. Perhaps this is a limited way of viewing gifts, and it may benefit the Church to consider gifts a bit differently. Nevertheless, we do not want to emphasize here that gifts may be taken back or are not actually owned by the receiver once given, but rather that each gift is sustained and preserved by God. For Milbank, Divine gifts are infinitely sustained, reflecting the constant participatory spirit between humanity and the Divine. If all things given are being perpetually sustained, even after the initial exchange, then such sustaining deserves a new sense of gratitude from the Church. Such sustaining of gifts reflects God’s goodness, for only a God who is benevolent would sustain good gifts. This should re-instill the Church’s faith in God and his goodness, and consequentially, evoke a fresh thankfulness from the Church.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ How is it that one may give in the first place? In the economical sense, if one gives some-thing owned, then she, henceforward, lacks said thing. Does the giver then need to receive from another to replenish that which she gave? Love, as gift, must constantly be refreshed, replenished and re-given by the Divine, for as one gives that which she has been given, she will be given-to again in the appropriate measure that which she gave initially.

¹⁶⁶ Even one’s own body is perpetually sustained. What more could one be thankful for than the sustainment of one’s own corporeality and existence?

Similarly, human love exists because “God first loved us.” Perhaps this also reflects God’s perpetual sustainment of man. God does not simply love man once, and in so doing, wind up humanity’s ability to love. Perhaps instead, every single love is perpetuated and sustained. That is, even down to one’s love for brushing one’s own teeth is a love sustained because of God’s first love. Every good love has a Divine origination, and Milbank sees the normative New Testament notion affirming, “that wherever love and mercy are shown, there divine charity is present.”¹⁶⁷ A re-assessment of such Divine presence would greatly benefit every aspect of how the Church loves in response to Divine love.

Another way in which Milbank may help the church re-consider itself is through his concept of exchange. Because exchange -- gift giving – is prized, the church operates with intentions and hopes for others which come in cycles of gift exchange – movements outside of oneself directed towards the highest good of others, sustained by gratitude. This concept of gift-giving then turns one from being inward to expressing outwardly towards those within his life, and this is worship -- the very *telos* of the church. Worship leads a community into deeper fellowship with The Divine, and opens one’s horizon up to the beatific vision of life with God. Whenever one reaches out from herself towards the good of the other, there is participation, worship and ethics.

The Church needs to “think again God’s love, and think creation as a manifestation of that love.”¹⁶⁸ Humanity was not created because God needed someone, (for The Triune God existed as a community within himself) but rather was given out of

¹⁶⁷ John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri De Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2005), 22.

¹⁶⁸ John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*. Cambridge, (MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 50.

the natural process of love within the Trinity; because of the excess of love. The natural entailment of the Triune love was the creation of humanity: a people who can commune with The Triune God. This excess of love, this creation *out of* love is a gift. As such, The Church can once again see the exchange and reciprocity that occurs with God every time one chooses to love. When one enters the Trinitarian fellowship, she is to return to her world with excess love. For John Milbank, this concept of exchange is prized as the very heart and soul of the Church, though great care should be taken to not speak entirely conclusively on the subject for it is, ultimately, a sacred mystery hidden in the intra-Trinitarian life of God.

CHAPTER 5

THE *APORIA* OF DIVINE LOVE

The infinite God is “off-limits,” yet gives himself to the finite in revelation. God *is* pure mystery for humanity, yet finite beings may experience and understand in part. God is *ho on*, and has reminded us of his depth and transcendent nature as the “I AM.” Though this message of transcendence has come through finite means, which suggest his immanent presence in the finite realm, this does not lead one to assume any sort of Divine finitude, for though he has revealed himself, (*Deus Revelatus*), he has only done so in part (*Deus Absconditus*) - - this supports Milbank’s conclusion that God has and will always maintain a mysterious nature. For as we will see, Milbank maintains this transcendent and mysterious God to be wholly other than man yet still offer a way for finite persons to participate with him in the world. Thus, Milbank seems to straddle the border between transcendence and immanence, as it relates to the Divine. Throughout this chapter it will become clear that Milbank also attempts to straddle this border with Divine love as well. Due to Milbank’s subscription to the traditional version of the

Doctrine of Divine Simplicity, God's love, though able to be experienced, will always remain, in some sense, a *mysterium*.

How then do we identify Divine love? Can we create a method for being able to better grasp Divine love in the instances in which we see it in the finite realm? Milbank suggests that "we can't give these [identity conditions] in advance else we'd be able to trap and catch God like a butterfly. But Divine love is both the light we see all by and the things seen. When these two almost fuse, that's the closest we're getting."¹⁶⁹ Milbank would suggest that at the end of the day, Divine love is an *aporia*, or some sort of puzzle that will not be figured out, for "though we glimpse a solution" we do not fully understand it. An example of the mysterious nature of Divine love would be in the infinite-finite gift exchange. In this exchange, "Divine love asks [for] no return and yet its entirely experienced throughout as the grateful return we make else its not experienced at all."¹⁷⁰ The Divine, loving gift is qualified by the individual's acceptance and reciprocation, and without these, the individual did not receive the gift.

Milbank would contend that even before the fall of man Divine love was mysterious. It was not sin that caused man to lose full knowledge of God, instead man never had full knowledge of himself, much less God. Therefore, one cannot have the expectation to ever be so redeemed as to fully know, in an infinite way, Divine Love. However man can fully experience Divine love, but only to the hilt of his finite capacity. There is a proper gap between the finite and the infinite; the post-lapsarian state of humanity is not entirely to blame for this distance between God and man, as there is a

¹⁶⁹ John Milbank, Personal communication to J.W. Alvis, August 19, 2008.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

natural component to the space between humanity and the Divine. If it were not for this space there would be no difference, no actual dissimilarity that would lead to communion.¹⁷¹ Therefore, Divine love has never been a solely phenomenological venture, for love is bound up in the distance between two persons or beings. Man was, and still is, finite; bewildered by, and grasping for the infinite. Though one is able to love, it is with a fragmented love, which must be refined. This wisp of love exists only as an imitation of the infinite love that may never be fully understood.

For Milbank, one's pursuit into understanding Divine love is an advance as measureless and infinite as one's pursuit of God. It is a quest never to be complete. This is how Divine love must be, for if man's love "does not analogically participate in simple and infinite love, then a supposedly 'clear' grasp of its formality precludes any further (and endless) *advance* into its mystery..."¹⁷² This mystery would then result in a permanent secret, shut in God. The result of such a view would end in love "inescapably obscure," rendering it unthinkable, undoable and unspeakable for man. Instead, it is thinkable, though fragmentarily at best. *The Gift* - - in this case The Holy Spirit - - has ushered man into the Trinitarian exchange, a communion where love has been infinitely shared.

¹⁷¹ If there were no natural distance between God and man then we would have pantheistic or panentheistic frameworks, for if there is nothing to know and no question about an-other, then there is no division between man and God. The lack of a distance or some - - at least dim - - division must result in all beings sharing one essence. Even within the God-head there is a proper sort of dissimilarity that allows for the three persons of God to interact with one another as distinct (but intact) persons.

¹⁷² John Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror," in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 285.

Love as Analogical

“Love is analogical, not univocal...” for the love of things “is only analogous to the higher love of persons and this in turn to the love of God.”¹⁷³ Milbank means to suggest that we can only speak of Divine love in so far as we can speak of it analogously, in a comparative way (e.g. love is grace, love is like a bomb, love is in our hearts, love is in the lion’s mane, etc.). Love is itself an analogy, and must be spoken of as such - - Divine love must be spoken of with an intentional ambiguity so to not misspeak of Divine love. Therefore, we must speak of Divine love on the terms of how humanity experiences it: through the love of things and of persons. For Milbank, Divine love must be spoken of analogically because it cannot be spoken of with certitude in a way that the vast, infinite difference between man and God is not recognized. Finite love is also mysterious and “is complexly spoken of and exemplified just because it is an incurably imprecise analogical concept that indicates no reality other than the mysterious fact that certain diverse experiences and feelings appear...”¹⁷⁴ Clearly for Milbank, the topic of love must be approached with a certain cautiousness; to speak of Divine love is to speak of the Divine.

Milbank does not suggest going about the search for Divine love in a modern way. One’s modern pursuit of certitude can be analogous to a pirate going on a treasure hunt, collecting hints along the way of where the treasure is, and once all of the puzzle’s components are figured out he can fully understand the location of the treasure; in this

¹⁷³ Ibid. 286.

¹⁷⁴ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon. Radical Orthodoxy Series*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 203.

case, the hunt is over and complete. The treasure no longer has any sort of mystery or complexity which the Pirate must discover. The treasure is fully understood, and thereby loses its value for what sort of potential it no longer may hold for said pirate. This, for Milbank, is *not* how one should go about the search for God or Divine love - - all in order to deduce his whereabouts, fully disclose him, and reveal his secret hiding place for all the world to see. God has not fully disclosed himself but has, on the contrary, left much to be (if ever to-be) discovered. It is in this line of thought that Milbank once again critiques Marion for having a far too determinate theory of love. Marion seizes the possibility of stripping Divine love away from The Divine Being, and therefore making love a subject that is capable of being fully digested. This supposed exhaustion of the topic of love is dichotomous with Milbank's Doctrine of Divine Simplicity where he would propose that God is as a simple being, one not composed of different attributes, but essentially acting *as* love, as a simple being.

An Augustinian Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

In Milbank's view there is no partitioning of God's attributes. For Milbank, to speak of God's love is to necessarily speak of his essence. Humanity cannot fully speak of God's essence and therefore, as Milbank concludes, one cannot fully speak of God's love. Milbank attests to a view that abandons the idea of *properties* in God and instead sees love as an *act* of who God is. He proposes that it is best to see God not as a complex being in the way that we see human persons (i.e. beings who express properties composed together to make the whole person), but rather as a simple being composed of

one *esse*. Milbank appeals to an Augustinian Doctrine of Divine simplicity, one which denies that God has any properties. For Rogers this version of The Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (henceforward referred to as DDS) submits that God is not a set of properties but instead “is an act... an eternal, immutable, absolutely simple act.”¹⁷⁵ Though Milbank does not see God as housing properties, this does not necessarily disrupt God’s personhood. Though, of course, Divine personhood would not be the same as that which characterizes humanity.

Milbank agrees with Augustine’s version of the DDS. Augustine held to what is now considered the traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity, one which asserts that “God simply is an act, and all the words we use to describe God refer to this act.”¹⁷⁶ God is not made up of *actions* or attributes, but the actions essentially *are* who God is. Rogers concludes that the traditional doctrine “depends on an entire system of classic metaphysical assumptions...”¹⁷⁷ which are different than the modern metaphysical notions. Wolterstorff points out that these assumptions are not like those of modern ontology, or “relation ontology, and as part of this difference we work with a different view of essence.”¹⁷⁸ Wolterstorff sees the DDS affirming that God’s “essence or quiddity is not something other than his being.”¹⁷⁹ That is, God’s existence is not something distinct or separate from God’s nature.

¹⁷⁵K. Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies*, (32, 2, 1996), 165-186.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 165-186.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 165-186.

¹⁷⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity,” in *Philosophical Perspectives* (5, 1991), 547.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 549.

Both Augustine and Milbank would insist that God is immutable, and likewise, all of his acts as he is a “simple” being.¹⁸⁰ God *is* not *because* he loves, instead He is *as* He *is* love. If God’s being was dependent upon his expression of love, then God would stand at the end of a chain of causes within himself. This would threaten his immutability because of the internal change that would occur as a result of this newly achieved ability to love. This would look like the Cartesian “*causa sui*, according to which God is ‘cause of himself’ rather than [Milbank’s] simple ‘first cause’, or absolute ground of all causality.”¹⁸¹ For Milbank, God is the source and ground of all beings and a “God who loves as he is ‘to be’ according to an absolute, self-grounded necessity.”¹⁸² This is a reversion to Thomistic sentiments of *esse* which proclaims God to be the head of causation, and thus not subject to causality.¹⁸³ This reversion must be made now in the 21st century in order to correct the blunders of Modernity.

The Doctrine of Divine Simplicity understands love to be the very essence of God. This approach turns the modern concept of love on its head, for under the Augustinian view, love cannot be fully spoken of or explicated. Love is not a topic that is as exhaustible as say an algebraic theorem - - a chain or link of established and

¹⁸⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 6.7.8. Augustine suggests that “We speak of God in many ways—as great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatever else does not seem unworthily said of him. Nonetheless, God is identical with his greatness, which is his wisdom (since he is not great by virtue of quantity, but by virtue of power); and he is identical with his goodness, which is his wisdom and his greatness; and he is identical with his truth, which is all of these things. For in him it is not one thing to be blessed and another to be great, or wise, or true, or to be good, or to be altogether himself.”

¹⁸¹ John Milbank, “Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology* (11, 1995), 143.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* 143.

¹⁸³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), I, 38.

For Aquinas, “In every simple thing, its being and *that which it is* are the same. For if the one were not the other, simplicity would be removed. As we have shown, however, God is absolutely simple. Hence, in God, being good is not anything distinct from him; he *is* his goodness.”

accepted truths. Nor can love be measured by drawing a line between two distances as the space is marked. Instead, it is in some sense, an *aporia*, and for Milbank, may remain so even into the Eschaton. Though the topic of love can be pronounced it cannot be fully articulated. Further, this does not simply refer to Divine love, but also to man's love for things or other persons.

Love of Things

In Augustine's view, even man's sin is his love; whatever one moves towards is his love. Sin is that misguided love which has been warped by the evil in the world. To sin is to love a thing, person and perhaps even God, improperly. Every-thing which man puts his energies toward is a result of his love for it, or for some-thing which it will lead to.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, all desire is shaped by love: love for a *thing*, this includes the persons of the Trinity, and one's neighbor. Every-thing God created should be loved (e.g. trees, colors and shapes, smells,), nevertheless things may be loved improperly.¹⁸⁵

For Augustine, there is no distinction between love and rightly directed desire, or *dilectio*; the two are almost synonymous, for to desire a thing is to love that thing.

Between Augustine's use of *delicto* and *amor*, there is little distinction as the two are used interchangeably to describe the love of man for objects and God, and the love of

¹⁸⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*. Trans Edward B. Pusey, (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1961), X.

Augustine suggests that God is always the final love of all loves and the object of one's loves. To love a thing is not to simply love it solely for its own good, but for the good that it leads to in the Divine.

¹⁸⁵ See also Wendell Berry, "How to be a Poet (To Remind Myself)," in *Given: New Poems*, (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).

All things have an original makeup of goodness as they originate in the Divine. Berry seems to reflect Augustine's sentiment well in suggesting that "there are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places, and desecrated places."

God for man.¹⁸⁶ Perhaps we can consider the implications of such a view upon how we see Divine love. If God's love is synonymous with his desire and there is no possibility of his loving a thing improperly - - there are only rightly guided desires in him - - then God is ever loving, just as he is ever desiring. God's love is an endless act.¹⁸⁷

In finite loves, to love a thing properly is to recognize its Divine origination and therefore find it desirable. All things - - including human persons - - ultimately originated in the Divine and are to be loved as such. For Augustine, even the three persons of the Godhead are "things."¹⁸⁸ Perhaps this Augustinian view is what helps Milbank to conclude that "love of persons cannot be disentangled from love of things anymore than love itself can be considered apart from being and understanding."¹⁸⁹ This is how love seems to work; every act of love communicates the ontological character of the thing loved and the thing loving, and each moment of love is to be interpreted and apprehended.

Finite love, as described by Ricoeur, takes all of one's attention from other things of importance. When man loves, all other objects of one's concern become less of the focal point than one particular object or idea as "the discourse of love is initially a

¹⁸⁶ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*. (New Haven CT: Yale Press, 1980), 11.

¹⁸⁷ Perhaps humanity's finitude and depravity prevents from loving and desiring interminably as God does. Man may only direct his loves and desires towards a limited number of things at one time, and the objects of such loves change over-time, unlike God's love.

¹⁸⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Ed. D. W. Robertson, (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958), II. Augustine seems to use the word "things" quite openly. To the modern ear, the word "thing" somehow implies the lack of personhood, but this doesn't seem to be what Augustine is getting at. Perhaps this is Augustine's platonic influence shining through a bit, as there is a sort of material qualification that Augustine requires in order for a thing to be such.

¹⁸⁹ John Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror," in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 278.

discourse of praise.”¹⁹⁰ To praise is to focus one’s attention from herself and other things; to love a thing found to be worth loving. Praise is both an action and a state of being; it is ethics. In order to love one finds value in the other - - the person, or thing, is worth praising and love begins for that thing.

Love’s Relation to The “Will”

As noted earlier, Milbank poses that the secular and modern understandings of love are doomed to lead to nihilism. Because of the intended *telos* or aim of such a love, it is bound to be meaningless. The modern concept of love sees little or no distinction between finite and infinite loves. They are essentially the same thing: an expression, attribute and an ability to properly care for another. This is in part due to a Cartesian understanding of the “will.” For “Descartes, [human] will can be univocally equal to God’s [will].”¹⁹¹ That is, for Descartes, there is no real difference between God’s *will* and humanity’s *will*. Since the finite and infinite *wills* share the same quality, the Divine *will* ends up, by default, looking much like man’s *will* - - qualified as mere intention and initiation of action. If God’s will is constructed of the same elements as man’s, then so too is God’s love, for love is a direct expression of the *will*. Instead of this faulty conception of *will*, Milbank sees *will* as the place where the finite may participate with the infinite in decision, pursuit and initiation. Milbank suggests that “‘will,’ in Augustine, names the drastic participatory tension between the infinitely general and the

¹⁹⁰ Paul Ricoeur and Mark I. Wallace, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 317.

¹⁹¹ John Milbank, Personal communication to J.W. Alvis. August 19, 2008.

finitely particular.”¹⁹² That is, human *will* must be understood only as it is inter-related to the Divine. For if one is willing along side the Divine, then it is necessarily good-will. The will is “only actual and effective when it wills the good –hence for both Dionysius and Augustine, it is not exactly the case that evil can be willed; rather there is evil precisely to the degree that there is an absence of willing. No one, as willing, wills anything but the good, and evil only affects the will to the extent that a deficient good is being willed.”¹⁹³ Milbank precisely names *the will* to only be maintained as such when it is directed towards the good and with God. This is clearly in contrast with the Cartesian view that sees *will* as that which may be directed and wielded by a Being apart from the Divine.

In speaking of his will, “My weight,” says Augustine, “is my love”(*pondus meum amor meus*).¹⁹⁴ The will is at the very heart of one’s loving. Augustine proposed that the “will,” -- or the “potency,” as Milbank suggests -- by which one makes decisions and acts

¹⁹² John Milbank, “Darkness and Silence: Evil and the Western Legacy,” in *The Religious: Blackwell Readings in Continental Philosophy*, Ed. John D. Caputo, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 285.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 281.

Milbank goes on to note that contra “postmodern Kantians...privation theory seems to imply a root of evil prior to power and will...” *emphasis mine*. This undermines Milbank’s concept of Being which he finds in the Christian tradition: that of a pure self-originating infinite Being who is good, indefeasibly good. “Free will” was naturally created only knew the will of the good. One’s willing can only be such when it is aimed at the good, properly.

See Augustine, *City of God*, trans John Healey, Juan Luis Vives, R. V. G. Tasker, and Ernest Barker, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1945), XIV, II.

See also Augustine, *On The Free Choice of the Will*. trans Anna S. Benjamin, and L. H. Hackstaff. (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), III, 18.

Milbank appeals to Augustine here to support his view on will. Augustine considers the will to be free when one is not in sin and sin binds the will and holds it captive; suffocates it from activity. Perhaps we can consider will to be situation particular in such a way that one holds many wills. One holds as many wills as she does life circumstances or situations in which those wills would be expressive. Or, perhaps, one has innumerable expressions of his will and instead of the will being unidirectional (either for “this” one thing or against “that” other thing) the will may be ever acting for one good, while being smothered by sin to pursue another good; that is, one may have his will bound in relation to one particular sin -- or love gone wrong -- and in another part of his life, have a free will aimed at loving the good. For Augustine “the choice of the will...is genuinely free, only when it is not subservient to faults and sins.”

¹⁹⁴ Augustine, quoted in *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*. By Etienne Gilson, trans. L.E.M. Lynch, (New York, NY: Random House, 1960), 134.

upon them, is in a sort triune relationship with love and knowledge. In *The Trinity*, Augustine compares the Triune God with man and suggests that within man, there is a pseudo-triune nature. This tri-unity is made up of will, knowledge and love. Through better understanding the connections between these three “parts” of man, one will better understand the Triune God. However, Descartes’ mistake was a drastic one, for humanity cannot fully understand God by considering this tri-unity of humanity. Therefore, there is a connection between Descartes’ univocal understanding of the will, and its affects upon the modern concepts of love and knowledge. Milbank suggests that this univocal concept of the will “detaches love from knowledge and so from recognition.”¹⁹⁵ He sees these concepts as necessarily connected, and from here we will survey Milbank’s consideration of the dialectic between love and knowledge.

Love and Knowledge

Milbank poses that within “secular love is an unknowing unilateral love and so knowledge is correspondingly a banal symmetrical bond of representation without love.”¹⁹⁶ Knowledge without love is impossible, for one cannot know anything without rightly directed desire towards knowing some-thing. The secular pursuit is found in an over qualification of knowledge that strips it of life, movement and faith, and thus sees it as stale information which one can cognitively comprehend and store. Instead, Milbank poses that knowledge seeks to love just as true love seeks to know. “Love, since it is love

¹⁹⁵ John Milbank, Personal communication to J.W. Alvis. August 19, 2008.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

of the known, cannot be fully known only as love.”¹⁹⁷ One’s loving or desiring must reflect knowledge of the thing loved or desired. This is not knowledge as simply information, but also knowledge as experience - - lived experience, that which cannot be theorized.

The way- - though not the solution - - of attaining understanding of a thing or idea is to have a collection of knowledge or experiences of other things and ideas. Milbank suggests that “perhaps love can *only* be classified by its positive relation to other *genera* of being and reflection or else to other semi-transcendental aspects of reality like knowing and *aisthesis*.”¹⁹⁸ Love, knowledge and aesthetics are all intimately related to the good, true and beautiful. In order for one to speak of love, she must speak also of the other transcendentals. Though Milbank is often found critiquing Marion’s ontology, there seems to be some commonality between the two as to how to speak of love. For Marion, the themes of idolatry, the gift and love are so closely linked that one cannot speak of one without also speaking of the others.¹⁹⁹ This is Milbank’s approach to the topic of love also, as he rarely speaks of it as a stand alone concept. That is, because of God’s mysterious nature, there is always a relation which love must have with something else, an inter-relatedness that love must share with other acts. Because of God’s simplicity, Milbank cannot speak of Divine love as an autonomous, stand-alone attribute. Instead, God reflects the unification of love and knowledge, and acts them out simultaneously in his nature and life; he does not pick and choose which action will fit for each specific situation.

¹⁹⁷ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 286.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 276-287.

¹⁹⁹ Bruce Ellis Benson, “Love Is a Given - Jean-Luc Marion Tests the Limits of Logic,” *The Christian Century* (120, 2003), 22.

Love and Affinity

To love something, to have a certain natural draw to someone, this is affinity. For Milbank, “Affinity is the absolute non-theorizable, it is the almost ineffable. Affinity is the mysterium. And it is the beyond-the-ethical which alone gives us the ethical, for without affinity, love can only be the merely moral and immanent command to put the other first, a self-abasement before the rival egotism of the other...”²⁰⁰ The good news of affinity is that it can only be supplied by God, for one’s loving The Divine involves being akin to him - that is, made in his likeness. Milbank recommends that this image is an ineffable likeness that spurs on the non-theorizable affinity of another. Affinity is beyond nature; a supernatural gift. Affinity, or ontological kinship, must be activated through God’s expression of love. For finite loves must always come from the infinite love. God’s love must be infinitely distinct from our own. If there is no way in which God could possess or maintain a love greater than our own, and we are left up to our own finite means of attaining that love, then there is no basis for love. At best, humans may express finite love to its fullest capacity, but because of the privation of humanity even this ability has been scarred. Human love is, and can only be, a pale reflection of the obscure, mysterious and infinite love.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon, Radical Orthodoxy Series*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 203.

²⁰¹ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, Ed. Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 289.

“Love, then, can only be known as the obscure love of infinite knowledge; it can only be pursued as the obscure knowledge of infinite love.”

Divine love as an *Aporia*, and its relation to the Ecclesial Community

As mentioned in previous sections, Milbank sees modernity to have made its way through the doors of the church. This time, modernity has given a false impression of God, one that leaves him static and straightforward. God has been deduced, and this leaves him transfixed between humanity and divinity; that is, we know God's capacities and limits because he is limited to how we perceive him. This consideration of God leaves the church content with the familiar and known God, and does not leave room for any discovery or newness in and through him, nor does it allow for any sort of awe towards such a God. One's satisfaction and contentment with her understanding of the Divine (and ultimately his love) results in her losing interest in exploration. In one's making the reduction of God's love to a theorem, she is requiring that God perform within the parameters of such a theorem. This sort of disallowance is a fateful flaw for all persons of the church. It is a loss for all when one reduces the love of God to a trite concept or a fully penetrable phenomenon.

It seems as if this mistake may be traced back to the modern conception of progress; where man's ability to love is growing along with his knowledge and technological prowess. Man is getting closer to divinity, day by day. This sort of modern thinking leads the Church to believe that Divine love is, in effect, fully penetrable and knowable. In attempting to glorify human love, we do injustice to how we consider Divine love, and are ultimately guilty of making the infinite, finite.

Contrarily, Milbank's message is one of Divine love as it most truly exists in *mysterium tremendum*. This view should lead the church to relax its grip on some of the

limitations it has set on God. A mysterious God requires that one have faith in him not just *despite* the unknown, but *precisely because* there are things unknown. Though we may catch glimpses of Divine love, there is most always a sense in which we question it. When faced with the unknown, we tend to waver and hesitate, we doubt. This sort of doubt is what makes faith possible, and allows it to change and become greater. Instead of the Church simply resting in the assurance of doctrine, she should never be content with her life with the absolute; this life only flourishes in the mode of discovery.

Additionally, the idea of the Divine love as mysterious should provide for the Church a great encouragement. If it is possible for persons in the Church to embrace such mystery, then perhaps they may find encouragement in a love much greater than their own loves; much greater than their needs, much greater than their idea of Divine love. This should provide a certain sort of excitement in the church, as God's love is mysteriously even greater than can possibly be imagined. Such a reminder of the mystery of God's love should lead us to see that we are not on our own, and that there is still more love and goodness to discover in the future.

Another way that the Church may benefit from Milbank's work is found in the recognition that everyone always loves some-thing. This concept, as applied to the Church, should re-arrange some of the ways that sin is viewed. Sinfulness is not simply a *state*, but also a multitude of choices to love things inappropriately. A closer look at this idea may help the Church in dealing more appropriately with sin. Seeing sin as misguided love seems to be much more appropriate to offering humanity a certain sort of dignity. If sin can be described as misguided love, and one's sin as an *attempt* to love

properly, then we may offer a greater dignity to others.²⁰² If individuals are attempting to love properly and make decisions they think to be best, then perhaps the Christian community may relax its grip on some inappropriate judgmentalism directed towards other's sinfulness. That is to say, in seeing sinfulness as improper love, we may offer others dignity because the aim of individuals' love is proper love. Properly understanding the trajectory of one's loves helps us to offer a different sort of compassion towards them, irrespective of their acknowledgement of this.

²⁰² This is not to say, however, that sin, even as misguided love, does not carry with it a dose of healthy shame and woe. This is also not to say that sin as pure evil should be disregarded or the deprived state of humanity ignored.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this thesis, we established the tremendous significance of this topic of love. One's concept or experience of Divine love is a linchpin to all other theological streams of thought. It is the crux upon which Christian theology rests, for without a God of love, the entire system of Christianity must fail. If no God of love then the Christian story may be committed to the flames. Milbank proposes that "love is the most perennial human need; Christianity is the religion which most places love at its heart."²⁰³ Therefore, as it has been shown, this topic of love is essential for the Church to understand, for out of such understanding blooms appropriate Christian praxis. Thus, it has been necessary that we offer Milbank's re-narrations of that love, in an attempt to better understand the significance of the topic.

Throughout this paper we have considered John Milbank's conception of Divine love, and how it speaks, as a corrective, to the modern misunderstandings of love and consequentially Divine love. This paper has charted some of the ways the Christian understandings of these loves have been negatively shaped by modernity. Such negative influence upon the Church requires, in Milbankian fashion, a sort of re-narration, or re-

²⁰³ John Milbank, "The Future of Love: A reading of Benedict XVI's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*," (http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_TheFutureOfLove.pdf., Date Accessed: April 24, 2008), 1.

telling of Divine love. Such re-narration calls for a return to pre-modern understandings of Divine love, and a revival of its importance, breadth and depth in all theological discourse. The most formidable of Milbank's contributions is found not in the newness of RO's ideas in the theological community, or the avant-garde style of Milbank, but rather the ways in which RO hopes to re-inject pre-modern theology into our post-modern community, and in so doing, re-focus the Church upon its core beliefs.

This thesis hopes to have untangled the oddities and features of Milbank's God of love as well as his explication for his difference from other contemporary considerations. As we have examined, Milbank considers the phenomenologies of love formed out of the modern mind to be not at all reflective of the existence of the Christian, triune God. The secular arrangement of love presumes only a finite future "in terms of this-worldly success," however an arrangement which sees love as characterized by the Divine first love, opens up a future of promise.²⁰⁴ To love and to be loved is to hope for love. In order for love to-be, there must always be a future for such love. RO has "continuously acknowledged that the biblical legacy introduces, in a radical sense, that God is personal and loving, that he creates, brings about developments within time, and orientates us towards an eschatological future."²⁰⁵ All of these essential components of RO are necessarily dependant upon their understanding of Divine love.

After establishing the significance of this topic of love, we considered some of the more general features of RO and Milbank's theological interests. In so doing, we established why Milbank's understanding of love is of particular interest. We have

²⁰⁴ John Milbank, "Scholasticism, Modernism and Modernity," *Modern Theology* (22, 2006), 663.

²⁰⁵ John Milbank, in Rupert Short's *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation*, (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2005.), 107.

shown how Milbank sees love as an act manifested in the world, available to the senses, and phenomenologically discernable. In order for one to love at all, she must first be loved by God. This consideration of finite and infinite loves led us into an investigation of the significant features of Milbank's participatory ontology, and how participation marks a very basic and fundamental component of that love. Through his participatory framework, we considered the characteristics of how such reciprocity leads to gift-exchange and ultimately Divine gift-exchange. If Divine love is a gift, then in order to better understand Divine love, one must also better understand the nature and essence of a gift and given-ness; to understand Divine love *as* gift. Lastly we considered Milbank's proposal that we are infinitely limited in how we may understand love. Though it is essential to further consider Divine love, we must live with a present tension, as Marion concludes, "we live with love as if we knew what it was about. But as soon as we try to define it, or at least approach it with concepts, it draws away from us."²⁰⁶ As shown in this thesis, Milbank most often speaks of Divine love analogously, thereby avoiding a univocal claim to understanding it. He reminds us of the carefulness with which we should approach this topic in his claiming that it is, ultimately, an *aporia*.

We have considered some of the ways in which Milbank's understanding of Divine love may affect the Ecclesial community, and it seems as if the implications are vast and far-reaching. Like every good theologian, Milbank wants his theology to enter the doors of the Church, yet he does not necessarily give pragmatic steps for persons to follow in order to experience God more truly and deeply. Consideration of the ecclesial

²⁰⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, Trans. Stephen E. Lewis, (New York: Fordham UP, 2002), 71.

Perhaps, because of Marion's univocal understanding of finite and infinite loves, finite love ends up looking more mysterious and open ended, like the infinite love.

implications of Milbank's thought raises the dialectic between the theoretical and the practical.²⁰⁷ Blondel notes that "Every doctrine which does not reach the one thing necessary, every separated philosophy, will remain deceived by false appearances. It will be a doctrine, it will not be Philosophy."²⁰⁸ This seems to expand the definition of philosophy (and necessarily theology) to include the necessitation of one's praxis and action upon her thetic roots or beliefs. For Blondel, in order for one to actually *do* philosophy she must have some sort of action or comportment that is a result of her endeavor. Surely Milbank would agree that one must (not out of a societal expectation, but a natural necessitation) act upon his or her philosophies and theologies; that is, Milbank wants to see reason and faith reintegrated, after the modern turn in society which placed a strict division between the two.²⁰⁹ Philosophy or theology that is not taken and believed should not be considered as such.²¹⁰ In this sense, should not the role and purpose of theology in the Church be reconsidered?²¹¹ Milbank hopes to redeem

²⁰⁷ Is there a sort of progression which one goes through in order to see practical change? Does practical change always move from the head, that is the theoretical sphere, or do both constantly inform one another? If life change is only prompted through theoretical re-configuration, then could it be possible for a person to simply create her own world by will-power and a re-structuring of their cognitive strata so that they might believe or live a certain way?

²⁰⁸ Maurice Blondel, quoted in Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2008), vi.

²⁰⁹ This is not to say reason has faith in tow, or faith has reason in tow, but rather that the two inform and are woven into the fibers of one another.

²¹⁰ John Milbank, "Faith, Reason and Imagination: the Study of Theology and Philosophy in the 21st Century," (<http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers.php#milbank> posted 2007. Date accessed: January 26, 2008), 13-19.

See the section of this paper where he considers Pope Benedict's great Ratisbon address, in which the Pope diagnoses the ideological problem of the 21st century. Milbank concludes that "The philosophy of the 20thC was predicated on the autonomy of pure reason and the impossibility of metaphysical speculation. Latterly, however, we have seen the deconstruction of the attempts even to define the limits of what can properly be known about, whether in the case of Derrida's critique of Husserl, or Rorty's consummation of the critique of the analytic enterprise. Conjoined to this is the collapse of the ideologies of finitude: positivism, Marxism, Freudianism, even Darwinism. But this has left an appalling vacuum."

²¹¹ John Milbank, "Faith, Reason and Imagination: the Study of Theology and Philosophy in the 21st Century," (<http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers.php#milbank> posted 2007. Date accessed: January 26, 2008), 1-6.

Christianity by expropriating theology from the modern choke-hold, under which it has been for far too long. Christianity may return to its primordial roots through theological re-narration, and in so doing, Christian persons may move from the theoretical elements of true, historical Christianity to the non-thetic experiential ones where persons recognize the utter significance of participation in and with the Divine and that Divine love. Since he writes so extensively, it is clearly the case that Milbank believes *in* the significance of the theoretical; scholarly theological enterprises have a trickle down effect into the Church. This reflects the belief that there is a sense in which the thetic relationship one has with something (e.g. Christian doctrine) will lead to some outflow or comportment in life qua life. That is, when one has adjusted their noetic structure and belief system to include, for example, a God who loves, then there is a natural sort of behavior or comportment that comes along with such a thought or belief. John Milbank personally recognizes the significance of Divine love upon his own life, for as we have seen, he believes in Divine love, through it, by it, under it and along side it.

see also Dominique Janicaud et al, *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': the French Debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak, (New York: Fordham UP 2000), 5-7.

Janicaud offers more of a polemical view of theology being smuggled back into philosophy via phenomenology. For Janicaud, Marion, et al, have erred by trying to make phenomenology work for theological measures. This quest for the "essence of phenomenality" has been in efforts to find that which is originary or "pure phenomenality." According to Bernard Prusak, Janicaud claims that this theological turn in phenomenology can be traced back to the roots of Pope John Paul II in his *Fides et Ratio* (1998) where he calls those who are in the field of philosophy to "move from phenomenon to foundation." For Marion, phenomenology should be "about" the things which interest phenomenology (i.e. the "things themselves."), not about "doing" phenomenology.

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