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Disciplinary Responses to Theology Brief Preview

ANNOTATIONS ON THE THEOLOGY OF LOVE AND THE FRONTIERS OF SCHOLARSHIP

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As I seek to grasp Professor O'Donovan's profound thought on love, I realize how little I have previously considered the ways its varieties of expression might penetrate scholarship, scholarly lives, and institutions. I begin my own efforts to grapple with this enhanced vision by raising questions about ways the "love-command" may be discovered in every corner of the research university. I follow Professor O'Donovan's (hereafter OOD) headings. Along the way I speculate about connections between manifestations of love and particular disciplines.

The Love Command as a "Fulfillment"

1/ If love is the unifying principle for the Torah - ancient Judaic law - should it likewise be seen as the touchstone for Christian appraisals of and contributions to all law and lawmaking, whether judicial, legislative, or administrative? This would set a challenging agenda for legal scholars, interdisciplinary law and humanities scholars who work on law, and public policy specialists.

2/ On love reaching "the whole range of moral norms," can we discern sharp enough cutting edges of love, or specifications of the ways love expresses itself as a master principle, so that we can both appraise law on the books and law in action (see 1/ above) but also observe its means and challenges in unifying levels of norms from international law to national and local formal laws? This again would provide a valuable conjunction of theology with those who study the behavior of law.

3/ Where love reaches to being "written on the heart," is this a place where the "exterior" forms of law (e.g., statutes, government regulations) enter the "interior" of the self, such that law as a field engages with psychology, behavioral economics, and social work as fields where inner sentiments, preferences, and deficiencies connect to love's outward expressions and formulations?

4/ In the statement that the "love-command is the historical climax of the revelation of God's will," what is

the referent and force of “historical” here? At the historical moment of the first codification of God’s commands, i.e., Sinai? At the moment of Jesus’s earthly life? And are there subsequent historical moments (e.g., the abolition of the slave trade, giving women the vote) when we may observe new breakthroughs in human recognition of love’s scope?

The Breadth of Love

5/ *On love as sensitivity*, may we ask about it being an emotional response to what? Other persons, animals, sunsets, the sounds of the surf, magnificent music and art? And what spectrum of emotions might be discovered in “love as sensitivity”? Is theology here capable of mutually informing the fine and performing arts, psychiatry and social work, helping professions, architecture, neuroscience, and psychology?

6/ *On love as faithfulness*, insofar as life on the intellectual frontier has “originality” as a hallmark, this juxtaposition with “faithfulness” appears essential to our scholarly lives, but I would welcome more understanding of why it is “faithfulness” (to what?) that could lead to suspicion. Is it faithfulness to the steady often hard slog—endless hours in the lab or archives, years of fieldwork, painstaking ransacking of data—that follows the start-up passion in a line of scholarship?

7/ *On love as practical helpfulness* and undervaluing things “not sufficiently energetic,” is this an implicit affirmation by Professor O’Donovan that the application of love in practical ways (e.g., the helping professions, engineering, architecture, public health, public policy, applied sciences) should not eclipse love as it is manifest in expressive fields (e.g., the fine and performing arts, literature) or theoretical fields (e.g., pure mathematics, theoretical physics, logic, music theory, fundamental research in the sciences) or highly specialized fields (e.g., ethnomusicology, paleobiology, sociolinguistics)? Might there be a primary form of love that has a particular affinity with respective fields of inquiry?

8/ When OOD speaks of *love’s “moments” as “passive and active,”* is he pointing us to the *moods* of love—sometimes on the front foot, sometimes on the back foot, in the terms of those of us who are lovers of cricket? Where might such moods arise in the scholarly life? Passive moods when we are receiving new ideas or findings at a faculty workshop or academic conference? Passive moods when we are imbibing seemingly endless new words or observations or data-points?

9/ When OOD speaks of *love’s moments as “admiration, desire,”* I am reminded that in their GFI writings, Nicholas Wolterstorff and Jennifer Herdt (in her wonderful Postscript on The Virtues) both speak to *passion* in one’s scholarship. In OOD’s terms, does desire or passion get expressed as a form of *eros* in the sheer joy and excitement many of us feel in our research, teaching, writing, public education on topics where the Holy Spirit has quickened our beings? Or are passion, admiration, and desire rather different points on a spectrum of relationships with our work and scholarly colleagues, students, administrators?

10/ When OOD speaks of *love’s “moments of experience,”* I was reminded of an inspiring course I took as

an undergraduate in developmental psychology. Is OOD here offering a framework whereby we might prospectively or retrospectively conceive of the Christian walk in terms of a succession of different kinds of love to the fore, viz., that we might reproduce in our own lives something of the historical revelation of love's manifestations that he talks about above? And does this translate to the phases of my scholarly life—a succession of different kinds of love for ideas or students or collaborators-as-friends or guiding funding into new realms of inquiry? Looking forward, the doctoral student or early career scholar can anticipate various ways of loving that punctuate the unfolding career. Looking back, the senior scholar can see the loves that brought a career to its later chapters.

11/ When OOD says it is “intelligible to ‘love’ qualities,” is he implicitly or even explicitly asserting that love of my field, excitement in my discovery of a new concept or empirical finding or topic of inquiry may properly be seen theologically as an emanation of love?

12/ When OOD points to friendship as a form of love, I reflect on its almost complete absence, in my experience, from the pulpit. Even less have I heard of its expression as “personal love” in the university or our collegial networks, collaborations, and the like. Of course, I have many friendships developed in scholarly societies, research and writing collaborations, co-teaching, but I would welcome other scholars' views on how it can be manifest as an ethical imperative in the academic life. For instance, is it collegial friendship that sustains us when we hit a brick wall in writing or confront negative findings or seem to have lost our creative impulses? Is the development of more fully expressed friendships a gift than can emerge from collegial collaborations, such as co-authorship or membership in scholarly societies?

Love Conceived as Will

13/ In my earlier conversations with OOD on love, I understood that his expansive concept of “eros” goes far beyond the binary critiqued here or our unthinking reduction in common discourse of eros to sex. How does OOD see eros unfolding more expansively in the life of the mind, in the realms of discovery, integral to the research university? Does eros in OOD's expansive understanding reach to the passions that propel many of us in our research, teaching and writings? Is this to say in yet another way that passion alongside curiosity, faithfulness, and diligence are the often invisible filaments of love in our scholarship?

14/ How does OOD differentiate between “eros” and “desire”? Is the latter a subset of the former? Where does “desire” fit in a University of Edinburgh or St. Andrews or Hong Kong or JN Nehru University?

Love Conceived as Knowledge

15/ Insofar as the discovery and search for truth have often been a *raison d'être* of the university, is OOD here elevating our scholarly work beyond reaching truth to exercising love or intensifying our love relationship with God?

16/ On “knowing each thing for what it is,” might OOD be alluding to tensions among academic fields that

result from reductionism, i.e., the effort to explain away one field's theory and methods by another, e.g., reducing law to economic preferences, belief to neurobiology, social institutions to psychological processes, myths to psychological needs, etc.? Drawing these cross-disciplinary struggles into a framework of love feels like a quite radical move. By knowing "each thing for what is is" are we called both to celebrate the particular expertises of a given scholarly field as well as recognizing the need to see relations of knowledge about a particular thing with other things in adjacent fields, i.e., a complementarity that can produce flourishing in learning and life?

17/ On love being "conformed to the order of reality," and "grounding reality of the object" seem to this social scientist to bespeak the value of empirical research. Talking of differentiation ("differentiated action" below) resonates with a student of Max Weber and much contemporary social science. Is OOD saying that every differentiated form of social relations—business partners, professor-student relations, doctor-patient relationships—will have a corresponding manifestation of love particular to that relationship? That manifestation of love will be misplaced if uncritically borrowed from another kind of relationship? If so, how do we elaborate this in the plethora of actions and relationships in our academic lives: teacher/student interactions, research/writing collaborations, author/referee relations, editor/author or grant writer/grant referee exchanges? Does our Christian presence in the university impel us to identify all these forms of "differentiated action" in the academy and to discern how love is properly to be exercised in each or has an affinity with each?

18/ When OOD writes that "failure to recognize the different character of our relations" might lead to a "failure to love well," is he calling implicitly for academics, in the first instance, to be much more analytic and self-reflective about the relationships essential to the academic life, and in the second instance to bring to the surface the appropriate variant of love appropriate to that relationship?

Love in the Form of Virtues

19/ I am new to virtues-thinking both in theology and in my scholarship. Do I understand OOD here to be saying that each virtue has its own particular or governing norm which I am called to understand and then to apply to my work and scholarship? In addition, however, am I called also to revisit each virtue and ask where love might also infuse it or complement or modify or round out the particular norm that is dominant in courage or prudence among others?

20/ When OOD speaks of the health professional getting beyond rules to "a kindly face," would he generalize this example to propose that every helping professional, indeed every academic, must not be constricted in the understanding of their roles by defining it in ethically confined ways, i.e., that we should consider a potential love dimension to every academic role?

Love and Justice

21/ OOD closes with a tantalizing question: Could he provide examples in either direction, i.e., institutional practices bound absolutely by justice norms which are not relaxed by the imperative of love versus institutional practices modifying justice by the command of love?

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