

Love One Another as I Have Loved You

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Introduction

This article will shed light on the deepest manifestations of love and why love is our reason for being, our highest dignity, and our eternal destiny. When we understand “love” in this way, we will also see the goodness and power of suffering to help us actualize this highest love in our lives, and in view of this, we will no longer be able to view suffering as a mere negative, but as one of the most powerful agents of positive change in our lives. As such, suffering cannot be meaningless—for it leads us to our *ultimate* purpose—eternal and unconditional love with God and the blessed throughout eternity.

Our dominant view of happiness will influence (and probably determine) the way we view love. Furthermore, the way we view happiness and love will affect the way we view suffering. Hence we will structure this article as follows:

- I. A Brief Review of the Four Levels of Happiness
- II. The Four Levels of Love
- III. The Four Kinds of Love
- IV. Suffering and Exceptional Love in the Lives of Saints

I.

Brief Review of the Four Levels of Happiness

A brief description of the Four Levels of Happiness might help in understanding the four levels of love. Recall that the lower levels are immediately gratifying, surface apparent, and intensive, while the higher levels are pervasive, enduring, and deep—but not vice versa. Level 1 arises out of the satisfaction of physical-material desires—such as a good bowl of linguini, nice clothes, a good car, and a fine bottle of wine. Level 2 arises out of ego-comparative advantage, coming to us from increases or comparative advantage in status, popularity, power, control, giftedness, intelligence, athleticism, beauty, and of course winning. Level 3 comes from making a positive difference to someone or something beyond ourselves—making the world optimally better off for our having lived—such as making a contribution to family, friends, community, church, kingdom of God, society, or culture. Level 4 comes from satisfaction of our transcendental desires—the desire to be in relationship with God through religious community, prayer, worship, and sacred time and symbols. It is incited not only by our interior experience of God (the numinous experience), but also our conscience and our desire for perfect and unconditional truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home.

We looked at three fundamental problems with remaining on Levels 1 and 2—namely underliving our lives (not making the contributions or legacy we could have), existential emptiness, and the negative emotions of the “comparison game” (jealousy, fear of loss of esteem, inferiority, superiority and contempt, loneliness, resentment, self-pity, ego rage, ego sensitivities, etc.). We saw that these difficulties could lead to a profoundly unhappy, unmeaningful, and empty life if we do not move to Levels 3 and/or 4. Moreover, we saw that Level 3 is not capable

of satisfying our restless hearts; for without Level 4, we feel a sense of cosmic emptiness, loneliness, alienation, and guilt coming from the absence of a relationship with the Divine and an absence of ultimate purpose, dignity, and destiny.

We concluded from this that true happiness includes transcendent happiness which brings Level 3 contributive Happiness to its fulfillment, and allows Level 3 Happiness, in turn, to bring Levels 1 and 2 Happiness to their proper fulfillment. When the four levels are present, we do not have to worry about living for physical gratifications alone—they can bring us happiness in their own proper way without bearing the burden of having to bring us ultimate, pervasive, enduring, and deep happiness—which they cannot do. Similarly, when we allow Levels 3 and 4 happiness to have a higher place, we don't have to make intelligence, athleticism, beauty, status, power, etc. ends in themselves. We can enjoy the gifts we have—not because they make us better than others, but because we can use them to make an optimal positive difference to family, friends, community, Church, the kingdom of God, etc. Finally, we don't have to make contributions in this world an end in themselves. When we allow Level 4 to have the highest place, we can make contributions for the sake of the eternal salvation of others, the kingdom of God, and the will of the Lord who calls us ultimately to Himself. All four levels of happiness are good, but only the 4th Level of happiness can bring the others to their proper fulfillment. If we make lower levels of happiness ends in themselves, they will ultimately leave us dissatisfied, empty, and alienated—opening the way to disappointment, calamity, and even despair.

II. Four Levels of Love

As noted above, as our view of happiness goes, so also goes our view of love; so inasmuch as there are four levels of happiness, there will also be four levels of love. We will discuss each level in turn.

II.A Level 1 and 2 Love

If we have a dominant Level 1 view of happiness, we are likely to think of love as the fulfillment of libidinal or sexual desires. If external pleasure is most important to our happiness (and quality of life), then it is unlikely that we will be able to look beyond physical gratification in our search for love. Even though the other desires for happiness (and love) are present in us, they will be overshadowed by our dominant view of happiness, and will truncate the search for the other three levels of love.

If we have a dominant Level 2 view of happiness, then we are likely to view love as the quest to *be loved* by other people. We will generally associate with people who might be able to advance our status, position, wealth, and power, or who might be able to satisfy our needs for affection, romance, and sexual gratification. Recall that all of us have Level 2 desires which are good and necessary for our lives, but when Level 2 becomes dominant, it tends to restrict our view of “love” to what Aristotle might have called “friendships of utility” or what Maslow called “the need for esteem and the need *to be loved*.” Thus a dominant Level 2 view of love is not *truly* generative. It might appear to be generative, but such actions generally expect some “return

on investment” (a *quid pro quo*). Thus, a generous gesture or an offer of help very probably anticipates a return of generosity or help of equal or greater worth. Romance is also viewed in this way—the offer of romantic “gifts and services” anticipates comparable or greater romantic “gifts or services.”

In Chapter 7 (The Opportunities of Suffering), we will discuss in detail how suffering can help us move from Love 1 and 2 to Love 3 and 4. As we shall see, suffering cannot do this by itself – it provides only the *impetus* to move toward Levels 3 and 4. If we are to actually *make* the move, we will have to see Levels 3 and 4 as not only “an end to the pain of the comparison game,” but also the key to our highest fulfillment, dignity, and destiny. If we recognize this, we can transform suffering from sheer meaninglessness into a powerful lever to achieve the fulfillment and self-identity for which we were created. If we *sustain* this move to Level 3 and 4, the highest levels of love will be within our purview, and we will be well on the way to the eternal salvation promised us by Jesus Christ and His unconditionally loving Father.

II.B Level 3 Love

If we have a dominant Level 3 view of happiness, then we are likely to have a truly generative view of love. Thus, we will be interested in *other people’s* happiness – alongside our own. Likewise, we will be interested in their welfare, security, and advancement – alongside our own. Though Level 3 does not entail the loss of desire for our own happiness, welfare, security, etc., it allows the other’s happiness, welfare, and security to be important *in its own right*, meaning that the other’s welfare need not be subordinated to *our* welfare or a “return on investment.”

For example, I might have a Level 3 friendship with someone with whom I expect mutual or reciprocal attentiveness to my needs, welfare, etc. However, if I see that the other’s needs are greater or more urgent than my own (in a particular situation), then I am free to attend to those needs without asking myself, “Am I giving more than he is giving?” – “Am I getting my fair share out of this friendship?” The freedom that Level 3 incites enables me to mitigate my concern for “equality,” “just compensation,” and the resentments that can arise out of these viewpoints. Level 3 enables me to serve others in their needs when they truly need it – without having to keep a strict accounting of the debt owed.

Recall that Level 3 happiness is interested in making a positive difference to someone or something beyond myself for no other reason than “making the world a better place.” In Level 3, the primary interest is in the betterment of others, the community and the culture. People who give anonymously to others, or who are dedicated to serving others, the community, or the kingdom of God, generally do so because they really want those other people, the community, or the kingdom of God, to be advanced by their efforts and contribution. If they receive recognition, it’s a “nice thing,” but it is not the reason for the generosity or service.

Viktor Frankl learned this lesson in a concentration camp, and it was reinforced so powerfully throughout his life that he made it the centerpiece of his psychotherapeutic school (logotherapy):

...being human always points, and is directed, to something or someone, other than oneself--be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself--by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love--the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.¹

If we have a dominant Level 3 view of love, it does not mean that we will be detached from our egos. As we saw in Volume I (Chapter 4), it is all too easy to slip into a dominant Level 2 viewpoint—sometimes for a few minutes, or a few hours, or a few days, or even longer. However, if we are moderately vigilant about putting Level 3 ahead of Level 2, we can keep our view of love relatively generative and detached from surges or spikes of egocentricity. If we look to the good of the other – even when we are seeking our own fulfillment, we will be less inclined to use or diminish the other for egocentric ends. This helps us to free ourselves from objectifying (“thing-a-fying”) others, using others, and controlling others. If we can see the other’s good as equal to -- or more important than our good, we become *free* to be generous with our time and self-gift—which makes us free for commitment to the other.

There are three primary powers within us that help us to move to this Level 3 perspective—empathy, conscience, and prayer-grace (Level 4). Let’s begin with empathy. Recall from Volume I (Chapter 1) that empathy is a strong power of connection or unity with another person that breaks down our barriers of autonomy and egocentricity so that doing the good for the other is just as easy, if not easier, than doing the good for ourselves. Recall also from Volume I (Chapter 4) that empathy must get its start from “looking for the good news in the other”—looking for kindness, strength, virtue, delightfulness, and transcendent mystery in the other. This ability to “look for the good news in the other,” in its turn, depends on having at least a dominant Level 3 view of happiness—to live for making an optimal positive difference to the people and world around us. But what does this mean?

If we are going to use our remarkable capacity for empathy to strengthen the bond between ourselves and others, we will have to commit ourselves to looking for the good news in the other which entails a dominant desire to make an optimal positive difference to the world with our lives. Thus, the move to dominant Level 3 is critical to unleashing the power of empathy. Once empathy has been unleashed, then “caring about” and “caring for” others becomes almost effortless. Battling our egocentricity is manageable through the power of empathy, but without it—at least in my case - it would be unmanageable. Empathy and care for others moves us to restrict our egocentricity without relying on strength of the will. The strength of our care *automatically* diminishes the strength of our Level 2 desires—making them less compelling. The dominant Level 3 viewpoint needed for this freedom is within the range of our *natural* ability to choose. As we shall see, our natural ability can be assisted and supported by prayer-grace (Level 4).

¹ Viktor Frankl 1984 *Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York: Beacon Press) p. 101.

Let us proceed now to the second interior capacity that helps us move to a dominant Level 3 view of love—*conscience*. Recall from Volume I (Chapter 1) that conscience is one of the most important human faculties. It is generally viewed as an inner attraction to and love of goodness and justice and an inner shunning and fear of evil and injustice. Our love of the good leads to feelings of nobility and fulfillment when we do the good, while our shunning and fear of evil leads to feelings of guilt and alienation when we do evil. Thus this two-sided inner sense causes not only feelings, but a sense of our inner self before and after we do good or evil. Recall also that Immanuel Kant and John Henry Newman attempted to show that conscience has a *Divine* origin, and that Lewis and Tolkien recognized its role in our sense of a cosmic struggle between good and evil.²

This powerful attraction to the good and fear-revulsion toward evil helps us in our relationships with others. If we are attentive to our conscience, we will not want to hurt, harm, or use other human beings. If we do, then we will probably feel alienated for treating them basely and unjustly (which they do not deserve). We will also sense our cooperation with evil, which moves us away from the perfectly good source of our conscience. Even the anticipation of hurting, harming, or using others causes feelings of self-alienation and guilt. When we take cognizance of our conscience, then we are imbued with the Silver Rule in our hearts and our whole being—“do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.”

Recall also that there is another dimension to conscience—namely the attraction to the good—and the feelings of nobility and “home with self” that arise when we follow that attraction—and do the good. This dimension of the power of conscience is one of the primary forces behind our desire for Level 3. Recall that Level 3 is not only a *choice*, but also a *desire*. Inasmuch as our desire to make an optimal positive difference to others and the world comes from the attraction to the good and the noble (from conscience), then we could say that the desire for Level 3 is inspired by conscience. So, conscience inspires the desire for Level 3, and when we *choose* to follow that desire, it becomes stronger within us, and the stronger the desire becomes, the easier it is to follow. After a while, the desire can become so strong that it subordinates the desires for Level 1 and Level 2 to itself—and becomes a habit of mind and heart—what the ancients called “a virtue.” Thus, continually choosing the desires of conscience creates the condition necessary for making Level 3 Happiness and Level 3 Love not only a dominant *desire*, but also a dominant part of our identity—*who* we are. As with empathy, this process induced by conscience (and choosing to follow conscience), is within the range of our *natural* capacity, but it can be greatly enhanced by prayer-grace (Level 4) which is our next topic.

II.C How Prayer and Grace Enhance Level 3 Love

We may now proceed to prayer-grace, which arises out of Level 4 desire and choice. As we shall see in Chapters 7 and 8, the power of empathy and conscience can be greatly enhanced by prayer and grace. With respect to empathy, our relationship with the loving God—particularly

² See Volume II, Chapter 2, and the sequel to the Quartet (*Called Out of Darkness: Contending with Evil Through Virtue and Prayer*) for an extended treatment of these subjects.

through contemplative prayer and the Examen Prayer³—frees our emotions and desires from egocentric dominance. The more we know the heart of God from our interior life and Christian Revelation, the more God’s love becomes co-natural with us—God’s heart of unconditional love speaks more and more clearly to our hearts.⁴ As this occurs, our love becomes more like His, and we are gradually purified from our egocentric desires and perspectives. As God’s heart speaks more easily to our heart, it becomes easier to look for and see the good news in the other, and as a result, easier to empathize with the other, and care about and for the other.

It should be noted that this transformation of our hearts through identification with the heart of God does not arise out of a stoic act of will. For example, I don’t repeatedly insist to myself that “I’m going to have the heart of Jesus Christ—I’m going to have the heart of Jesus Christ—I really, really am...” This will not do anything except frustrate us because we cannot “power” ourselves out of egocentricity. Exerting our “will to power” serves only to turn us in on ourselves instead of toward the One whose love we want to imitate.

A far better strategy is to involve our *hearts* and the Lord of love. How? By contemplating on Him, praying to Him, and expressing our desire to become more like Him in His love. As we contemplate on the unconditional love of God, we become more and more aware of how much He has loved us and continues to love us. This incites trust, gratitude, and love, which in turn incites the desire to be more like Him—to be His companion in the salvation of the world. This process allows the Lord’s heart to speak to our hearts which produces a gentle yet persistent transformation through loving identification with the Lord.

Evidently, transformation through contemplation and prayer is radically different from a stoic act of will in which we attempt to beat ourselves into submission to the will of a stoic god. Even if we succeed in doing this, we do not arrive at greater empathy and the third level of love—but rather at a kind of hard-hearted self-righteousness. Jesus’ Parable of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee praying in the Temple is most instructive here. The Pharisee has been very successful at fulfilling the prescriptions of the Law, and Jesus says that “He prayed to *himself*, ‘God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust...’” (Lk 18:11).

In sum, prayer—particularly contemplation and the Examen—allows *God* to touch our hearts (grace) which frees us from our egocentricity so that we might empathize and care for others with ever greater compassion, humility, and authenticity—in imitation of Jesus. In this way, Level 4 supports and enhances Level 3 desires, which in turn enhance Level 3 love.

Prayer-grace also supports and enhances the natural power of *conscience*. An important series of studies shows that religious people may not necessarily *know* more about ethics than non-religious people; however they are less willing to be unethical—particularly at the moment of decision.⁵ If religion helps us to follow the dictates of our conscience, then it will also support and enhance our capacity for Level 3 love.

³ See Volume I, Chapters 7 and 9.

⁴ See Fulton J. Sheen 1979 *Cor ad Cor Loquitor: Heart Speaks to Heart*, (Bethesda, MD: Ministr-o-Media Inc.)

⁵ The empirical study of Parboteeah, et al. in 2008 used the religious typology of Cornwall et al. (1986) to confirm the findings of previous studies (Tittle and Welch 1983, Weaver and Agle 2002, Turner 1997, and Fararo and Skvoretz 1986) showing that religious belief is negatively related to individuals’ willingness to justify

Prayer-grace supports Level 3 love beyond the enhancement of empathy and conscience, because it puts us in touch with and partially fulfills our transcendental nature. Recall the study of Dervic, et. al. in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* which showed that religiously unaffiliated subjects had higher rates of suicide, impulse aggressivity, meaninglessness, familial tension, and past substance abuse.⁶ All of these characteristics negatively influence our capacity to love others and ourselves. Put the other way around—prayer and grace enhance the factors which lead to love of neighbor and self. Psychiatric studies seem to verify what Jesus said long ago—that love of God would lead to love of neighbor and self.⁷

II.D Level 4 Love

Is there any other way in which prayer and grace support and enhance love? The above three ways (the enhancement of empathy, conscience, and our transcendent nature) show how Level 4 enhances *Level 3* love, but as you may suspect it also enhances specifically *Level 4* love. Level 3 love is oriented toward specific individuals with whom we have empathy. It does not necessarily extend to the transcendental nature and salvation of those individuals, but only to contributive and ethical treatment of them. However, Level 4 love recognizes the transcendental nature, dignity, and destiny of every individual, and so seeks the ultimate salvific good of those individuals. For dominant Level 4 individuals, being empathetic, contributive, and ethically responsible is not enough because Level 4 seeks the ultimate transcendental and eternal fulfillment of others. For Christians, this means we will want to help others discover and move toward the unconditional love of God revealed by Jesus.

unethical behaviors. In other words, religiously affiliated people are less willing to engage in unethical conduct at the moment of decision (Paraboteeah et al. 2008 p 393).

See M. Cornwall, SL Albrecht, PH Cunningham, and BL Pitcher, 1986, “The Dimensions of Religiosity: A Conceptual Model with an Empirical Test,” *Review of Religious Research* 27(3), pp 266-244.

TJ Fararo, and J. Skvoretz, 1986 “Action and Institutions, Network and Function: The Cybernetic Concept of Social Structure,” *Sociological Forum* 1, pp 219-250.

KP Parboteeah, M. Hoegl, JB Cullen, 2008 “Ethics and Religion: An Empirical Test of a Multidimensional Model” in *Journal of Business Ethics* 2008 (80) pp 387-398.

CR Tittle, and MR Welch, 1983 “Religiosity and Deviance: Toward a Contingency Theory of Constraining Effect,” *Social Forces* 61 (3), pp 653-682.

JH Turner. 1997, *The Institutional Order* (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers).

GR Weaver and BR Agle. 2002, “Religiosity and Ethical Behavior in Organizations: A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective,” *Academy of Management Review* 27(1), pp 77-97.

⁶ “Religiously unaffiliated subjects had *significantly* more lifetime suicide attempts and more first-degree relatives who committed suicide than subjects who endorsed a religious affiliation... Furthermore, subjects with no religious affiliation perceived fewer reasons for living, particularly fewer moral objections to suicide. In terms of clinical characteristics, religiously unaffiliated subjects had more lifetime impulsivity, aggression, and past substance use disorder. No differences in the level of subjective and objective depression, hopelessness, or stressful life events were found.”

K. Dervic, M. Oquendo, M. Grunebaum, S. Ellis, A. Burke, JJ Mann, 2004. “Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempts” in *American Journal of Psychiatry* (Vol. 161, No. 12). pp 2303-308.

<http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/article.aspx?articleid=177228>.

⁷ This point is fully explicated in Volume I, Chapters 7 - 10.

Dominant Level 4 individuals view Level 3 love as incomplete—for it only takes into consideration a *small* part of the nature, dignity, and destiny of each person. Level 3 love can even lead to the frustration of the much larger part of our nature by overemphasizing the fulfillment of the smaller part. Even though we cannot force or “hound” people into recognizing their transcendental nature and destiny, we can present reasonable and responsible evidence of our transcendence to those who are willing to listen (see Volume II of this Quartet). To those who are willing to look further, we can also give reasonable and responsible evidence for the historicity, resurrection, and divinity of Jesus (presented in Volume III of this Quartet). At the very least, we can all be witnesses to the increased empathy, conscience, and transcendental happiness coming from our faith – which may provoke some to wonder how they might be able to move toward the joy we seem to “naturally” or perhaps better, “supernaturally” exemplify.

Furthermore, Level 4 love extends beyond Level 3 love by acknowledging the transcendental significance of good and evil. In Level 3, good and evil are considered to be opposite qualities and effects of our actions and intentions *in this world*. Even though conscience reveals supernatural qualities in goodness (from God) and evil (from a malevolent force), a Level 3 perspective does not explicitize these qualities. They remain hidden in the background until we take an interest in our transcendental nature (Level 4) in which case the supernatural dimension of good and evil become explicitized. Similarly, the archetypal myth of our involvement in the cosmic struggle between good and evil will remain solely in the world of our dreams until we become interested in our transcendental nature and destiny (see Volume II, Chapter 2). Sometimes our interest in the cosmic struggle between good and evil can be aroused by reading the Tolkien trilogy or going to a Star Wars movie, but if we have no sense of our transcendental nature, our engagement in it will remain solely on the level of “mere interest” or entertainment. However, if we do have a sense of our transcendental nature and destiny, then these myths have the significance intended by Tolkien for them:

[Myths] are not lies. Far from being lies they are the best way — sometimes the only way — of conveying truths that would otherwise remain inexpressible. We have come from God and inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God.⁸

When we acknowledge transcendence and our transcendent destiny, the archetypal myth within us takes on supernatural significance and we no longer see “good and evil” as the qualities and effects of our actions and intentions *in this world alone*—but rather in the totality of reality which includes both absolute love and absolute egocentricity, absolute light and absolute darkness; and absolute good and absolute evil. Once we recognize this dimension of reality, our love for others cannot stop at fair conduct and ethical propriety; we will want to protect people from the power of darkness by helping them to see the power of absolute light and love. We will desire this not only for individuals, but also for our culture, and even the human community. In Level 4, love naturally extends itself to promoting supernatural good and absolute love—and defeating supernatural evil and absolute darkness – for the whole human community.

III.

⁸ Joseph Pearce 2001, “JRR Tolkien: Truth and Myth” in *Lay Witness*
<http://catholiceducation.org/articles/arts/al0107.html>

Four Kinds of Love

We are now in a position to correlate the four *levels* of love with the four *kinds* of love presented in Volume III (Chapter 1). In brief, C.S. Lewis presents the four *kinds* of love from classical and Christian writings as follows:⁹

- *Storgē*—a *feeling* of affection.
- *Philia*—friendship that entails *mutual* gift of self, loyalty, support, and commitment.
- *Eros*—sexual-romantic love which is brought to fulfillment through “highest friendship” in a “highest, exclusive relationship.”
- *Agapē*—love which seeks only the good of the *other* arising out of the recognition of the unique intrinsic goodness and lovability of that other — leading toward forgiveness, care and compassion, and self-sacrifice for the other.

Now let us correlate these four *kinds* of love with the four *levels* of love mentioned above.

III.A

Storgē – Affection

Storgē can be present in all four levels of love. Since it is only a *feeling* of delight or affection, it needs nothing other than an object of affection or delight to be engendered – such as a child or a pet. People who are pursuing physical gratification (Level 1), the need to be esteemed or loved (Level 2), empathetic, contributive, and generative love (Level 3), and transcendental love (Level 4) can all experience objects of affection and delight—and the feelings associated with them. *Storgē* is the only kind of love for which the four levels are not significant.

III.B

Philia -- Friendship

Philia (friendship) is an entirely different matter. In Level 1 love, friendship is virtually illusory. Since the other person is viewed mostly as “object” of gratification—some *thing* to gratify *me*, there is virtually no recognition of another *person* deserving of loyalty, support, contribution, and commitment.¹⁰ We do not think of mere objects (things) as being worthy or deserving of these subjective qualities. Therefore, *mutual or reciprocal* loyalty, support, contribution, and commitment are virtually nonexistent.

In Level 2 love, friendship is not illusory, but it is reduced to what Aristotle called “friendships of utility.”¹¹ A “friend” is someone who can do something for me, can open a door

⁹ See C.S. Lewis, 1960. *The Four Loves*. (New York: Harcourt).

¹⁰ The “objectification” or “thingafication” of another person is explained by Martin Buber as an “I-it relationship”. See Martin Buber, 2010. *I and Thou* (Eastford Connecticut: Martino Publications) pp. 10-13.

¹¹ See Aristotle 2015 *Aristotle on Friendship: Being an Expanded Translation of the Nicomachean Ethics Books VIII and IX* trans. and ed. by Geoffrey Percival (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). pp. 11-19.

for me, or provide a needed service for me—but is certainly not a *person* with whom I would be in a relationship of mutual concern, care, and commitment. Notice that the person is still objectified (thing-a-fied) in this view of friendship. In Martin Buber’s words, we are still on the Level of “I-it” instead of “I-thou.”¹² What is friendship without the awareness of personhood—without the elements of concern, care, loyalty, support, and commitment? Not much! It barely brings to fruition the potentiality of mutual care and commitment, and is the faintest glimmer of what Jesus called “friendship with His disciples.”¹³

As people make the transition from Level 2 to Level 3, they may notice fluctuations in their view of others – from “I-it” to “I-thou” back to “I-it,” etc. It is human nature to return to attitudes and feelings that we have habitually appropriated and used for many years. However, if we make a concerted attempt to live for contribution before ego-comparative advantage and physical gratification, we will eventually see our “grip on old habits” begin to loosen. As will be explained below, prayer-grace (Level 4) can be exceedingly helpful in this process.

As we begin to transition into a Level 3 view of the human person – as a “thou” instead of an “it” – it becomes easier to look for the good news in the other. Why? Because we can see the “good news” beyond characteristics that will bring us ego-comparative advantage. The “good news” is no longer limited to utility, outward beauty, or status enhancement, it extends to the kindness, virtue, friendliness, delightfulness, mystery, transcendence, and lovability of others. This is the good news from which empathy, concern, and care are fashioned.

In short, if we want to actualize true *filia*, we will want to move to Level 3 love, because it entails a Level 3 view of happiness (contribution and empathy) and a Level 3 view of person--“thou.” Level 3 individuals can be friends with people having any level of happiness – though the ensuing friendship cannot have the same qualities from level to level because Level 2 and Level 1 people cannot reciprocate in a Level 3 way. Since it is difficult for dominant Level 1 and Level 2 people to experience genuine empathy, concern, and care for others (making it difficult to freely contribute and commit to them), we cannot expect reciprocity of friendship in the way that it is given – if we are Level 3 or 4. This means that a dominant Level 3 person will “not grow” very much in friendship with dominant Level 1 and Level 2 people because the latter do not love others in the same deeply personal way. However, Level 3 people can extend themselves to Level 1 and Level 2 people in generosity, genuine care, joy, and commitment without expecting the same level of reciprocity or a deep personal friendship.

If Level 3 people are looking for deep personal friendships (or a potential spouse), it is best to seek out Level 3 or Level 4 friends – otherwise they can expect a life filled with frustration and disappointed expectations. Some Level 3 people believe that they can “make” or “change” dominant Level 1-2 people into Level 3-4 people by befriending or marrying them. This strategy rarely works unless the people in question are already in the process of moving toward Level 3-4 *on their own*.

¹² Martin Buber *I and Thou* pp. 10-13.

¹³ See John 15:15 – “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

Level 3 friendships have the potential to grow in depth, contribution, and commitment for decades – true friends can take greater joy in one another, find greater peace through one another, find themselves at home (less alienated) through the other – as well as experiencing the mutuality of care and “being cared for,” of supporting and being supported, of committing and “being committed to,” – almost indefinitely. As the Book of Sirach says:

A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter;
he who finds one finds a treasure.
A faithful friend is beyond price,
no sum can balance his worth.
A faithful friend is a life-saving remedy,
such as he who fears God finds;
For he who fears God behaves accordingly,
and his friend will be like himself" (Sirach 6:14-17).

This passage leads us to Level 4. As we saw above, Level 4 (prayer and grace) can be very important in attaining and maintaining Level 3 love – and therefore, Level 3 friendship. Christians’ commitment to the teachings of Jesus will incite them to look for the “good news” in others in a Level 3 way. They will not only know what to look for, but they will want to look at the other person as Jesus does – and even though it may be difficult to stay focused on these qualities, they will feel moved by their love of the Lord and the grace of the Holy Spirit to hold onto this perspective. It is easier to do something difficult with a friend who is supportive than to do it by ourselves. Speaking personally, I cannot imagine trying to keep my focus on “the good news in the other” – amidst the bad news – without my faith in Jesus and grace from His Spirit. I do not have enough natural virtue to do this without my commitment to the Lord and His inspiration and love in my life. Frankly, I am not very successful at keeping my focus on Level 3 love – even with faith, prayer, and grace – but without it, I would have very few successes – and would have long ago succumbed to the bad news and the superficial good news in others (utility, surface beauty, status enhancement, etc.). I am aware of other people who have more natural virtue than myself, and so I would say that “*If you are anything like me*, then faith, prayer, and grace are absolutely essential to Level 3 happiness, love, and friendship.”

Level 4 prayer and grace does not stop at helping us to attain and maintain *Level 3* love and friendship. As noted earlier, it helps us to see the transcendent, eternal, and sacred dimension of others – and for Christians, it enables us to see them as brothers and sisters of Jesus, and even as the image of Jesus Himself – “Whatsoever you do to these least ones of mine, you do unto me” (Mt 25:40). This brings friendship into a whole new domain. It sees the eternal and transcendent mystery in the other, the presence of Christ in the other, and the dignity that comes from this – and so it seeks to treat others in a fashion commensurate with their eternal, sacred, and divine identity -- seeking to bring it to fruition in the eternal kingdom of unconditional love with Jesus Christ. This perspective changes everything – because love can no longer be focused on the other person *alone* -- it must also be focused on the person as a “child of” the loving God. However, when the transition is made, a new kind of love which allows God to possess the other – and the other to belong to God – comes into being. This love recognizes that even a very best friend cannot belong only to *us* – and we cannot belong only to *them*. We must open the

relationship to the loving God who alone can fulfill the *eternal and transcendental* nature of the sacred mystery who we call our “friend” or “beloved.”

In his insightful autobiography about love and suffering – *A Severe Mercy* -- Sheldon Vanauken describes a change in his relationship with his wife, Davy, when they return to America after a profound conversion to Christianity during their studies at Oxford with C.S. Lewis. Davy takes her conversion to Christianity very seriously and begins to pray and read the bible daily – pouring over it for her Sunday school classes and opening herself to being transformed in the image of Jesus.

Prior to their conversion, they grew in an ever deepening *Level 3* commitment and love – perhaps as deep as *Level 3 filia* (or in their case, *eros*) could go. They describe the exclusivity of their love as a “Shining Barrier,” indicating the *sufficiency* of each one for the *completion* and *fulfillment* of the other. When Davy began to take her faith seriously, and to fall more deeply in love with Jesus and His teaching, she discovered that their profound *Level 3* love was not capable of completing or fulfilling their transcendental nature and their need for redemption by Jesus. She knew that she could not redeem and fulfill Sheldon in this most important respect, and that he could not do the same for her.

Sheldon, on the other hand, was far more reluctant to break the “Shining Barrier” because it was so filled with love, joy, and fulfillment in both the present and his memory of the past. To even think about “breaking the Barrier” brought a sense of deep grief. So as Davy deepened in her loving relationship with Christ, Sheldon became disturbed and resentful toward her journey through the “Shining Barrier.” *Intellectually* he knew that she was progressing in love, but *emotionally* he was unable and unwilling to accept it – particularly his insufficiency to complete and fulfill his part in it. At one point he thinks to himself:

I wanted – what did I want? I wanted the fine keen bow of a schooner cutting the waves with Davy and me – just Davy and me and Flurry – happy and loving and comradely on her decks. Well, there was nothing unChristian about that, as long as God was there, too, and as long as we were neglecting no service of love. But, I wanted Him approving from a considerable distance. I didn’t want to be thinking of Him. I wanted to be free – like Gypsy. I wanted life itself, the colour and fire and loveliness of life. And Christ now and then, like a loved poem I could read when I wanted to. I didn’t want us to be swallowed up in God. I wanted holidays from the school of Christ. We should, somehow, be able to have the Shining Barrier intact *and* follow the King of Glory. I didn’t want to be a saint. Almost none of this did I consciously know – just longings.¹⁴

As Davy grows in love of Jesus, her love for Sheldon is also transformed. She no longer sees herself as being the completion and fulfillment of her beloved, because she knows that Jesus and His Father alone can do this. So she decides to love Sheldon the best way she can – in her new realization of what love means. He describes it as follows:

¹⁴ Sheldon Vanauken 1980, *A Severe Mercy: A Story of Faith, Tragedy, and Triumph* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers) p. 136.

It was the year when Davy, a month or so before its end, offered up her life in holy exchange and utter love for me. Tonight, after Bourges and the 'Requiem Mass,' she told me, to my horror and dread.¹⁵

In her Level 4 perspective – through the heart of her Christian conversion -- Davy felt that the highest possible love for Sheldon would be his salvation in Christ with her, and so she offered up her very life in loving exchange for him and his salvation. Sheldon – still clinging to the Shining Barrier of Level 3 – was horrified. Davy's progression in love -- and her willingness to sacrifice herself in imitation of Jesus – was now at odds with Sheldon's view of love and life.

Shortly thereafter Davy contracted a virus which relentlessly attacked her liver. Medical treatment at the time was unable to stop its progress. She was expected to die within a few months. During this period Sheldon knew he would have to evolve in his view of love in order to reach her so that their love could again be truly reciprocal. So he began to allow God – whom he formerly thought would swallow them up – to play a greater role in *his* part of the relationship. He found that by so doing, his love of Davy increased profoundly. As he grew in humility, he was happy to let Jesus fulfill Davy where he could not, and was happy to let go of Davy in order for Jesus to fulfill her. He knew that he had to do this so that Davy could be truly happy and fulfilled – and he trusted that Jesus would not take her away from him, but would give her back to him when she was truly fulfilled. Later, He would give Sheldon back to Davy when he was likewise fulfilled. Davy's offering of herself was successful, because Sheldon, in his *freedom*, chose to respond in faith.

Level 4 love is categorically different from Level 3 love because it entails an abandonment to divine providence – or in Sheldon's and Davy's case, an abandonment to Jesus. This abandonment leads to a personal transformation that places our destiny in the hands of the unconditionally loving God, a transformation that allows us to freely give our lives in loving exchange for the salvation of others – in imitation of Jesus who gave his life for the salvation of the world.

III.C

***Eros* – Romantic and Exclusive Love**

Though *eros* is identified with romantic or sexual love, it is quite complex – reaching to the highest levels of human generativity, freedom, and commitment. It combines sexual drive, beauty, gender complementarity, and romance with intimacy, generativity, the highest levels of *filia*, commitment of our future, and the promise of exclusivity.¹⁶ A brief survey of these characteristics reveals that some can be shared by all four levels of love – namely, sexual drive, beauty, gender complementarity, and romance -- while others are more proper to Levels 3 and 4 - - intimacy, generativity, the highest levels of *filia*, commitment of our future, and the promise of exclusivity. This means that *eros* within a Level 1 or 2 person will not be able to reach its proper fulfillment, because that fulfillment requires generativity and higher levels of commitment –

¹⁵ Ibid p. 149.

¹⁶ See C.S. Lewis 1960 *The Four Loves* pp. 91-115.

which are proper to Levels 3 and 4. The four levels of *eros* are explained in Volume III (Chapter 1), and we might summarize it as follows.

The first two levels of *eros* are quite superficial and do not reach the depth of personhood, goodness, lovability, and transcendental value in the “beloved,” that can be reached in Levels 3 and 4. As a result, Levels 1 and 2 romantic relationships do not reach the same degree and scope of common cause, commitment, familial interest, and generativity reached in Level 3 and 4 relationships. In Levels 1 and 2, the focus is directed at physical appeal, status appeal, and utility appeal. However, as one moves into Levels 3 and 4, the nature of *eros* changes dramatically. It is less focused on physical gratification, and being admired and loved, and more focused on forming a “first priority” friendship which can lead to mutual support, common cause, and ultimately, commitment and family. Sexuality and romance are still present, but they are reconfigured. Sexuality is no longer an end in itself, but serves the union and commitment of the beloveds. The same holds true for being loved and admired – it is not an end in itself but serves a generative end beyond itself. This means that “romance” has a much more enhanced meaning in Levels 3 and 4 than in Levels 1 and 2. In Levels 3 and 4, romance includes mutual support, care, intimacy, appreciation, common cause, respect, and commitment – which means that it is laden with the attributes of love which Paul speaks of – patience, kindness, not boasting, not growing angry, etc. (1Cor. 13:4-7).

Level 3 *eros* may be likened to what Sheldon and Davy enjoyed in their years before their conversion at Oxford. They had a very heightened view of romance – including intimacy, mutual contribution and support, common cause, and self-sacrifice – which led to and sustained their “highest priority commitment” – which they alone could experience. At first they interpreted this heightened romance in terms of a “Shining Barrier” that indicated their sufficiency to fulfill one another completely. However, their encounter with C.S. Lewis and subsequent conversion to Christianity showed Davy that there was much more to Sheldon’s life than her, and much more to her life than Sheldon – namely, salvation in the unconditional love of Jesus Christ. Davy could not help herself – she proceeded to Level 4 *eros*, and breached the Shining Barrier.

At this juncture, Davy loved Sheldon in a much deeper and broader way than Sheldon was capable of loving her. Her love (*eros*) was so great that she offered her life to Christ in loving exchange for Sheldon’s salvation – for which there is no greater love. This horrified Sheldon who later understood what she had done for him. This caused him to offer himself completely for her. This absolute concern for the transcendent eternal salvation of the other is the height of *eros* -- Level 4 *eros* -- which Level 3 – though remarkable – cannot reach because of its limited (non-transcendent) vision of the human person.

Unfortunately, our culture is becoming progressively more disconnected not only from the Level 4 perspective of Davy and Sheldon after their conversion, but also their Level 3 perspective before their conversion. Inasmuch as parts of our culture are moving to a dominant Level 1 and 2 viewpoint, it is losing a Level 3 and 4 view of sexuality, intimacy, and romance. As a result, we are becoming progressively more shallow in our relationships – and even substituting “fashioned images of ourselves” in social media for the “real us.” This has led to a devaluation of marriage and marital relationships, an undermining of marital commitment, and an increase in the rate of divorce. Some young people claim that they do not know the difference

between cohabitating and being married – as if public commitment were completely unintelligible. If we are to reverse this trend, we will first have to help people move toward dominant Level 3 and 4 happiness, then to Level 3 and 4 friendships, and then to a reexamination of the positive characteristics of commitment, marriage, and family.

We will also have to reexamine how technology is affecting our ability to relate to others in a Level 3-Level 4 way. The rapid progress made in communication, technology, internet, and social media seem to be intensifying the decline in Level 3-4 friendship and *eros*. In many respects, we are relating just as much to machines and computers as to real human beings. Though computers can deliver real time communication with others, they tend to be faceless and terse. Social media encourages people to make “images of themselves” instead of conveying their real self. Emails can be harsh and arrogant because we are not attending to the feelings and reactions of a real person. Though business, creative work, and scholarship are considerably enhanced by these tools, *personal* relationships are not. If our “computer associations” are complemented by real interpersonal relationships, then they will cause little harm. However, if “computer associations” begin to replace personal relationships, the harm to Level 3-4 friendships and *eros* can be significant.

III.D *Agapē* – Selfless Love

We may now proceed to the fourth kind of love – *agapē*, which is sometimes translated as “charity” (*caritas*) – and was advanced and developed by Jesus and the Christian Church.¹⁷ Though it may include giving alms to the poor (which is promoted by most religions), it is much more – including an interior disposition and a vision of the other coming from Jesus’ teaching on “compassion” and “neighbor” – particularly in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (see Volume III, Chapter 1).

Agapē is the kind of love arising out of our recognition of the unique goodness, lovability, and transcendental of the other. It seeks no reward other than that of protecting, promoting, and fostering the good of an intrinsically valuable human being. Hence, this kind of love is not interested in who is being loved – whether it be a potential friend, a real friend, or a total stranger. Furthermore, it needs no reason to justify its occurrence other than the fact that all persons deserve to be loved (cared about, cared for, and contributed to) simply because they are intrinsically valuable transcendent mysteries. Unlike friendship and *eros*, *agapē* does not seek mutuality or reciprocity – and it is indifferent to emotional rewards such as gratitude or romance. Hence, *agapē* can fuel a love of strangers, the marginalized, criminals, enemies, the destitute, and others who are incapable of reciprocating. Furthermore, *agapē* can be self-sacrificial – even to the point of death. It is the kind of love promoted by Jesus and the kind of love most intimately tied to virtue and suffering. When people practice this kind of love as a matter of

¹⁷ See C.S. Lewis 1960 *The Four Loves*, pp. 115-125. Though Lewis does not use the term *agapē*, he considers the immense contribution of Jesus’ teaching to the propagation of this kind of love. McKenzie notes that the term “*agapē*” was chosen by the Christian Church to refer to Jesus’ unique kind of love – exemplified, for example, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. This kind of love goes far beyond the three *natural* loves, and so the Christian Church needed another term to refer to it – hence, the selection of *agapē*. See John McKenzie 1965 *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 521.

habit, they are probably in the highest attainable state of human virtue, bringing their human nature to its highest level of freedom, dignity, and fulfillment.

By now it will be evident that a dominant Level 1-2 viewpoint is virtually incapable of giving rise to or sustaining *agapē*. Indeed, the whole idea of *agapē* -- with its forgetfulness of self, and its inclination toward non-reciprocal, non-rewarded self-sacrifice – is antithetical to a dominant Level 1-2 viewpoint. Level 1 and Level 2 are not self-forgetful, and their orientation is toward reciprocity and reward. For this reason, dominant Level 1-2 people have a very difficult time responding to and aspiring to be like Jesus. Thus, if we are to engage in *agapē*, we will have to be at least at Level 3.

Level 3 is sufficient for *agapē*, but Level 4 can support *agapē* by supporting Level 3. We noted above that prayer and grace (arising out of Level 4) could support Level 3 love. We cited several studies that showed how religion supports familial relationships, adherence to conscience, and meaning in life, and decreases lifetime impulsivity and aggression, substance abuse, and suicide rates.¹⁸ All of these qualities enhance empathy, responsibility to others, and awareness of others' transcendental and eternal significance. Level 4 love also views our completeness and fulfillment through a divine Being who is perfect truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home. It shows that we are incapable of bringing ourselves to complete happiness, and shows us a path of love that is humble and responsible to a divine power (as well as to ourselves). Since all of these attributes are essential to *agapē*, we may conclude that faith and religion – prayer and grace – support the initiation, sustenance, and growth of *agapē*.¹⁹ This is particularly true for the Christian religion where Christ preaches *agapē* as the epitome of joy, purpose, fulfillment, and God's kingdom.²⁰

III.E *Agapē* and Christianity

In Volume III (Chapter 1), we gave an extended description of *agapē*, showing that Jesus explains its dynamic character through the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Recall that Samaritans and Jews were enemies—so that the Jew who was beaten and left for dead by the side of the road was not only a stranger, but an enemy to the Samaritan. Nevertheless, the sight of the man who was beaten and robbed moved the Samaritan to a deep compassion. Luke translates Jesus' Aramaic by the Greek word *splagchnizomai*, which refers to a deep interior sympathy and sorrow that physically affects the “pit of one's stomach.”²¹ Though this deeply felt interior state can be achieved in Level 3, it is found most profoundly in people of faith and deep prayer.²² Though this kind of Level 4 love is by no means limited to Christianity (e.g., Gandhi), it is frequently and profoundly manifest in Christianity because it lies at the heart of the teaching and example of Jesus. Jesus not only teaches this kind of love in the Parables of the Good Samaritan and The Prodigal Son, as well as the attributes of *agapē* (love of strangers, enemies,

¹⁸ See K. Dervic et. al. 2004, Parboteeah et. al. 2008, Weaver et al. 2002, Cornwall et. al 1986, Tittle et. al. 1983, and Turner 1997.

¹⁹ See C.S. Lewis *The Four Loves* pp. 119ff.

²⁰ See, for example, John 15: 11-15, Galatians 5:22-23, 1 Corinthians 13:1, and Philippians 2:2-3.

²¹ See Strong's Concordance #4697 – “*splagchnizomai*”.

²² See C.S. Lewis *The Four Loves*, pp. 119ff.

the unjust, the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and prisoners), He also manifests it in His actions – particularly in His self-sacrificial love for the redemption of the world.

When Christians take their faith seriously, they not only go to Mass, but also try to enter into the heart and spirit of Jesus – both in attitude and action. Frequently, they will get involved in church activities—perhaps teaching, helping the needy, helping to administrate the parish, etc. This deep interest in faith is shared with their family members, who in turn create a “familial community of faith and prayer.” This rises to a high level of priority within the family and the personal lives of most of its members. This kind of faith is filled with Level 4 love—interest in the *salvation* of family members, church members, people served by the church, people who are taught in classes or bible studies, and frequently going beyond “the call of duty” to help friends and strangers who are in need to “get back on their feet.” The Lord is pleased with this love, and does not *require* more. However, He often *inspires* us to engage in extraordinary acts of charity or heroism when urgent needs arise—and so many of us are able to look back on our lives and see our call to what might be called heroic or saintly Level 4 love. Perhaps we defended the faith against someone who was attacking it, or stood up to somebody who was undermining decency or virtue in the culture, or defended a victim who could not defend himself, or volunteered to serve in a place of extreme poverty or destitution. Despite the legitimate excuses that could have been made to avoid such sacrifices, we responded to them anyway—perhaps because others asked us to do so, or we felt that the Lord wanted us to do so, or we felt a deep compassion for those who are suffering. Whatever the motive, we responded to a “call” we felt within our hearts—a call to *sacrifice ourselves*, entering into the realm of extraordinary Level 4 love.

IV.

Exceptional Love and the Lives of Some Saints

When we enter the domain of Level 4 love, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit becomes incredibly powerful. The Spirit does not violate our freedom, but inspires us in proportion to our willingness to be inspired to greater and greater acts of *agapē* and self-sacrifice for the good of those in need, for the culture, the Mystical Body of Christ (the Church), and the kingdom of God. There is no small number of such individuals, many of whom are acknowledged by the current culture—but a particularly impressive list may be found among the canonized saints of the Catholic Church. Though every one of these saints had their personal shortcoming and cultural limitations—because they were human beings still *not perfected* in love—they were inspired by the love and self-sacrifice of Jesus and sought to imitate Him by serving the needy, the culture, and the kingdom.

Most of these individuals began their lives like most of us—learning about and growing in their faith—some rich and some poor—some well-educated and relatively uneducated. Some of them, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Catherine Drexel, and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, took a *direct* route to sainthood—generally in three stages:

1. Remarkable growth in faith and love in childhood and adolescence.
2. The development of a strong personal relationship with Jesus in prayer.

3. A profound contemplative experience of the self-sacrifice and passion of Jesus, producing such deep love of Him that they too wanted to imitate Him completely—especially in self-sacrificial love.

Some saints took an indirect—and even a *very* indirect—route toward their sainthood—such as St. Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Ignatius Loyola. St. Augustine left the Church and Christianity to lead a rather “excessive life,” including seducing his friends to get addicted to the bloodlust of the coliseum; St. Francis of Assisi wanted to lead the life of a rich heir and heroic soldier; and St. Ignatius Loyola was a vainglorious dueler, ladies’ man, and a military commander. These individuals seemed to have gone through five stages in their path to exceptional Level 4 love:

1. They were disinterested in faith and love while growing up— aspiring to “honors, riches, power, and glory.”
2. A period in their adult life where they in fact pursued “honors, riches, power, and glory.”
3. Two or three major experiences that turned their lives around—conversion experiences.
4. A resultant, almost insatiable appetite, to learn everything about Jesus Christ and His teaching.
5. A deep contemplative experience of the self-sacrifice and passion of Jesus, producing such a profound love for Him that they wanted to imitate Him in self-sacrificial love.

There are huge variations within these two general scenarios, and some saints fall outside of both scenarios, but the vast majority of them have one thing in common—they were inspired by the love of Jesus, particularly manifest in His suffering and death on the cross for the world. As they contemplated on the crucified Jesus, they did not focus on the hatred and ugliness underlying his tortured death, because they were inspired by His unconditional love which they perceived as emanating from His crucified body. For them, the crucifix was a living symbol of perfect love for the world. They experienced the profundity of Jesus’ self-sacrifice with such great empathy and gratitude that they abandoned themselves completely to His providence and the service of the needy, the culture, and the kingdom.

Notice that all these individuals—even those who started out as vainglorious—sought *humility* in imitation of the Lord they loved. Thus even though their love was truly exceptional, they would have never considered themselves to be heroic because it would have implied that their love was *self*-motivated instead of being inspired by the love and self-sacrifice of their living Lord. The saints who took the “indirect route” had to struggle against pride and passion—precisely because they were passionate and strong-willed. Most of them would have stated outright that they were not perfect in controlling their pride and passions, but because they made the virtue of humility and compassionate love so central to their spiritual lives, they learned how to mitigate pride’s negative influence. Once again we see that the quest for humility and self-restraint is not primarily *self*-motivated, but rather, inspired by the humility and self-restraint of Jesus—particularly in His passion and death.

It is difficult to give a detailed discussion of only a *few* saints because there are so many. Virtually all canonized saints in the Catholic Church manifest extraordinary love, which is inspired by the unconditional love of Jesus—particularly on the cross. Nevertheless, I selected

St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ignatius Loyola as representatives of the indirect route -- and St. Peter Claver and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta as representatives of the direct route to attain extraordinary Level 4 love.

IV.A St. Francis of Assisi

Throughout much of his youth, St. Francis focused on a life of riches and military glory. As a young man he worked as a merchant for his father selling cloth and velvet. He wore bright clothes, befriended the rich, and enjoyed worldly pleasures. On one occasion God called him through a beggar who asked him for some help. Francis was so moved that he took all of the day's receipts and gave them to the beggar provoking his father's anger and disdain. Nevertheless, Francis continued his worldly life, and went on campaign against Perugia, where he was captured and spent one year in prison. During this time, he seems to have had a deeper spiritual conversion. Once again, he returned to the life of a soldier, and had his father commission armor (laden with gold) for him to go out on another military campaign. After one day, God called him in a dream, telling him that his life of riches and military glory was leading Francis away from Him, and that he should return home, and turn his life around. He did this to the great disdain of his father and to the ridicule of all his former friends and neighbors—moving as it were, from vainglory to humiliations for the sake of Christ in one day. Following this, Francis began to give himself progressively more to prayer—in which he felt great contrition for his sin, as well as great consolation from Jesus. All the while, he grew in trust and knowledge of the love of Jesus – and grew in love of “Lady Poverty.”

On another occasion, Francis entered the little church of San Damiano outside of Assisi. Accustomed to praying before the crucifix, he entered the church and prayed before the icon of Jesus crucified – at which point he had a mystical experience in which Jesus said to him, “Francis, Francis, go and repair My house which, as you can see, is falling into ruins.” He took this to mean the ruined church of San Damiano, but later discovered that Jesus meant the “universal church,” which incited him to rebuild the spirituality of the church based on prayer and poverty.

His experience in prayer was tested one day when he was riding in a forest, and was confronted by a leper whose appearance and smell revolted him. Nevertheless, the love of Christ dwelling in him (from his lengthy period of prayer) incited him to get off his horse and kiss the leper—who, in turn, kissed him. When he rode off, and looked back, the leper had disappeared. He concluded from this that he had “passed the test” from the Lord. At this juncture, his conversion was complete, and he set himself about the mission given to him in the church at San Damiano. He was about to enshrine a life of *self-sacrificial love* in his own person and in the religious order he was about to found.

Francis began to preach and work with the poor throughout the towns of the province of Umbria. His exhortations were so impassioned—and more importantly his work with the poor was so edifying—he inspired eleven men to follow him. At this juncture, he needed a “primitive rule” to start a religious order devoted specifically to poverty and work with the poor. Though Pope Innocent III did not officially approve the order, he did permit Francis to continue in it until

he had additional growth. Francis' complete dedication to the crucified Jesus and His self-sacrificial love for the world was so extraordinary that it edified dozens upon dozens of men to join him in his life of poverty. Many of these new followers were wealthy and educated, and gave up everything to be near him. Though his new order grew at an unprecedented rate (by comparison with other orders at the time), Francis did not attribute it to himself, but rather to the loving God moving his new followers as He moved Francis himself. After this period of growth, Francis returned to Rome where his new order was approved by Pope Innocent III.

Francis and his friars then proceeded to preach all over Italy—beyond the province of Umbria. Again additional friars began to join the order, and Francis started houses throughout Italy. During this period Francis was preaching in the church of San Rufino. A noblewoman—Clare of Assisi—was moved by his preaching and clandestinely left her palace and family to join Francis in a life of poverty, self-sacrifice, and charity. She later started the woman's correlate of the Franciscans, which she named the "Poor Ladies," which was later renamed as the "Poor Clares."

Francis then began to travel beyond Italy—establishing his most important missions in the Holy Land which at that time was occupied by the Saracens. Before going to the Holy Land, Francis attempted to convert the Sultan of Egypt (the nephew of the great Saladin). The Sultan listened to the preaching of Francis, but it had no effect at that time. Later, however, some hagiographers reported that the Sultan secretly converted to Christianity on his deathbed. Whether this actually occurred or not, the Sultan gave Francis and his companions permission to enter the Holy Land and to establish houses and missions at various holy places. This truly extraordinary gesture shows the effects that Francis' preaching and presence had on the Sultan.

When he returned to San Damiano in Italy, he worked on administrative tasks to solidify the internal organization of the Franciscan order (which he called the "lesser brothers—the *fratres minores*"). He was later given the stigmata²³ -- the wounds of Christ—to fulfill his spirituality of complete abandonment to the crucified Christ. Sensing that the end was near, he dictated some of his personal memoirs to his biographer—Thomas of Celano.²⁴ He died shortly thereafter fully aware that he was going to his Lord of unconditional love.

St. Francis' life is a testimony to how profoundly the Holy Spirit can work through the sufferings of Jesus and through extraordinary self-sacrificial love. After St. Francis' vision of the crucified Christ in the little chapel of San Damiano, he was moved to identify with the humble, poor, and crucified Christ completely. His conversion to extraordinary love (in imitation of his Lord) made his example and preaching almost addictive to those who were open to it. No other religious order had grown so rapidly prior to the time of St. Francis—and despite the fact that Francis tried to make it "the lesser brothers," it became a major influence both inside and outside the Christian church. Francis never took the credit for this but gave it all to the Lord who loved

²³ Some saints, like St. Francis of Assisi and St. Pio, had the wounds of Christ appear in their hands, feet, and side, and St. Pio (who lived in the 20th century) had his wounds examined by several physicians, some of whom concluded that they did not appear to be self-inflicted.

²⁴ These events are recounted by St. Francis' official biographer, Thomas of Celano, a Franciscan monk and a contemporary of St. Francis. See Thomas of Celano 2000 *The First Life of St. Francis of Assisi* trans. by Christopher Stace (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge).

him and gave himself for him. As Francis showed, the Holy Spirit can work through suffering, self-sacrifice, and extraordinary—Level 4—love to bring immense and lasting good for the needy, the culture, and the kingdom of God.

IV.B St. Ignatius Loyola

St. Ignatius Loyola provides yet another example of the same pattern – (1) the call of Christ through suffering, (2) devotion to the crucified Christ – and His self-sacrificial love for the world, and (3) dedication of his life to following Christ in self-sacrificial love.

Ignatius was born in Loyola Spain in 1491 of parents of minor nobility and like St. Francis, focused on a life of honors, and military glory. St. Ignatius enjoyed the military life because it gave him many opportunities for glory, honor, and vanity. He was known to be a “ladies’ man” and a dueler. On one occasion, when a Moore denied the Divinity of Christ, he challenged him to a duel and ran him through. He apparently engaged in many such duels.

He took up arms with the Duke of Nájera (Viceroy of Navarre) and went on campaign with him—proving himself as a valiant soldier and good leader. On one occasion, completely outnumbered by a French army in Pamplona, Ignatius was trying to rally his small band of Spanish soldiers to continue fighting. A French cannonball hit him squarely in the leg causing a severe fracture. The French soldiers were impressed by his bravery and returned him to his home in Loyola to recover.

During this time of recovery, Ignatius asked for books of romance and military glory, but none were available. Instead, he was given an illustrated life of Christ and biographies of St. Francis and St. Dominic. The *Life of Christ*, written by Ludolph of Saxony, was remarkably detailed and theologically insightful, which greatly edified Ignatius. Moreover, it recommended a technique of simple contemplation—to place oneself within the scene of Jesus’ life—which captivated Ignatius who had an active imagination. This volume—as well as some lives of the saints—became the foundation for his conversion—as well as his *Spiritual Exercises*, which he wrote during and after his experience at Manresa (see below).

During this time, he would daydream prolifically—sometimes about chivalry and military exploits, and sometimes about doing deeds of love for his Lord. Both kinds of daydreams produced considerable excitement and delight, but he noticed that the former kind left him sad and empty while the latter left him continuously consoled and hopeful. He came to realize that the affective and spiritual states following his daydreams were ways in which the Lord was communicating with him—the feelings of sadness and emptiness indicated a path away from the Lord of consolation, while the feelings of consolation and hope indicated a path leading toward the Lord. This became the basis for his rules for the discernment of spirits (in the *Spiritual Exercises*).

He was then moved to go to Jerusalem to convert the Muslim world and regain the sacred city for Christ, his Lord. On his journey, he went to the well-known Benedictine Abbey of Montserrat to visit the shrine of our Lady, and there before her statue he gave away his sword

and dagger, and pledged himself completely to the service of Christ. He was then moved to go to the nearby town of Manresa where he procured lodgings near a hospital (in which he served) for ten months. During that time, he spent every free moment going to a nearby cave to pray, experiencing a wide range of spiritual states and feelings—consolations, desolations, genuine sorrow for sins, visions, scruples, inspiration, and discouragement which bordered on despair. As he reflected on these affective and spiritual states, he began to learn how the Holy Spirit can use both consolation and desolation, and how the evil spirit could use both desolation, false consolation, and even masquerade as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14).²⁵ He not only recognized God’s call to him, but also how God was guiding him in his service. Like St. Francis, Ignatius’ communion with the heart and love of Jesus moved him to a life of Level 4 love (*agapē*) which included a complete self-offering in imitation of the crucified Jesus. He placed the *Anima Christi* prayer at the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises* to signify this:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me; Body of Christ, save me; Blood of Christ, inebriate me; Water from Christ's side, wash me; Passion of Christ, strengthen me; O good Jesus, hear me; Within Thy wounds hide me; Suffer me not to be separated from Thee; From the malicious enemy defend me; In the hour of my death call me; And bid me come unto Thee; That I may praise Thee with Thy saints and with Thy angels; Forever and ever; Amen.²⁶

In his ardent desire to serve the Lord, he proceeded toward Jerusalem but after a few weeks, was told by the Church there that he was quite counterproductive and needed to return to Europe. Though he was downcast, he used his knowledge of discernment to follow the Lord’s guiding hand to his new mission—to share the *Spiritual Exercises*, work with the poor and homeless, catechize children, and follow the Lord’s call to poverty, chastity and service. After the completion of his elementary studies, he proceeded to the University of Paris where he spent seven years obtaining a Master’s Degree in Theology. During that time, he gave the *Spiritual Exercises* to several fellow students who were so moved by him and the experience of the exercises that they became his first companions—Francis Xavier, Alfonso Salmeron, Diego Laynez, and Nicholas Bobadilla (Spaniards); Peter Faber, a Frenchman; and Simão Rodrigues of Portugal. He was later joined by Saint Francis Borgia, a member of the House of Borgia, who was the main aide of Emperor Charles V, and other nobles.

On August 15, 1534, St. Ignatius and his companions proceeded to the church of St. Denis (now San Piere) on Montmartre (a hill in northern Paris) to take their first vows in their new order “the Company of Jesus”—also called the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits. St. Ignatius’ dedication to extraordinary love—manifest not only in the *Spiritual Exercises*, but also in his spiritual *practice* to the poor, orphans, and prostitutes—moved these students of the University of Paris to pledge themselves to a life of evangelization, poverty, chastity, and service to the poor and needy.

²⁵ For a full explanation of discernment of spirits and God’s providential guidance see Volume I (Chapter 8). A summary of this is also given in Chapter 9 of this Volume.

²⁶ A medieval prayer composed by Jean-Baptiste Lully. It was a favorite of St. Ignatius Loyola since the time of his conversion.

In 1537, Ignatius and his companions proceeded to Rome to put themselves at the service of the Pope. On the way there, he had a very palpable and moving vision of God the Father placing him with His Son – after which he determined to dedicate the Spirit of his new order to following Christ crucified. St. Ignatius was brought to tears not only by his vision of the crucified Jesus, but in his subsequent meditations on Him. This moved him with ever greater ardor to imitate the Lord who had loved him so – by accepting and even pursuing the cross that would empower his continued self-transformation and effectiveness in mission.

That same year, the companions received permission from Pope Paul III to be formally recognized as a religious order. He gave them temporary approval and allowed them to be ordained, which occurred at the church of St. Denis in Paris. In 1540 the Company of Jesus was formally approved by Pope Paul III.

Since the time of its formal approval, the Jesuits experienced meteoric expansion. They started classically based schools across Europe, became involved in the reform and strengthening of seminaries, and initiated missions in countries as far away as Paraguay, Bolivia, Columbia, China, Japan, India, Ontario, and Ethiopia. They were also responsible for the Counter Reformation in Germany, Poland, and Eastern Europe. St. Francis Xavier alone was so successful that he initiated missions in India, Japan, and Borneo, converting approximately 30,000 people before he died on an island outside China—hoping to gain entrance there to establish a mission.

Like St. Francis of Assisi, Ignatius’ charisma was grounded not only in his preaching and spiritual direction, but in his authentic love for Christ, the poor, and the deprived. His example was so great that the little Jesuit order initiated on the Hill of Montmartre in 1534 grew to over 1,000 priests worldwide by the time of his death in 1556. Again we see the riveting, if not addictive, quality of Level 4 love. People found St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier not only to be interesting, but almost irresistibly authentic and truthful. Their poverty, humility, self-sacrifice, and compassion gave credibility to their words of faith, which allowed them to have enormous impact for the needy, the culture, and the church. Was this addictive quality and enormous impact attributable to the charisma of St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier alone? Was it attributable to their heroism and natural talent alone? *They* certainly did not think so—they gave credit—all the credit—to the Lord of love working through their humble love and zeal to bring His word of hope to the world. In so doing they testified by word and action that love’s self-sacrificial and compassionate “power” is beyond pride and *worldly* power.

IV.C **St. Peter Claver**

Peter Claver was born in 1581 in Verdu, Catalonia (Spain). His parents were prosperous farmers and devout Catholics, and Peter took an early and deep interest in their faith. He was noted for his intelligence and piety, which enabled him to gain entrance to the Society of Jesus at the age of 20.

Prior to entering the Society, Claver studied at the University of Barcelona where he advanced not only in his education, but in his faith. He felt compelled to follow Jesus in his call

to be a servant/slave²⁷ of all – Mt. 20: 26-27, and he wrote in his journal, “I must dedicate myself to the service of God until death, on the understanding that I am like a slave.” As it turned out, this was an incredibly prescient remark.

After Claver completed his novitiate, he proceeded to his philosophical and theological studies at Majorca. There, he met a very pious brother, St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, who was a humble porter at the door. St. Alphonsus was no ordinary porter – he was the spiritual director of many of the seminarians (as well as townspeople), and was noted for his prophetic gift. When he saw Peter Claver, he felt that the Lord was calling him quite strongly to minister to the slaves in the new world. St. Alphonsus believed this so strongly, that he mentioned it on several occasions to Claver, who eventually decided to follow this lead as a way of fulfilling his call by Jesus to be at the service of all “like a slave.” In 1610, he volunteered to work in New Granada, and arrived at the port city of Cartagena in Colombia. There he witnessed the exceedingly harsh treatment of the black slaves, which deeply disturbed him. The call of Jesus to be a slave – even of the slaves (a servant of the servants) became solidified in his heart. Claver had to delay this call for six years so that he could complete his theological studies and be ordained a priest. After that, he pursued his heart’s desire.

Cartagena was a large slave trading post. Ships filled with black slaves regularly came from Africa and docked at the port there. Slave owners would come to a large auction area to bid on the slaves who survived the transit. Approximately one-third of the slaves died in transit, and the lower decks (where the slaves were “stored”) were so crowded and foul that even Claver was overcome by the experience. Two popes – Paul III and Urban VIII – had already vehemently condemned the slave trade, and Pope Pius IX later called it “the supreme villainy.” Nevertheless, the need for black slaves to work in the mines (rather than the weaker Indian natives) and the huge profits associated with the slave trade (who were sold for 50 times their cost in Africa) motivated most of the traders to turn a blind eye toward the papal pronouncements. This provoked Claver to become a “street preacher,” reminding the slave owners incessantly of their responsibility to the slaves before Christ and the Church. Though much of his preaching went unheeded, he did convince many to treat their slaves more humanely.

Claver felt deeply for the slaves whom he believed were his equals in every way. He became associated with Fr. Alonso de Sandoval (another Jesuit) who ministered to the slaves in the places they worked. He studied the slaves’ customs and languages (most of whom came from Ethiopia, Angola, and Congo) and later wrote a book about them. Claver learned these customs, and used translators to speak with the different slave groups for purposes of ministry and catechesis.

Where Sandoval ministered to the slaves in the workplace, Claver chose to do so on the ship at their point of entry. When a ship would come in, he would rush onto it, and go immediately to the slave decks, enduring the incredible stench and horrible sight, to minister to the slaves. He would bring food, drink, medicine, and other provisions to help them in their next stage of transit. When possible, he would try to educate the slaves in the faith, and if they wanted, baptize them. According to virtually all reports, he cared for, catechized, and baptized at

²⁷ The Greek word *doulos* used in the New Testament can be translated as either “servant” or “slave,” because servants were almost universally slaves in ancient culture.

least 300,000 slaves before his death. After their baptism, Claver reminded the slave traders that they must treat the slaves as “fellow Christians” – who had the same status as they did in the eyes of Jesus. After the slaves were sold, he followed up with the slave owners to make sure that the slaves were accorded their proper Christian and civil rights. In doing this work, he did not stay with the slave traders, but rather in the slave quarters – where Jesus his Lord would have been content to stay.

Claver became seriously ill in 1650. His Jesuit Superior hired a former slave to care for him, but when placed in charge of him, he physically abused and starved him in his last years. Claver never judged this former slave negatively for his harsh treatment – he saw it as a path to greater humility in imitation of the Lord of love. He died four years later in 1654, and ironically, was given a large state funeral – precisely the opposite of the way he lived and would have wanted – the final humiliation.

What motivated Peter Claver? Prior to entering the Jesuits, Claver’s great devotion to Jesus led him to what he believed to be the highest form of imitation – to be like a slave for everyone in the service of his Lord who was the servant of all and gave His life as a ransom for all. This early commitment (at the University of Barcelona) led him to the Jesuits, where in the novitiate he would have discovered St. Ignatius’ meditation on the “Two Standards” and the “Three Degrees of Humility” (in the *Spiritual Exercises*). In those meditations, St. Ignatius exhorts the retreatant to be poor with Christ’s poor, and to be humble with Christ’s humble – these two virtues help to resist the temptations of the evil one, who exhorts us instead to riches, honors, and glory – which will ultimately undermine our capacity for love and our desire for the kingdom.

No doubt, Claver responded to these meditations in the spirit of the third week of the exercises – which focuses solely on the passion and death of Jesus. He loved his Lord – particularly in his perfect self-sacrifice and love for everyone. This opened him to the imitation of Christ and the appropriation of a spirit of poverty and humility for the sake of love and service. The Lord had set the stage for his meeting with St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, and when the latter suggested being “the slave of the slaves,” Claver could not resist. He was impelled by desire, grace, and love to follow his Lord to the fullest expression of service and self-sacrifice – the fullness of love.

IV.D **Blessed Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa)**

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta is an extraordinary example of Level 4 love inspired by the love of Jesus. Born in 1910 of humble parents in an obscure town of Macedonia (Skopje), Anjezë (Agnes) Gonxhe Bojaxhiu fell in love with the person of Christ and a life of service at the age of 12. From that time on she experienced remarkable development leading to the spirituality that would underlie and nourish her extraordinary apostolic zeal. Her apostolic life was devoted to seeing the face of her beloved Jesus in the poorest of the poor and imitating Him in His love for them in her every action.

Her devotion was so strong and her love so pure, that she drew disciples to herself in precisely the same way as St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ignatius of Loyola. After starting the Missionaries of Charity – a Catholic religious order devoted to loving and serving the poorest of the poor – in 1950 with 13 sisters, the order grew quite rapidly, and by the time of her death (1997), it had grown to more than 4,000 sisters and 450 brothers in 120 countries worldwide. Her charism was so powerful that her order continued to grow by another 1,000 sisters a decade after her death.

How did this “little” woman from such humble beginnings soar to such heights of love and service? In a phrase, it was the Lord’s powerful inspiration, call, and guidance. It seems that the Lord called Agnes to a life of service at a very early age. She was so intrigued with the service of missionaries in Bengal that she would spend hours reading their biographies – all the while intensely desiring (a sign of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) to serve the poor in mission countries. At the age of 12, she resolved to become a religious sister and serve in the missions.²⁸ At the age of 18, while praying before the shrine of the Black Madonna of Letnice, she became certain of God’s call to her, and resolved to join the Sisters of Loreto as a missionary.²⁹ Though the details of these experiences are not known, it must have been significant enough to move her to a remarkable lifelong commitment to the poor. She was well on the way to Level 4 love at the age of 18.

Agnes joined the Sisters of Loreto, took the name “Teresa” (after Thérèse of Lisieux), and took final vows in 1937 (at the age of 27). During her years of formation, she became deeply interested in the spirituality of Thérèse who emphasized self-sacrifice in imitation of Jesus for the salvation of souls (see Chapter 8, Section III). St. Thérèse transformed her sufferings (from tuberculosis) into acts of loving self-sacrifice for the salvation of those in need. Teresa was struck by this, and placed self-sacrifice at the center of her spirituality. She would experience heightened suffering in a “dark night of the soul” (in imitation of St. Thérèse) throughout the last thirty years of her life (explained below in this section).

Teresa spent twenty years teaching in the mission school associated with the convent in Calcutta, and eventually became headmistress of the school. Though she was a skilled teacher and administrator and loved the students, she sympathized deeply with the poor in Calcutta—particularly during two extended periods of famine. This led to her “call” to start the Missionaries of Charity—dedicated to serving the poorest of the poor.

After spending twenty years at the convent school, she experienced what she called “a call within a call” on a train ride from Calcutta to Darjeeling in 1946 (at the age of 36). The experience was so powerful and convincing that she considered it to be “an order from the Lord.” Teresa found herself following in the footsteps of St. Thérèse’s mystical experience of Jesus on the cross who declared to her: “I thirst” (see Jn. 19:28). Like Thérèse, Teresa interpreted Jesus’ cry to be an unquenchable thirst to bring as many as possible to the heights of love and the salvation of their souls. She desired to love Christ in the poorest of the poor and to offer her sacrifices for their needs and salvation. At this point she had given herself over to Level 4 love—complete self-sacrifice for the good of the kingdom. Her “call within a call” (interpreted through

²⁸ See Joan Clucas. 1988. *Mother Teresa* (New York: Chelsea House Publications) p. 24.

²⁹ See Meg Green. 2004. *Mother Teresa: A Biography* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press) p. 11.

the mystical love of St. Thérèse) led to the mission statement of her new religious order: "to quench the infinite *thirst* of Jesus on the cross for love and souls...[by] labouring for the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor."

After taking a brief course in medical training in Patna, Teresa moved into the slums of Calcutta and began to serve the poorest of the poor as a poor person. She saw the image of Christ in the eyes of those she served—particularly the dying, diseased, and destitute, and found a spiritual joy in her service and love of Jesus in the poor. Teresa's love was "heroic yet humble and self-effacing" and her joy palpable and mystical—even amidst the sickening smells and disturbing sights of Calcutta's slums. This love and joy led to an explosion of vocations in her newly found Order, which in turn led to an explosion of hospitals, charity centers, houses for the dying, mobile medical units, food pantries, and soup kitchens. Her spirituality of humble-heroic love (complemented by spiritual joy) fascinated many—and when some joined her religious Order, they found it to be "tough but addictive"—certainly not for the faint of heart, but filled with an expressed love for Jesus.

At this juncture, the Lord asked Mother Teresa for the ultimate sacrifice—similar to that experienced by St. Thérèse of Lisieux—the dark night of the soul. We must pause here for a moment to address this important spiritual phenomenon which is generally restricted to those with a well-developed spiritual life immersed in humble and heroic Level 4 love—such as St. John of the Cross (who wrote extensively about it³⁰), St. Teresa of Avila, St. Thérèse of Lisieux (the main inspiration of Mother Teresa), and St. Paul of the Cross. St. John of the Cross explains the Lord's rationale for introducing such darkness into the lives of his devoted beloveds as follows:

[T]he soul not only suffers the void and suspension of these natural supports and apprehensions, which is a terrible anguish (like hanging in midair, unable to breathe), but it is also purged by this contemplation. As fire consumes the tarnish and rust of metal, this contemplation annihilates, empties, and consumes all the affections and imperfect habits the soul contracted throughout its life.³¹

As St. John of the Cross indicates, the "dark night" is yet another form of suffering – experienced by only a few truly holy and loving people – given by the Lord as a stage of *final purgation* to help purify Level 4 love of any remaining imperfections – residual attachments, aberrant affections, and spiritual pride. It may seem bewildering that the Lord would (lovingly) cause the most loving people to experience emptiness, darkness and profound loneliness in order to complete their purification in love. To be sure, He does not do this with the vast majority of people – even those who are very advanced in holiness and love; yet, He does do this for a select few whom *He knows* can endure it and benefit from it. Several Catholic *contemplatives and mystics* experience this kind of purgation but it is less frequent in active contemplatives such as Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. Nevertheless, the Lord knew that she – having chosen Thérèse of Lisieux as her primary inspiration -- would be able to endure the pain of final purgation like her spiritual mother who declared:

³⁰ See St. John of the Cross *Dark Night of the Soul* in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh (Wash. D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Press).

³¹ *Ibid* p 364.

When I want to rest my heart, wearied by the darkness which surrounds it, by the memory of the luminous country to which I aspire, my torment redoubles; it seems to me that the darkness, borrowing the voice of sinners, says mockingly to me: "You are dreaming about the light, about a country fragrant with the sweetest perfumes; you are dreaming about the *eternal* possession of the Creator of all these things; you believe that one day you will walk out of this fog which surrounds you! Dream on, dream on; rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for, but even deeper night, the night of nothingness!" ... In spite of this trial, which robs me of all comfort, I still can say: "Thou hast given me, O Lord, delight in all Thou dost. For what joy can be greater than to suffer for Thy Love? The more the suffering is and the less it appears before men, the more is it to Thy Honour and Glory."³²

It is crucial to note that the Lord is not causing "the voices of sinners" who make suggestions about the fictitiousness of eternal life and his love. Rather, the Lord simply removes his normal consolation and supports from the saint's consciousness, leaving him or her open to their own dark unconscious suggestions as well as those of the evil spirit.³³

These other voices (not belonging to the Lord) are part of the purification process. Their suggestions about ultimate darkness are temptations against hope that must be confronted and defeated—so also their suggestions about the Lord's infidelity and uncaring nature (temptations against faith and trust). Most importantly, their suggestions to "cut and run," "to give it all up," and to cynically proclaim the falsity of unconditional love are temptations against love – the ultimate temptation of pride and egocentricity. They too must be confronted and defeated—and when the trial is over—and it will be over—there will be the perfect joy of completely purified love with the Lord. This is precisely what happened to Mother Teresa in her final weeks on this earth.

According to Benedict Groeschel, who documented the accounts of Blessed Teresa's sisters, and witnessed it himself, she suddenly emerged from her serious and somber demeanor, and became filled with joy and hope that was both giddy and intensely ecstatic. Groeschel writes:

Fr. Brian [Kolodiejchuk—postulator general of her cause] records the sisters' observation when Mother Teresa returned to Calcutta shortly before her death: "After her return from Rome [and New York] . . . Mother had been extremely happy, joyful, optimistic, and talkative. Her face was always radiant, full of fun. The Lord must have revealed to her the impending end of her life." . . . I personally observed this joyfulness

³² St. Thérèse of Lisieux 1912 *The Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux with Additional Writings and Sayings of St. Thérèse*
<http://www.catholicbible101.com/St.%20Therese%20Story%20of%20a%20soul.pdf>
pp. 93-94.

³³ For an explanation of "ordinary consolation and supports," see Vol. I, Chapter 8, Section II. For an explanation of the reality of evil and the deceptions of the evil spirit, see Robert Spitzer 2016 *Called Out of Darkness: Contending with Evil Through Virtue and Prayer*.

the day before Mother returned to Calcutta. I was asked by her sisters to offer Mass for her. She was so weak that she could not stand, but attended Mass lying on a cot. My confrere Fr. Andrew Apostoli and I were utterly astonished after Mass when she was "bubbly." She laughed and told us with great joy the number of sisters and convents they had throughout the world. Mother never spoke about this before, and she was not doing so in any boastful way. Rather, she was rejoicing "with triumphant exultation" at the great blessings God had been able to grant through the Missionaries of Charity.³⁴

Blessed Teresa was longsuffering, but following Jesus her beloved and St. Thérèse, her inspiration, she knew well the power of offering her suffering – most especially her spiritual suffering – as a loving, self-sacrificial offering for the strength of the Church and the salvation of souls (see Chapter 8, Section II). She also knew that her suffering would purify her in the manner described above, and so she knew that even though darkness pervaded her interior life, she could present the joy of Christ to others through her exterior love and life. Hence, even in her darkest days, she was able to begin with her adaptation of the prayer of John Henry Cardinal Newman:

Dear Jesus, help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go.
Flood our souls with your spirit and life.
Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly,
That our lives may only be a radiance of yours.
May we feel your presence in our soul.
Shine through us, and be so in us,
[so] that every person we come in contact with –
Let them look up and see no longer us, but only Jesus.
Stay with us, and then we shall begin to shine as you shine;
So to shine as to be a light to others.
Jesus, the light, will be all from you.
None of it will be ours.
It will be you shining on others through us.
Let us preach you without preaching:
Not by words, but by our example,
By the catching force,
The sympathetic influence of what we do,
The evident fullness of the love our hearts bear for you.
Amen.³⁵

As Blessed Teresa experienced a void within, she continued to see Jesus in the faces and figures of the people she served, and in serving them, love the One whom she desired more than anyone else. This gave her *genuine* joy to lift up those who had no joy. This seeming bifurcation of interior and exterior life was brought back to complete integration in her final days when the joy she found serving Christ through the poor penetrated her very soul revealing

³⁴ Benedict Groeschel 2007 "Mother Teresa Remembered" *First Things*
<http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2007/09/mother-teresa-remembered> Sept. 11, 2007.

³⁵ Blessed Mother Teresa "Adaptation of the Prayer of John Henry Newman" in *World Prayers*.
http://www.worldprayers.org/archive/prayers/invocations/dear_jesus_help_us_to.html

her ultimate home – with Jesus and His heavenly Father. Patient endurance of her suffering led her to the heights of love – and she knew well that in the “twinkling of an eye” there would be no suffering – only unconditional love – with her beloved forever.

V. Conclusion

At the height of the fourth level of love, suffering and love are unified — but only for a while—the remainder of our earthly lives. Suffering calls forth loving self-sacrifice for others and the Kingdom of God. It purifies us in love, by bestowing gifts of humility, empathy for the weak, and trust in God. It enables us to offer ourselves in sacrifice to the Lord for salvation of the world in imitation of Jesus’ act of unconditional love—(see Vol. III, Chapter 3, Section IV).

When suffering has done its purifying work—and when it has been freely embraced as an act of love—it is no longer necessary. At that point, our free choices toward the higher levels of love--inspired by the grace of God -- will have shaped our eternal identity. Like St. Francis, St. Ignatius, St. Peter Claver, and Blessed Teresa, it remains only for the Lord to call us into the Kingdom of His perfectly loving joy.

The above biographies shed light on how the Lord inspires us to the heights of love through suffering. The misery and emptiness caused by the negative emotions of the comparison game lead us toward Level 3 and Level 4. The suffering coming from cosmic emptiness, loneliness and alienation, opens the way to a deeper relationship with the Lord who alone can satisfy our restless hearts. This movement toward the Lord reveals His love—a love recognized by virtually all the world’s religions, but brought to fruition in the revelation of Jesus Christ who showed us in word and action His unconditional love and that of His Father—a love of perfect humility, empathy, and compassion demonstrated in His free and complete self-sacrifice on the cross.

Meditating on the passion and death of Jesus has led scores of Christians toward the heights of humble-heroic Level 4 love—not only St. Francis, St. Ignatius, St. Peter Claver, Blessed Teresa, and virtually every known saint, but also the unheralded self-sacrificial love of tens of thousands of “Davys” (from Vanauken’s *A Severe Mercy*) who give themselves completely for others and the Kingdom. The powerful example of Jesus is a conduit for inspiration to move toward ever greater acceptance of suffering—ever greater heights of love—for the sake of the One who loved us in the same way. Once inspired, we leave a legacy of incomparable good – and after our hearts have been purified, we inherit the Kingdom prepared for us from the beginning of time.

We are now in a position to examine the opportunities of suffering (Chapters 7 and 8)—for as now might be clear, the primary opportunity of suffering is love—a legacy of love, purification of love, and the inheritance of unconditional love. Bearing these opportunities in mind, we will be able to learn how to follow the Holy Spirit during times of suffering (Chapter 9) and why the unconditionally loving God would allow suffering in the world (Chapter 10).