



A Long Way East of Eden 5: Love After God

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A Long Way East of Eden by Pete Lowman was first published in 2002. We are grateful to the author for his work in preparing it for publication on **bethinking.org**.

Love After God: 'Has it not become colder?'

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'Maybe there's a God, maybe there isn't. It doesn't matter much.'

But as we've seen, it does matter. And the long-term loss – and gain! – to us looms largest in the area of life that has become central to our culture: personal relationships.

The final shelter

Intimacy embodies so much that matters deeply to us.

We've looked at the issue of *identity*, and seen how the experience of love forms a vital component of a healthy self-worth. (The advertisers are aware of it too: *'Don't let love and life pass you by'*, runs a Dateline ad.) It's scarcely the whole story, of course – yet most of us have known what it is to feel our loneliness consuming our self-worth from within.

And doesn't *purpose* in life also focus, to a significant extent and for plenty of us, into the discovery and development of 'real' relationship? But so, increasingly, does *ethics*; as we have seen – *'What's right is what's right for my family...'*

So it is that relationships have often become our final citadel in the twilight of the West, after the death of God. This is Matthew Arnold:

...The sea of faith

*was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd;
but now I only hear
its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar
retreating to the breath
of the night wind down the vast edges drear
and naked shingles of the world.*

Ah, love, let us be true

*to one another! for the world, which seems
to lie before us like a land of dreams,
so various, so beautiful, so new,
hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
and we are here as on a darkling plain
swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
where ignorant armies clash by night.*

(Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach')

Love, let us be true to one another: that will be left when everything else is gone. This is D.H. Lawrence:

'I know,' he said. 'It just doesn't centre. The old ideals are dead – nothing there. It seems to me there remains only this perfect union with a woman – sort of ultimate marriage – and there isn't anything else.'

'And you mean if there isn't the woman, there's nothing?' said Gerald.

'Pretty well that – seeing there's no God.'

'Then we're hard to put to it,' said Gerald.[1]

(D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*)

When there is nothing else left to believe in '*seeing there's no God*', love remains. The pattern recurs in a singer central to more recent decades, John Lennon, whose haunting melody 'Imagine' was arguably the most beautiful denial of Christian beliefs ever written. 'Imagine' didn't stand alone; other songs by Lennon demonstrate profound unbelief, not only in Jesus and the Bible but in many other kinds of ideals besides. One thing, however, he still expressed particular faith in: his relationship with Yoko Ono.[2] '*Love, let us be true to one another*' (Arnold); that is where we look for shelter when everything else is gone.

Candle in the dark

But will our shelter hold as the 'night-wind' turns chillier?

We do seem to face a problem. As Lewis would say, often we find love when we're looking for something else; once love itself becomes our goal, it gets harder to find – or even to understand.

An historical example: the artistic movement known as Romanticism often sought fulfilment in human impulses such as love, after the sterility of eighteenth-century rationalism. Somehow, however, it didn't work; it all ended up in tortured excess and twisted relationships, over which stands the shadow of the cruelty of the Marquis de Sade. The love-god turned out to be broken or unattainable. (The whole development is charted in Mario Praz's thorough if unpleasant book *The Romantic Agony*.)

To D.H. Lawrence too, the man woman relationship offered so much creative potential. But his novels' relationships usually seem unsatisfying, his lovers devouring-and-devoured. And in 1921 we find him writing of love more broadly:

'Why is everybody always caring so hard about somebody else? Why not leave off? In short, why not have done with Jesus and with love and have a shot at conscious proud power. Why not soldiers instead of lovers? Why not laugh, and spit in the eye of love. Really, why not laugh?... Kick the posterior of creeping love, and laugh when it whimpers. Pah, it is a disease love... give me henceforth Mars, and a free flight.' [3]

Later still, the '60s placed 'free love' at the centre of a culture whose anthem was 'All You Need Is Love'. But somehow it turned into abuse and whips, children with vanished fathers, planeloads of pornography leaving Europe each day for the two-thirds-world where their effect is colossal. (Of course the rate of women being gang-raped has shot up in places like Port Moresby, New Guinea; but that's how the free market works. The West feels sometimes like an open sewer to the rest of the world.)

Somehow we wanted love, but we've failed to get

it right. Singers like Alanis Morissette express a strong sense of the failure of relationships, and the damage they can do. *'The cult of intimacy conceals a growing despair of finding it'*, writes the respected American commentator Christopher Lasch; *'Isolation seems to be the disease of our time'*, confirms Allan Bloom.[4] One of the things that made the '90s collapse of the British royal marriages so significant – Diana and Charles, Fergie and Andrew – was the sense of representativeness: the royals couldn't make it work either. According to Andrew Morton, the night Charles proposed to Diana, she told him in response how much she loved him. *'Whatever love means'*, was his reply.

So what does it mean? – after the death of the Christian God from whom the term was historically defined? The Christian worldview didn't merely describe love (*'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.'*[5]) More crucially, it affirmed – uniquely among world religions – that God actually 'is Love'; and it pointed to Christ's ultimate act of love on Calvary as the pattern for all relationships – and for sexual and marital lovers in particular.[6] But God doesn't exist. So, in a world of disposable marriages and cocktail sex, what should we use the word 'love' to mean?

Is love anything more than a word? Does 'love' mean any more than the mere hunger for sex and company... more than a temporary tactical alliance with sex included, accompanied by pleasurable but passing feelings? Actress Joan Collins once admitted, *'I've never been able to figure out what love means.'*[7] Novelist Julian Barnes has an answer for her: love is just a way of getting someone to call you darling after sex. Camille Paglia is equally tough-minded: sex is combat. Feminist writer Andrea Dworkin: *'Romance is rape embellished with meaningful looks.'*

And if you don't believe that, still what does love mean? We've learnt sex: now where do we learn tenderness? How can you tell whether or not your relationship is a destructive 'codependency'? How far should love extend – what does it entail in terms of commitment or forgiveness? (*'I would have*

*thought not forgiving was a sign of love', said a character in a recent TV drama about marital unfaithfulness.) And how do we find the strength – or will – to (truly) forgive anyway? Again, is love something that can last? Can it coexist, long-term, with marriage? Medieval 'courtly love' poets denied it; and the clear message of films like *Falling In Love* (Meryl Streep, Robert de Niro) is that 'love cannot endure in the humdrum atmosphere of married life, it needs the secret hothouse excitement of an affair.[8] 'Modern marriage is in chaos. We no longer have a clear concept of what marriage means', says Penny Mansfield of *One to One*. 'That's what marriage is – concentrated lust', says a character in 'Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman'. How do we find our definition – or should we each make our own? Is the story of many broken relationships that of the fatal combat of different ideas as to what 'love' and 'marriage' mean?*

Or is there simply something scientifically inevitable about the decline of love into exploitation and domination? We could recall Sartre's comment: 'All kinds of materialism lead one to treat everyone, including oneself, as an object.' What then is this 'love'? One problem posed by the new psychology and brain genetics is whether 'love' is any more than a sentimental gloss to dignify the evolutionary mating drive, and the reactions certain sights or scents trigger in our chemistry so that our genes get passed on. 'Why is love?', wonders biologist Colin Tudge provocatively:

... The point of sex is to mix genes. The constant supply of novelty provides the raw material for evolutionary change... But no creature in its right mind would risk sex, no matter how worthwhile the biologists might show it to be. So natural selection has ensured that we are not in our right minds: passion for motivation, ecstasy for reward – testosterone, adrenalin, endorphins. That's about all there is to it, really.[9]

But where does that leave us? William Barrett writes,

Suppose, out of a moment of theoretical austerity... we strive to consider those close to us "as if" they had no minds and were not conscious, but were only behaving bodies. We would very shortly be schizoid, deranged. Or, to make the

illustration as plain and grotesque as possible, you are approaching a moment of tenderness and passion with the woman you love, but for a moment you stop to reflect that theoretically you can treat her words and caresses as if there were no consciousness or mind behind them. That way madness lies! [10]

But it doesn't, of course; that way, quite probably, the future of psychology lies, with its assumption that (now God is dead) 'love' means only a loaded term for triggered but mechanical responses. How the woman might feel about it is another matter, of course; the 'moment of passion' might well not be repeated.

But facts remain facts. Unless, of course, our intuitions are perhaps in touch with realities deeper than our atheism?

Where did our love go?

Kurt Vonnegut's nihilistic classic *Cat's Cradle* offers us a way of looking at our confusion about love:

*'Is – is there anyone else in your life?'
She was puzzled. 'Many,' she said at last.
'That you love?'
'I love everyone.'
'As – as much as me?'
'Yes.' She seemed to have no idea that this might bother me...
'I suppose you – perform – you do what we just did with – other people?'
'Boko-maru?'
'Boko-maru.'
'Of course.'
'I don't want you to do it with anybody but me from now on... As your husband, I'll want all your love for myself.'*

The speaker isn't expecting the disagreement that follows:

She stared at me with widening eyes. 'A sin-wat!' 'What was that?' 'A sin-wat!' she cried. 'A man who wants all of somebody's love. That's very bad.' 'In the case of marriage, I think it's a very good thing... Is that clear?' 'No.' 'No?'

'I will not marry a sin-wat.' She stood. 'Good-bye.'
'Good-bye?' I was crushed.

Then comes the cause of the problem:

'Bokonon tells us it is very wrong not to love everybody the same. What does your religion say?'

'I – I don't have one.'[11]

Step by step, the lovers' relationship heads for impasse. And the reason emerges in the final question: *'What does your religion say?'* *'I – I don't have one'*, replies the hapless male. The implication seems clear: inconsistencies in our deepest worldviews can lead to radically divergent perceptions of what 'love' involves; and if we've never thought around that level we may not understand why our love has gone wrong. But what are these 'divergent perceptions'?

Let's get historical again. Allan Bloom, notorious for his provocative *The Closing of the American Mind*, has an equally thought-provoking analysis of these uncertainties in his book *Love and Friendship*.

Bloom's story sees two forces at work. First, he links the 'death of eros' with the triumph of the outlook generated by 'materialistic science'; particularly in the powerful form of Freudian psychology, and the mechanisation of sex symbolised by surveys like the incompetent but influential Kinsey report. Their result, he contends, has been an *'impoverishment of feeling'*. *'Everything is so routine and without mystery'*; the *'risk and the hope of human connectedness'* have been replaced by an *'appalling matter-of-factness... A description of sex is no different from a description of eating habits, and the object of desire is essentially indifferent.'*[12] Consumption has replaced affection, he suggests; and at the intellectual cutting-edge, what we used to call love has turned into either a contract-relationship or a power-struggle.

Bloom is very good at linking this 'fall of eros' with the megatrends of the broader cultural scene. He notes the influence here of *'the hot new principle that all human relations, especially sexual ones, follow from the one motivating principle in man, the will to power. Everything is power-*

relationships, crude power, the will to dominate.'[13] The key prophet of this *'hot new principle'* was of course the atheistic postmodernist Foucault again; and Foucault's own erotic life was deeply involved with sado-masochism. (As Sturrock has commented, Foucault lived out in S/M what he set forth in theory in his philosophical work, the *'rigmaroles of domination and submission he had earlier uncovered in symbolic form'*. He died of an AIDS-related illness in 1984.)

Power, the will to dominate, to keep control – that is one contemporary 'aspect of love'. And in this *'war of all against all'*, says Bloom, the *'only possible peace is to be found in artificial constructs... Abstract reason in the service of radically free men and women can discover only contract as the basis of connectedness – the social contract, marriage contract, somehow mostly the business contract as model, with its union of selfish individuals. Legalism takes the place of sentiment.'*[14] Bloom probably has in mind the bizarre contracts suggested as frameworks for relationship in America's more postmodernist colleges. But we might also recall the well-meaning British liberals who suggest that newly-married couples should sit down and work out the contractual rules for when they break up (surely an approach tending towards disastrously self-fulfilling prophecy).[15] Nor is it only liberal postmodernists who turn so quickly to contracts as a basis for relationship. We saw two chapters back how the post-Christian New Right has gone in the same direction, with unfortunate effects on the vital intangibles of idealism and generosity.

Now if these two factors summarize the reality of 'love' – contract with no ultimate commitment, and power as the hidden driving force – it obviously raises the issue of security: how can I avoid ending up as the loser here? Thus the *'sexual talk of our times'*, says Bloom, *'is about how to get greater bodily satisfaction (although decreasingly so), or increasingly how to protect ourselves from one another... Ours is a language that reduces the longing for the other to the need for individual, private satisfaction and safety.'*[16] This sense of fear, of the need for self-protectiveness, features in many contemporary discussions of relationship. *'Of course men betray you'*, writes Edmund White in *The Farewell Symphony*, *'of course love is an illusion dispelled by lust, of course you end up*

alone.' *'For both sexes in this society, caring deeply for anyone is becoming synonymous with losing'*, wrote Hendin in his survey of American students, *The Age of Sensation*.^[17] And Christopher Lasch's famous study *The Culture of Narcissism* suggests that:

'Both men and women have come to approach personal relations with a heightened appreciation of their emotional risks. Determined to manipulate the emotion of others while protecting themselves against emotional injury, both sexes cultivate a protective shallowness, a cynical detachment they do not altogether feel but which soon becomes habitual.'^[18]

Thus we find the Spice Girls singing, *'If you wanna be my lover, you gotta get with my friends'*, because it is friendship that is safe, friendship that *'never ends'*. Friends are people you can trust; lovers may well not be. Friendship is safe; love is not.^[19]

Still, this is not the whole story. Perhaps the tradition of 'materialistic science' has indeed led us to treat each other as objects; perhaps mechanistic psychology has replaced 'love' with an atmosphere of power-struggle in a jungle of selfish-gene Darwinism, restrained only by our self-protective contracts. But, says Bloom, there has also been a second, humanizing alternative in our culture. This is the Romantic tradition, deriving from Rousseau in the eighteenth century.

Rousseau comes after the 'loss of God'; he was seeking to *'reintroduce eroticism in the context of Enlightenment materialism'*, says Bloom.^[20] Both Rousseau and his era had turned away from Christianity, so what he did was replace that earlier faith in God with *'sincerity in the profession of faith'* itself; *'sincerity puts the onus on the subjective certainty of the self.'*^[21] And that subjective sincerity became the heart of the whole Romantic tradition of love and relationship.

Here too, however, there was a problem. Rousseau assigned a central place in love to *'imagination unsupported by reality. He, of course, did so because he was persuaded that in fact imagination has no such foundation in reality for its creations.'*^[22] Thus the imagination central

to Romantic love is one unrelated to reality. Bloom quotes Rousseau as observing, *'This beauty is not in the object one loves; it is the work of our errors. So, what of it? Does the lover any the less sacrifice all of his low sentiments to this imaginary model?... In love everything is only illusion. I admit it. But what is real are the sentiments.'*^[23] They are ultimately unrealistic, but they are what really matter in love.

Give it a slightly more positive spin, and we recognize Rousseau's Romanticism, and his sadness, as contemporary 'aspects of love'. 'Love is blind', we smile tolerantly – as if the alternative is a realism of disillusion, but the illusion is worth having so long as we can believe in it. The Christian idea of love was different; it was founded, not on the improbable perfection of the partner, but on the active loving-kindness of God who brings imperfect partners wisely together. Love then becomes the emotional counterpart of something objectively real, a shared lifelong calling from God. But in our Romantic tradition, love tends ultimately to be 'a rock built on a fairy's wing'; at its heart is unreality. It is the greatest of dreams, but in the end we will know it for an illusion, and expect marriage to be something different. The Romantic hero and heroine will ride away into the sunset when the movie ends. Their 'love' belongs on another planet – it will not have to face the nappies and the conflicts over decoration. But we will. And at such times, if 'love' is only illusion then it may collapse under us. If that be 'love', we need some other word for the realities of relationship. And so 'love' loses its meaning.

That illusion is all too clear in the drastic gap between Rousseau's romantic rhetoric and his repeated habit of abandoning the children he fathered. Bloom goes on to show how the Romantic ideal fascinated, and failed, the following generations (for example in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Anna Karenina*). Above all, says Bloom, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* marked the inadequacy of the romantic hope:

Love had, it appears, no foundation in nature... Emma [Bovary] and Flaubert are full of longings for ideals that cannot be and are really, from the standpoint of reason, foolish. The aspiration of author and heroine is impossible to fulfil, and the world they look at in terms of it is dreary past endurance. They share defeat.'^[24]

The writers that followed, he adds, were bitter.[25]

So neither the materialistic nor the Romantic tradition give our hearts what they call for. Seen in this light, our 'love problem' becomes a classic instance of the 'split' Francis Schaeffer sees as haunting Europe's culture, ever since its loss of the Reformation's biblical worldview.[26] Up to and during the Reformation, says Schaeffer, God's reality underpinned and unified both the world of God's science and the world of God's values; they fitted together. In contrast, our post-Reformation, 'god-less' worldviews contain a disastrous chasm. On one side are the ideals and values we long for, that turn out, fatally, to have no true foundation in any reality. On the other stand the brute facts of materialistic science, which offer no values at all. Bloom's presentation of 'love' seems to exemplify this.[27] Between the romantic ideal we imagine, and the brute facts of life as seen through our dominant, mechanistic worldview, stands an enormous gulf; and neither is enough for us to live by alone.

It is particularly interesting that Bloom (who does not appear to be a Christian) sees the most coherent presentations of love coming in the work of Shakespeare – written, of course, when that unified, Reformation synthesis was dominant. Shakespeare, says Bloom, is neither a materialist, nor an advocate of a groundless romantic imagination. He does not have to start from human *'isolation and selfishness'*; but nor does he *'begin, as does Rousseau, from a Cartesian radical doubt and then try to put the machine back together again'*. Instead, says Bloom, Shakespeare's 'pre-modern view' leads to a *'naturalness'* about human connectedness.[28] We should not overstate the case here; yet if Shakespeare's ability to make this fusion work has anything to do with the Reformation, then it becomes of particular interest when set alongside the idea of Linda Grant (author of *Sexing the Millennium*) and others that 'companionate marriage', based on intimacy and devotion, was also an invention of the seventeenth century. Somehow the God-oriented Reformation worldview offered a coherent base for the meaning of love-as-marriage, and for thinking and writing about love.

If that is so, then the post-Reformation 'death of God' is highly important for understanding our

problems in 'love' today. In what ways might the death of God have contributed to the death of love? How might the rediscovery of God help me to be a good lover?

Intimacy and the death of the Father

There are at least three key areas where the presence of God significantly empowers our approach to relationship. First, the sense of calling that comes from faith in God the Father as sovereign Creator; second, the understanding of love that comes from faith in Jesus as God the Son; and third, the confidence that comes from faith in God the Spirit.

Most simply, our attitude to 'love' is profoundly affected by the notion that God himself 'is Love'. If that is true, love is not merely a piece of unscientific illusion; nor is it just a construct of the adolescent imagination, ungrounded in reality. Instead, our love would partake of reality in some very profound manner. That would be very significant. We are used to living with a huge chasm between two worlds that seem diametrically opposed to each other, even in denial of each other: the world of scientific objectivity that matters so much to us, and the world of authentic feeling that matters equally. The reality of a God who himself 'is Love' bridges that chasm. If true, it validates our emotional and sexual life, and challenges us to believe that love is more than just a word.[29]

But secondly, the belief in God the Father as Creator offers us profound confidence in God's loving sovereignty within our own lives and relationships. He is *good*, he is *almighty*, and he is always *'working together for good with those who love him'*, in our marriage as in everything else.[30] Psychologist Lawrence Crabb points to such faith as one of the strongest motivators for rekindling a disintegrating relationship.[31] Faith in a loving God's goodness brings us to believe he will not lead us, in so vital a matter, into something totally destructive. In some sense at least, we are in our right place; our marriage is one he has lovingly foreseen, and indeed (unless we entered it without seriously seeking his will) created. (*'Like meeting on board a ship; knowing you're bound for a long journey together'*, it's been said.) God surely desires, then, to provide ways to develop this marriage he has given us

into the kind of marriage he would want us to have. So many times this writer has talked to partners who are working through significant relational issues, and in the end they have concluded on an upbeat note with, *'But I'm sure God has brought us together.'* *'Three things are essential for a good marriage'*, said a writer in *His, 'commitment, commitment, and commitment'*: a sense of the calling of God is a powerful encouragement that this kind of creative commitment is worthwhile. (It is also a complete response to the pessimists who regard long-term marriage as unrealistic because it assumes that two different people will grow and mature in tandem. Belief in God implies faith that our growth process has been designed precisely to unfold in tandem.)

Related to this is the psychological effect of faith in the biblical teaching on marriage. Jesus taught clearly that divorce was unacceptable – that is, in view of God's supernatural power, no marriage was irretrievable – except in certain very limited situations.[32] In a challenging marriage, then, the only way out is forwards. This might seem a stimulus to despair if divorced from its all-important companion, faith in God's absolute goodness. But paired with that, it becomes enormously motivational. Include the possibility of divorce, and the option exists of playing the spectator: *'Well, let's see if she changes over the next months. If not, I can think about getting out.'* But if that option doesn't exist, there is no alternative but to make the marriage work. It becomes more 'profitable' to contemplate the difficult actions – swallowing our pride, forgiving, apologizing – that may in fact change the situation. Again, whether the Bible's marital teaching comes from a real God, and whether it is backed by real supernatural power, can make a huge difference in how we are motivated to act. (It is interesting that Zelda West-Meads of Relate – formerly the National Marriage Guidance Council – reports, *'When people with strong religious convictions encounter problems in their marriage they try harder to resolve them... Register office marriages are more likely to end in divorce than those conducted in church.'*[33])

At this point God's loving calling goes to the heart of the problem expressed by *Generation X* author Douglas Coupland in one of his later novels: *'She says: I'm sorry, but I just stopped being in love. It*

happened. I woke up and it was gone and it scared me and I felt like I was lying and hollow pretending to be "the wife." And I just can't do it anymore. I love you but I'm not in love.'[34] What is love? *'I love you but I'm not in love.'* Which 'love' matters most as foundation for truly fruitful longterm relationship? Taking Jesus' teaching seriously transforms this particular issue. The two 'great commandments' of the Old Testament are both *'You shall love'* (God in the first instance, your neighbour as yourself in the second).[35] Thus 'love' in its primary meaning is something we choose to exercise (or not), rather than something we either have or haven't got spurting up inside us. *'Love is a decision'*, says Gary Smalley; or in Trobisch's words, love is a *'feeling to be learned'* and fostered, rather than simply observed. When St Paul writes about marriage, the main thing he wants to tell husbands – no less than three times – is, *'Husbands, love your wives'*.[36] Evidently he thinks they can decide to! Christian belief has always been that emotions follow the will; God gives the feelings as we set out to love him and do his will, rather than in advance of our obedience. Counsellors confirm this as a common pattern in marital love too;[37] the issue is finding the power to get the process started. So here again our loss of God will logically have significant results in our relationships.

Ironically, commitment to marriage as a lifelong 'safe place' can make it a lot easier to handle conflict. *'We never dared to fight'*, Kathy told me after her live-in relationship broke up. *'Because any conflict might be the one that broke us apart. So I had to cut off any area where we might fight. In the end there was less and less for us to talk about. We never had the security to face conflict openly.'*

Faith in marriage as God's lifelong calling transforms it in a fifth way. Very few people get married without intending a serious commitment. But knowing it is truly 'till death us do part', and death alone, takes it onto a different level. It means we are saying: Whatever happens to either of us, with God's grace I will be there for you. If you have an accident or disease that leaves you physically scarred and sexually unattractive, still I will be there. If you have a deep depressive or mental illness, I will be there for you. If for a while we can't seem to work things out, I won't take it as an excuse to find someone else, I will stick with it and you and do everything I can to make things work. If you have a car crash and end up paralysed, I will still be there for you. If someone more attractive comes into my range of vision, still you can trust that I will be there for you only. Because that is how God loves us. In our consumer society, marriage all too easily becomes another 'disposable' – except that, this time, we are what gets thrown away. But that is a result of the banishment of God from our mental horizon. Lifelong marriage in the sight of God is an unlimited commitment to the other.

And this in turn transforms the meaning of sex. If marriage is a growing into total and lifelong oneness, sex is the physical expression and symbol of that oneness; an act of unlimited openness and self-giving, in a context of total mutual commitment, security, and trust. But with the 'death of God', the focus in our culture has moved away from sex as emblem of lifetime commitment – emphasising instead self-fulfilment,[38] making sure I get my orgasm. (In the process, sex itself seems changed; in novelists like Jay McInerney, its natural context has shifted from the bedroom to the bathroom.) But this too may be self-defeating. Instead of finding a place where there is space and time to learn sexually (and many of us need that), we're back into performance: Was I good? Was his/her last partner better? Will the next one be better? The performance element was clear in a *Mail on Sunday* feature which suggested that '*Few today would marry without knowing how a potential partner shapes up in bed*'. They failed, of course, to add '*shapes up in bed outside the security of marriage*.' Yet the premarital context has its own peculiarities; it is scarcely a safe guide to what long-term sex together will be like. (The 1993 Janus Survey showed 61% of American women

and 59% of men experienced sex as better after marriage.) The 'loss of God' contributes to a shift from sex as expression of totally secure relationship to sex as the unpredictable fee for relationship.

We have raised these issues here primarily in terms of how the loss of the sense of God's calling affects the development and survival of relationships. However, we should also note the fascinating conclusions of two American surveys, including a large study by *Redbook* magazine, that for women

sexual satisfaction is related significantly to religious belief. With notable consistency, the greater the intensity of a woman's religious convictions, the likelier she is to be satisfied with the sexual pleasures of marriage... Strongly religious women (over 25) seem to be more responsive... She is more likely than the non-religious woman to be orgasmic.[39]

Not something one is likely to read in *Cosmopolitan*, but it raises intriguing questions. More than one factor could be involved; but it seems the loss of God might have implications not only for women's relationships, but also concretely for their sexual experience.

Intimacy and the death of the Son

In a number of ways, then, the reality or absence of God the Father-Creator has major implications for our commitment and motivation in relationships, and hence for whether these last or not. But there is a deeper level for us to explore. Commitment to, or disbelief in, Christ as God the Son can affect enormously our approach to the whole issue of '*What is love in my life?*'

Jesus' followers look to the Gospel stories as models of what love means in practice. We look to his life, particularly the way he treats a whole range of diverse and not very loveable individuals; and, most of all, to his death. For Christians, the cross is the ultimately profound moment that defines and brings together all that is at the heart of relationship.

The classic biblical statement comes in St Paul's celebration of sex and spirituality in Ephesians 5. Here, Paul challenges us to understand the

deepening oneness of marriage and sex through the ever-deepening oneness of Christ and the Church. Christ's death, where he poured out everything he was for us, is the pattern for our love too, says Paul. (*'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.*[40]) So when a man asks, *'What does it mean for me to really love a woman?'*, he should look to Christ's creative, total self-giving. And the early church to which Paul wrote knew just what that crucifixion involved: the church's central meal of broken bread and poured-out wine recalled joy that was won only through a body broken and blood shed in hours of agony.[41] This, says Paul, is how far Christ loved a people who had wronged and rejected him: and this is the unconditional, unchanging love that we should seek to embody for our partner. Paul doesn't spell it out further, but the principles of that *'just as'* are, for any husband or lover, frustratingly clear! (Particularly if coupled with Christ's teachings that radical discipleship involves going the second mile for someone who asks you to go one.) There are many other aspects to fruitful relationship; but someone who sets out, creatively and genuinely, to love his woman (or her man) in so total a way, is surely less likely to end with a broken marriage.

But there are several more issues here for the understanding of love. First, there is the assertion that openness, risk-taking, is central to love. To be open to love is to be open to hurt. And that isn't easy. We noted Lasch's words in *The Culture of Narcissism*: *'Both men and women have come to approach personal relations with a heightened appreciation of their emotional risks. Determined to manipulate the emotion of others while protecting themselves against emotional injury, both sexes cultivate a protective shallowness, a cynical detachment.*[42] Jesus' cross is a statement that the risk of pain is inseparable from the experience of love: insofar as I maintain my armour against pain, in some measure I exclude the other person. So faith in the presence and goodness of an active God is vital for love; what empowers our risk-taking, our openness, is faith that all experiences God allows us must ultimately, somehow, be positive. In the gospel's terms, if we are living with God then any experience we face of 'death' must ultimately lead to experience of 'resurrection', because that is the

universe's basic principle – even if there is no guarantee when it will be.[43] On that basis, love can risk openness; as St John puts it, *'Perfect love'* – in this case, faith in the perfect love of God – *'drives out fear'*.[44] It is the opposite of self-protection.

Second, the cross, if we 'believe' (the word is weak) in it, redefines love as pre-eminently self-giving. Love is that condition in which our own interests are not the priority (or, more exactly, are a forgotten issue). Without the cross, that understanding becomes debateable. It is not by accident that the 'loss of God' is associated with the dominance (in America especially) of self-fulfilment therapies arguing precisely the opposite.[45] Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism* again:

Even when therapists speak of the need for "meaning" and "love", they redefine love and meaning simply as the fulfilment of the patient's emotional requirements. It hardly occurs to them ... to encourage the subject to subordinate his needs and interests to those of others... "Love" as self-sacrifice or self-abasement, "meaning" as submission to a higher loyalty – these sublimations strike the therapeutic sensibility as intolerably oppressive, offensive to common sense and injurious to personal health and well-being. To liberate humanity from such outmoded ideas of love and duty has become the mission of the post-Freudian therapies and particularly of their converts and popularizers.[46]

Vitz draws the conclusion for practical relationships:

The values of selfishness are not conducive to the formation and maintenance of permanent personal relationships or to values like duty, patience, and self-sacrifice, which maintain commitment... With monotonous regularity the selfist literature sides with those values that encourage divorce, breaking up ... in the name of growth, autonomy, and "continuing the flux"

– for example the kind of assertiveness training that emphasises *'escaping the compassion trap'*, presenting compassion and assertiveness as inherently contradictory.[47] You pay your money and you take your choice. Compassion, patience and self-sacrifice are values at the very heart of the universe, if the crucified Jesus is

indeed God's Son. But if not, maybe they could stunt your growth – though they might maintain your marriage.

A third issue that the cross would make fundamental is that of forgiveness. In any relationship, we are occasionally going to lose control. Anger, carelessness and jealousy are realities; and families break up because of inability to deal with these things. Inability to forgive generates inability to apologize or, indeed, to resolve anything. Besides, many of us bring into marriage a subconscious naïvete; somehow we dream that, right from the start, our partner will be an untiringly creative companion, a patient and sensitive soulmate, an expert and unselfish lover, a flawless manager, a support to our career, and several other wonderful things too. And either the marriage will break, or we must learn to accept, and forgive, our partner as (s)he is.[48] ('A lot of women have to realise they're not marrying their sisters', Philadelphia youth worker Marcia Hopler once remarked to me, *'but people whose socks smell.'*) The skills of compromise, apology and forgiveness are essential to long-term relationship. But they don't come easily, and they do demand practice; many of us need all the help we can get, and the 'loss of God' removes a vital model and motivation.

For there are other ways of thinking about forgiveness. Novelist Helen Zahavi speaks of *'not just the right to avenge oneself but the duty – a physical, psychological necessity.'* The proud Corsican 'vendetta' system, handing grudges down the generations, is an extreme case of this – but its diluted version, *'I don't get mad, I get even'*, seems widely acceptable. *'In a secular age'*, writes Blake Morrison, *'Christian notions of atonement, redemption and "turning the other cheek" seem archaic, even craven... To forgive is to be "soft". It's to let yourself be walked over. You only do it if you're lacking in self-assertion and self-respect.'*[49] In Canada, Posterski and Bibbey's[50] authoritative youth surveys reveal a wide diversity of attitudes as to whether forgiveness is a good thing, and show a clear correlation between commitment to the value of forgiveness and commitment to Christian faith. This is not surprising; Christ's cross[51] embodies the overwhelming importance of our forgiveness by God; and the regular celebration of communion is an ongoing reminder of that and of

the importance of our learning to forgive. Here again, faith in the cross leads to an understanding of love conducive to lasting relationships.

But what will become the norm as the cross recedes into unreality for us? For Nietzsche, the dynamic of self-sacrifice, apology and forgiveness was precisely one of the things that made Christianity redundant, since the individual's will to power was the only reality. Christian ethics, he declared, was the morality of the weak, revealing no more than an *'inability to take revenge'*. *'Never apologize; never explain'*, was Edith Piaf's watchword. Again, we pay our money and we take our choice – and the choice will have far-reaching effects.

To all of this we must add the question of empowering. Jesus' teaching is clear that right principles alone are insufficient; indeed, the prime thing they do is clarify our inadequacy to get things right without supernatural help.[52] *'Total self-giving love'* is pitifully easy to chatter (or scribble) about; and much more so in the first ardours of romance than in the horse-trading of needs and wants that come later, especially with the advent of children. Actually noticing, in the heat of the moment, the need to love in the sense Paul describes, and then finding the strength from somewhere to do it – we can imagine a particularly impressive partner succeeding here, but for ourselves it requires a bit of a miracle. The same can be true of finding the strength for self-control, forgiveness, or humility:[53] to be the first to apologise; to back off a demand, knowing your partner knows you are doing so; to be the one who buys the flowers or makes the conciliatory gesture in a clash-situation.

The point cannot be proven, but Christians will insist that here too the 'loss of God' is significantly damaging to relationships. *'Young people have seen thirty years of marital breakdown... they are afraid to start on a journey which may end in tears'*, says Jack Dominionian. Where then can we find confidence? Jesus offers a response: to be *'born of the Spirit'*,[54] as his follower, means that the supernatural power of God the Spirit comes within us, empowering us, situation by situation and issue by issue, to live the 'Christ lifestyle' – and increasingly so, as (or if) he fills and transforms our minds. Love, self-control, gentleness and humility are *'fruit of the Spirit'*,

adds St Paul.[55] To have the Spirit, Christians would testify, is not to become an effortless relational maestro, but rather to be offered a growing empowering for getting it right; in creativity, mutual forgiveness, perseverance, communication, devotion.

None of this is to say that faith in God is essential to a good marriage. It obviously isn't (though Christians will insist that they themselves would – or do – make a much worse mess of their own relationships if God were out of the picture). Nor is it to claim that earlier cultures generally had better relationships than we do; anyway our predecessors lived with the confusion of attitudes to love that Bloom describes. Our point is rather that – as any reader of *Cosmo* or *Marie Claire* will know – we clearly have problems in making our relationships work; and the loss of faith in God's calling, and the 'disappearance of the cross', remove a number of very powerful forces for healthy relationship that we can ill afford to spare.

Love in a cold season

But as the Americans say: *'Deal with it.'* We now know there was no 'divine hand' overruling our path through the mating game; and that, whatever happened on Calvary, it wasn't the act of total, atoning, self giving love that the Bible said, and it has no 'authoritative' status for us. So how shall we determine what it really means to love?

'His love of France is matched only by his love of women', said the adverts for a TV drama on a wartime resistance fighter. Can we speak that way? Is a 'great lover' someone who can envisage romancing a whole sequence of women, one tasted and cast aside after another? Clearly yes, for whatever ad-person designed the slogan. The *Love Story* version, *'Love means never having to say you're sorry'*, is self-evidently stupid. But is 'love' a bargain where both partners get what they want in care and fulfilment? Possibly; but then what happens when the fulfilment doesn't materialise? The husband is under work-pressure, the wife is pregnant, one partner has severe depression, 'fulfilment' is unavailable: is love, by definition, dead (and therefore replaceable)? Why – and how – should we work at rekindling it? Does the 'needs' / 'rights' approach inevitably emphasise not what we give but what we get – or use, consume – and collapses

when the getting stops? In that case, has love been swallowed up in narcissism – or were we always merely bargaining across a counter? Setting aside Jesus, how should we find our definition of love? Or do we each make our own? Maybe one of the biggest difficulties in many decaying relationships comes because the two partners mean different things by 'love', and have different expectations?

More and more, the term begins to disappear. As we noted in an earlier chapter, certain words like 'joy' and 'wisdom' seem to be falling out of use with the deepening loss of God. Perhaps 'love' is going the same way – except in songs that we know are 'sentimental', that is, unreal. In a recent TV programme discussing the experience of adultery; almost none of the participants used the 'love' word. Perhaps, to them, it was too much to hope for. And perhaps we wonder, deep down, if 'love' isn't a word belonging with the dramatic but immature passions of teen infatuation. Realism, maturity, means thinking more in terms of 'steady relationships' that – for the time being – offer good contexts for fulfilling both parties' needs...

When we had a God we had a reason to celebrate the reality of love. But that is past. Critics such as J.B. Broadbent have noted that love poetry, as a literary form, can die out, and maybe it is doing so now. In the novel, writes Bloom, *'There have been hardly any great novelists of love for almost a century.'* R.B. Kitaj remarked in 1994, *'It occurs to me that men and women are rarely seen together in paintings any more. At least, they are not depicted together in heterosexual relationship in the work of the dozen or so very well-known painters I most admire.'*[56] Does our culture have a basis for talking about, believing in, 'love' any more? Or is love dying with the death of God? And if our love-relationships were the prime shelter (and maybe goal) left us in the darkness, and they too disintegrate; what then?

'Loving isn't easy.' (*'Hell is other people'* – Sartre, and a currently chic T-shirt.) Stress, role conflict, financial problems, overwork, young children, immaturity, carelessness in communication, over-familiarity and neglect: many relationships go through – or come to – a moment when 'love' seems no longer there, on one side or both. The divorce rate is already one in three in a country like Britain. With the 'death of God' removing most of the supports discussed above, that rate may well

rise further. But there may also come the next acceleration to the cycle: *'As any counsellor can tell you, the most important factor in your marital happiness is what models you have had in your parents, and how you are reacting to them.'*[57] Parental and grand-parental marriages that terminate in divorce will very probably be replicated in the next generation; the hurt creates a deep assumption that marriages can't be expected to last, which in turn affects the children's commitment to making their own marriages work – or even to taking such a step at all.

'If as a child your parents divorced', writes Zelda West-Meads of Relate, this can affect your adult relationships. Cohabitation can seem a solution. You long for intimacy and commitment to repair the damage done to your own emotional world, but you fear giving it as you may end up being hurt again. People with that experience will often opt for live-in relationships.[58]

But cohabitation accelerates the process yet further. West-Meads was commenting on a British government survey showing that couples who live together before marriage are up to 60% more likely to divorce than those who do not; more recent figures show that married couples are more than five times as likely to be together after ten years, compared with cohabiters. The massive 1994 survey funded by the Wellcome Trust revealed that people cohabiting were far more likely than married people to have multiple sexual partners (one in seven cohabiting men as against one in twenty married; one in twelve cohabiting women as against one in fifty married). Further, *'Cohabitation does not seem to exert any strong influence on monogamy – indeed, (astonishingly), cohabiting men were more likely to report concurrent relationships than single men.'*[59] Domestic violence affects 6.4% of female cohabiters, compared with 2.7% of married women. A Swedish survey showed cohabiting couples to be six times more likely to break up than married couples. It isn't just marriage, but partnership in general, that seems to be breaking down; and increased cohabitation merely deepens a cycle of breakdown of intimacy that will now take a miracle to halt.

The social consequences of this cycle are all around us.[60] Journalist Polly Toynbee (who seems happier about it than most) has termed it *'an astonishing social revolution... more far-reaching than any political revolution ever could be.'* In education, any teacher will confirm that the pupils who most stretch the system are those coping with the hurts from broken family backgrounds. The plight of a health service increasingly short of resources is obviously deepened by major expenditure on sexually-transmitted diseases which would be massively reduced if relationships were more monogamous.[61]

But it is individuals who handle the deepest results of loneliness after relational breakup in our answerphone-and-intercom society. Divorced or separated people are four times as likely as married people to need psychiatric help (single people are only twice as likely); married people also adjust better to illness or disability.[62] In particular, behind the statistics lie enormous pressure and dehumanization for single mothers, particularly when illness hits their family, and particularly in a country like Britain still poor at ensuring equal pay for women. And matters gets worse as the cycle accelerates. *'Women have always got pregnant',* said one man interviewed by the *Independent on Sunday*, *'the problem now is that the men leave them. With the easing of moral restrictions, they just don't hang around very long.'* Yet surveys show too that six years after divorce the majority of ex-husbands wish they had never let it happen; while further still down the road we see the ever-increasing host of aging divorcees battling through life on their own. (Many people remarry after divorce, but the breakdown rate for second marriages is even higher than for first, about 50%).[63]

After God, what is love? 'Bonk', 'shag' and 'screw' fit what we think about sex more accurately, in their gruff, mechanical character, than the strange, older phrase 'making love', or the biblical 'know'.

Italian film director Federico Fellini: *'Women are presented on television... as if they are something to eat... They are treated the same way as hamburgers or, for that matter, nappies or stain removers... A young boy makes love standing on a street corner, munching a pizza, a tin of beer in his hand, stereophones over his ears and his other hand on the girl's backside. And what used to take us a week takes him a quarter of an hour to finish everything – he has had a drink, something to eat, he has made love and is ready to jump back on his motorbike.'*

Andy Warhol: *'Brigitte Bardot was one of the first women to be really modern and treat men like love objects, buying them and discarding them. I like that.'*

But the ones who really pick up the bill are the children. *'All the available evidence suggests that divorce makes children extremely unhappy even where the father has been very distant, has sexually abused the children or has been violent to their mother'*, says Penelope Leach in *Baby and Child*.^[64] In Germany, Professor Joest Martinus of Munich's Max Planck Institute observes that *'Children of divorced parents suffer particularly serious damage in their social development'*, finding it *'difficult to integrate into a community or to develop lasting relationships with a partner'*, and coming *'into contact with the law a lot more often than children from intact families... 5% of all children in the Federal Republic of Germany suffer from some kind of mental disturbance; in contrast, 35% of the children from broken homes suffer from such disturbances'*.^[65] In Canada, a study of 4500 students by Montreal University's Jean Francois Saucier showed teenagers from divorced families to be less confident about their lives and more likely to have psychological problems causing them to seek professional help.^[66]

In Britain, a study funded by the Rowntree Trust, comparing families that divorced with similar troubled households that stayed together, found children even in conflict-ridden but intact families

to be far better off in terms of health, schoolwork, self-esteem and friendships than those whose parents divorced. Dr John Tripp told a BBC *Panorama* interviewer,

'What the study has shown us, which is surprising, is it's the loss of a parent which is much more significant than other factors, such as conflict... Our data suggests that's a very minor effect compared with when a parent leaves a home. In almost all cases the children would have preferred the parents to stay together.'^[68]

Five years after divorce, only one child in ten enjoys a warm relationship with the absent parent (and one in four never accept their parent's replacement partner).^[69] A National Family Mediation group survey of 11,400 British children showed that children of divorced parents did less well both economically and socially. 86% of teenage suicides happen in fatherless families. As regards the boys, respected psychiatrist Anthony Clare argues that the presence of a father is central for a healthy male growth process, and the lack of fathers is strongly linked to 'spiralling' young male violence: *'Poor parenting and detachment, a destructive or absent father, and you end up with a damaged, aggressive male with a massive sense of shame, a desperate fear of weakness and an entrenched sense of injustice.'*^[70] Baby battering and sexual abuse are far more widespread in families without two natural parents; such homes accounted for almost two thirds of the 6000 cases catalogued by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children between 1983 and 1987, although they made up only a minority of families with children under sixteen, while a Canadian study by Martin Daly and Margo Wilson showed that children under two were seventy times more likely to be killed by step-parents than by natural parents.^[71] The accelerating cycle of divorce also swells the ranks of the next generation of violent child abusers. 60% of sexually abusing fathers had divorced parents; a stepfather from such a background can be one of the biggest dangers a young woman can encounter.

And so the cycle continues. Dr Sebastian Kraemer of the Tavistock Clinic told an interviewer on the same *Panorama* programme, *'There's a collective wish not to look at children's pain – because we would really need to have a*

social revolution in our attitudes if we took it seriously.' He's right, of course: too many people in the media feel too much guilt and pain themselves to be able to face the issues.[72]

The *Independent on Sunday* is, to my mind, Britain's most intelligent liberal newspaper. So we can get some idea of the consensus on this issue from the following sentences of an *IoS* editorial:

This is a complex subject, which is not easily debated in the age of the sound-bite. Suggest that children are better off with two parents and you will be accused of insulting single parents. But it is not an insult to single parents to argue that, because bringing up children is labour-intensive and emotionally draining, two pairs of hands will find it easier than one... The effects of divorce and single parenting are, according to research on both sides of the Atlantic, devastating and long-lasting; on average, the children perform worse at school, get into more trouble with the police, suffer more mental illness and earn less when they grow up. Class and poverty are part of the explanation, but not the whole.

The statistics are inescapable; and behind them lies a colossal quantity of individual hurt. Our broken relationships matter enormously. But when they are causing so much pain, we must surely look again at anything that could help them work. Our contemporary 'death of love' seems linked in several ways to the 'death of God'. We are paying a high price; so whether we were wise to do so – whether God, and the support he could provide for love, really is 'dead' – cannot be a trivial question. It may underlie much of our pain; for ex-partners, and especially their children, who might not have lost their relationships if they could have rediscovered faith in God's good calling; if they could have found fresh, life-giving meanings for love in Jesus; or if, indeed, they could even have found supernatural strength to recreate love, empower forgiveness and apology, discern what is possible, energize creativity.

Evidently it matters greatly whether these things are realities or not. The 'loss of God' is far from being the only explanation for our hurts. But the truth of God offers enough healing to our intimacy for a casual ignorance of whether he is real or not to seem small-minded and costly.

Does it really have to be that way?

In Summary...

'All we need is love.' In our post-God culture, relationships and intimacy are enormously important to us. But because of the 'loss of God', the meaning, attainability, and even existence of love have grown highly problematic. As we re-examine God's Fatherhood and Jesus' cross, we see numerous aspects that could help empower our relationships to survive and flourish... except we don't believe in them any more.

But that becomes serious when intimacy is (for many of us) the 'final shelter', often the most meaningful area in our lives... and yet it 'doesn't work'. Looking more widely, our relational breakdown is causing widespread social damage – and profound, far-reaching personal pain.

And here we must pause to look back at the enormous significance of our relational crisis for the issues we considered in earlier chapters. For many of us in western culture after the death of God, our identity and self-worth have found their prime underpinning in loving relationships. So too, after the loss of God, may purpose and desire. Loving relationships may also be the final shelter for our ethics.

But love isn't working. The trend of failed relationships in the West cuts, therefore, at the very heart of our futures. It exacerbates the identity crisis, and the purpose crisis; and it points us beyond an attempted ethics based on the family, out into the void....

In short, the loss of God has pointed to alienation on an epidemic scale. Nietzsche's question: Has it not grown colder?

[Go to Chapter 6]

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References:

[1] D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (1960 edition), p.64.

[2] Lennon's classic album *Imagine* seems to demonstrate this in a fascinating way. Anyone who owns it may care to look at how the title track's idealistic humanism fails to survive the full length of the album, turning into the deep existential despair of 'How'. The words of 'How' seem strongly reminiscent of some of Nietzsche's questions: if indeed God is dead, can there still (Nietzsche asked) be 'an above and a below'? And if there is no above or below (which reminds us a little of the words of the title song 'Imagine'), can we know where we're 'moving to', or are we just 'wandering through an infinite nothing?' Lennon's own solution comes, it seems, with the album's closing song, 'Oh Yoko'; for him, as for Lawrence's characters, the final shelter in the darkness is love. See also Lennon's song 'God'. (Paul Simon, of Simon and Garfunkel, has a beautiful track called 'Kathy's Song' that makes almost the same point: love is what remains after all our beliefs are gone.)

[3] This is the final letter of volume three of *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson (1984).

[4] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York, 1979), p.320; Allan Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (New York, 1993), p.14.

[5] 1 Corinthians 13:4, 5, 7.

[6] John 13:34-35; Ephesians 5:2, 25-33.

[7] *SAS Scanorama*, February 1987, p.70.

[8] Alan MacDonald, *Films in Close-Up* (1991), p.51.

[9] *Independent on Sunday*, 9 February 1997.

[10] William Barrett, *Death of the Soul* (New York, 1986), p.xiii.

[11] Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (1963), pp.130-32.

[12] Bloom, pp.13-14, 19-20.

[13] Bloom, p.27. Christianity does not deny the huge presence of this aspect of sexuality. Indeed, Genesis 3 presents the replacement of ideal sexuality by a dialectic of desire and domination as one of the key consequences of the break in relationship between God and humanity at the Fall (Genesis 3:16).

[14] Bloom, p.28.

[15] Cf., for example, the astonishingly negative mindset recommended for those in relationships by Polly Toynebee in the *Independent on Sunday*, 2 April 1995: 'Face up to the prevalence – and thus the probability – of divorce and separation; and

learn to separate elegantly, without fighting.' Rather than, say, learning to work doubly hard at marriage-building.

[16] Bloom, pp.13-14. The safety issue is underlined by the increasing prevalence of date rape: Patterson and Kim found that 20% of American women reported that they had experienced being raped by their dates (the figure rose to 37% within the gay / bisexual community). (James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (New York, 1991), pp.7, 130). One might add that, in a culture shaped by postmodernism's scepticism about love and its belief that domination is the final reality of all human social interaction, the rise of date rape is unacceptable but scarcely surprising.

[17] Herbert Hendin, *The Age of Sensation* (New York, 1975), quoted in Paul Vitz, *Psychology as Religion* (1977 edition), pp.116-17. Hendin's book was a survey of several hundred college-age young people. A telling (if welcome) side-effect of this emotional disengagement from romance, he adds, is the decline in student suicides over heterosexual love affairs – coming at a time when overall college-age suicide increased. Vitz comments that 'Today's students resist letting the opposite sex mean too much to them, and only homosexual men and women seem to interpret failed love relationships as significant enough to touch off a suicide attempt.' In general, concludes Hendin, 'Men seem to want to give women less and less, while women increasingly see demands men make as inherently demeaning... The scale of value against which both sexes now tend to measure everything is solitary gratification.'

[18] Lasch, p.330. Elsewhere he notes, 'The progressive ideology of "nonbinding commitments" and "cool sex" makes a virtue of emotional disengagement, while purporting to criticise the depersonalization of sex' (p.339).

[19] Space doesn't allow us to explore the questions of loneliness and inability to make lasting friendships, which also seem major contemporary issues. Several of the 'skills', or principles, that we shall look at in the following section are relevant to friendship as well as to romantic and sexual/marital love; for example, self-giving, openness, forgiveness, and commitment. (In this connection it was striking to see Alex Comfort, author of the 'swinger's Bible' *The Joy of Sex*, musing in a recent interview, 'I haven't got any friends. Not many.')

[20] Bloom, p.433.

[21] Bloom, p.75, drawing on Arthur Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought* (Chicago,1990). A key aspect of Romanticism is the way it often enthrones subjective sincerity in the place of objective faith. Keats, for example: *'I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination.'*

[22] Bloom, p.151.

[23] Bloom, p.112-13.

[24] Bloom, p.209.

[25] Bloom, pp.259-60. *'The prevailing mood was disappointment... The search for the beautiful ended in the triumph of the ugly... Novels, the privileged form of Romantic communication, in the twentieth century ceased to celebrate love... An angry "I told you so" announced the dashing of Romantic foolishness. The reality is that all the beautiful talk exists only for the sake of seducing others and oneself.'*

[26] Cf. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (1968); also his *Escape from Reason* (1968).

[27] Cf. Bloom, p.260.

[28] Bloom, p.270. *'Shakespeare seems to have thought that Christianity effected a deepening of women and a new sensitivity of men to them'* (p.391).

[29] An important aspect of Christian faith is that it holds God to be a Trinity, three Persons in one eternal Godhead united in mutual love. If he were not so, then the only kind of love that could have existed before the world would have been self-love. But as a result, says Schaeffer, we can say that human love *'is not a product of chance... Though I am very far from plumbing all its depths when applied to God Himself, yet the word love and the reality of love when Christ spoke of the Father loving Him before the foundation of the world, has true meaning for me.'* (*The God Who is There*, pp.97-99.) In contrast, in many forms of eastern religion 'God' is not truly personal; nor, consequently, is the human person, the potential object of affection, ultimately 'real' either. And this has implications for the meaning of love. For Gautama Buddha, for example, true wisdom ultimately involved renouncing his wife and family to meditate in solitude.

[30] Romans 8:28.

[31] Lawrence Crabb, *The Marriage Builder* (Grand Rapids, 1982), ch.7. Personally, I have found this idea – that strength for relationship-building, and particularly for forgiveness, come from our assurance of the long-term goodness of

God – to be very helpful in other relational situations too.

[32] Matthew 5:32. Obviously space does not permit us to go into the complexities here.

[33] *Independent on Sunday*, 21 June 1992. A related point was made by a Moscow psychotherapist in *Moskovskii Komsomolyets* in a 1986 discussion of Moscow's 50% divorce rate: *'There is no fear before God or before people... The external mechanism for keeping families together has weakened.'*

[34] Douglas Coupland, *Life After God* (1994), p.152. Miriam Stoppard wrote similarly in *TV Times* about *Coronation Street's* Deirdre Barlow: *'If you don't love [someone] any more, it won't work. You can't recreate love.'*

[35] Jesus' comment in Matthew 22:35-40.

[36] Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33.

[37] See, for example, Crabb's *The Marriage Builder*, and Gary Smalley, *Love is a Decision* (1989). A number of other points in this section derive from a seminar given by Nigel Lee of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship.

[38] Cf. Henri Nouwen, in his book *Intimacy*: *'When the physical encounter of men and women in the intimate act of intercourse is not an expression of their total availability to each other, [it]... is still part of the taking structure. It means "I want you now but not tomorrow. I want something from you, but I don't want you."*' (Excerpted in *Seeds of Hope* (1998 edition), p.74.)

[39] Robert J. Levin and Amy Levin, 'Sexual Pleasure: the Surprising Preferences in 100,000 Women', *Redbook*, September 1970, pp.52-53; quoted in Tim LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage* (1984), p.9. (Robert Levin coauthored *The Pleasure Bond* with leading sexologists Masters and Johnson.) LaHaye gives details of his own survey in ch.12 (particularly pp.211-12, 227-28), claiming that strongly Christian women in their twenties reported a higher figure of orgasmic satisfaction than any survey of the overall population that he had access to.

[40] This is part of a much longer passage. Besides illustrating Christian sexuality from spirituality, Paul is also doing the reverse, illustrating Christ's relationship to the collective organism ('his Body') of his people by comparing it to bridegroom and bride.

[41] 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

[42] Lasch, p.330.

[43] Once again blind Cornish poet Jack Clemo provides an enormously moving affirmation as he

describes his own love-affair in these terms in *The Invading Gospel* (1958).

[44] 1 John 4:18.

[45] Vitz's useful study *Psychology as Religion* documents the extent to which key figures in the 'selfist' or 'human potential' movement, such as Carl Rogers and Erich Fromm, were reacting strongly against Christian faith.

[46] Lasch, pp.42-43.

[47] Vitz, pp.81, 27.

[48] Here the presence or absence of God is again important. The Christian relationship is designed to be a triad: because my wife relates not only to me but also to a God who does not share my inadequacies, our emotional 'eggs are not all in one basket!' – and accepting the partner's insufficiencies is easier.

[49] *Independent on Sunday*, 3 May 1998.

[50] Cf. Don Posterski, *Friendship* (Scarborough, 1985), pp.33-34.

[51] Other belief-systems can have a different effect. Nation of Islam leader Leo Muhammad rebuked his fellow-Muslims, 'You talk about loving everybody, but the holy Quran don't talk that language.' Christianity had taught forgiveness and turning the other cheek, he added, but Islam says 'You smack my cheek, I kick all four of yours.' A Muslim leader made an almost identical comment after ethnic conflict in the Crimea.

[52] This is St Paul's point in Galatians 3:24, and in the flow of thought from his description of failure to live aright in Romans 7 to the presentation of the power of the Spirit in Romans 8.

[53] Humility itself is not a universal, but a virtue recognised within a Christian context – particularly as a reflection of Jesus (cf. Philippians 2:5-8). Classical Greeks, in contrast, despised it (cf. John Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (1979), p.148), as did Nietzsche.

[54] One of Jesus' ways of describing what is involved in 'believing in' him, John 3:8, 16.

[55] Galatians 5:22-23.

[56] On the homosexual side, Francis Bacon remarked of his own art that 'Most couplings are violent, more or less.'

[57] Doug Stewart, writing in the IFES magazine *In Touch*, October 1988, p.3.

[58] Kevin Ford cites clinical psychologist Paul Osterhaus on America's 'Generation X': 'An entire generation grew up lacking the skills of intimacy, feeling wary in relationships, approaching each other hesitantly, defensively and with little

intention of making any lasting commitments' (in *Jesus for a New Generation* (Downers Grove, 1995), p.159). Alongside that may be set the following summary of distinguishing marks of the present Canadian student generation, from a seminar convened by Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship: a lack of security caused by lack of solid relationships, both parents working in stressed environments, and the increasing incidence of child abuse; leading to a longing for intimacy matched by a fear of intimacy and entrapment, resulting in turn in a pattern of brief, unsatisfactory relationships; and, growing within that, a hardening distrust and a deep-rooted anger.

[59] Kaye Wellings *et al*, *Sexual Behaviour in Britain* (1994), summarized in *Independent on Sunday*, 16 and 23 January 1994.

[60] Relate chairman Ed Straw has suggested that public expenditure payments in Britain arising from broken homes amount to £4 billion a year.

[61] AIDS, herpes, and other sexually transmitted diseases will obviously be drastically limited to the extent that there is genuine and widespread belief that sex belongs within a lifelong, exclusive relationship.

[62] Patrick Dixon, *The Rising Price of Love* (1995), pp.34-35.

[63] There is much more to be said about the social impact of the 'sexual revolution'; for example about the increase in childlessness directly related to the spread of sexually-transmitted pelvic inflammatory disease, the commonest cause of infertility. Cf. ch.4 of Dixon. Dixon's study is an outstanding and highly thought-provoking treatment of the social and (massive) medical consequences of the shift away from Christian sex ethics. He also documents in great detail the research findings on the effects of marriage breakdown on children (ch.6); and the causative link with poverty, and increased rates of criminality, in the children involved (ch.7).

[64] Penelope Leach, *Baby and Child* (1988), p.279.

[65] *Idea*, 18 August 1980.

[66] *USA Today*, 12 October 1984. Asked how successful they thought they would be in life, students rated their prospects from a low of 1 to a high of 7. Girls from divorced families rated their prospects lowest (4.14), followed by boys from divorced families (4.31), then boys from widowed families (4.46), girls from intact families (4.49),

girls from widowed families (4.56), and boys from intact families (4.66).

[67] Quoted in Melanie Phillips, *All Must Have Prizes* (1997 edition), p.249.

[68] Cf. Monica Cockett and John Tripp, *The Exeter Family Study: family breakdown and its impact on children* (1994).

[69] Dixon, p.131. Indeed, child survivors of divorce become more likely to lose contact with *both* parents (p.132). Also, 44% of those with a step-parent at 16 had left home three years later, compared to just 27% having both parents at home; and 25% of those under 18 who left through domestic tension then became homeless (p.144).

[70] 'Is there any way we can pull back from spiralling violence in the home, in the cities, in school...? Evidence, both scientific and anecdotal, suggests that fathers – male role models – may hold the key', he concludes (*Independent on Sunday*, 23 July 2000). By their presence or their absence, we might add; that is, male violence may be an increasing part of the bill our culture has to pay for our inability to help our marriages last.

[71] Studies from Britain and America confirm the pattern. A step-relationship is, Daly and Wilson conclude, 'the single most important risk factor for severe child maltreatment yet discovered.' However, a 1994 study also showed that children were twenty times more likely to face abuse if their natural parents were cohabiting rather than married (Phillips, p.240).

[72] Former *Guardian* journalist Melanie Phillips describes the hostility evoked among critics she knew personally by the remarks about family life in her book *All Must Have Prizes*: 'It was almost impossible to discuss this issue in the way other topics were debated... More and more apparently "neutral" commentators were personally compromised. Ostensibly arguing about policy, my critics almost invariably were disguising expressions of their own personal pain, defiance or guilt' (p.xxii). She gives an interesting example on p.248.

[Go to Chapter 6]

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