

Motherliness and Agape

Observations of Carsten Johnsen

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[Bold supplied; italics in original]

One historical fact has mostly tended to remain obscure among those who handle literature today: It was **women's** tenderness and **motherliness** that actually transformed that literature. For it WAS transformed--at least to an astonishingly large extent--namely, into a literature having **LOVE** as its center. I do not here merely think of **women's love** for men. Even more important than that--let us admit it--is the **mother's love** for her child.

About Women, p. 130.2

Let us return to the instance we have already chosen for a clarification: **maternal love**. That specimen of human emotion is an unequivocal one, solid one. Would it be reasonable to assume that it could suddenly transform itself into a disorganizing, disintegrating force at the moment it gained a certain level of magnitude? Our experience so far, both practical and theoretical, shows nothing that would present evidence in favor of such a hypothesis. **Maternal love** remains **maternal love**, with all this positively stands for, irrespective of what dimensions it may adopt. Certain things just cannot be overdone. The more an emotion identifies itself with other-centeredness, the more it seems bound to be registered in that category of immaculate goodness. There is no "overdoing" of alterocentricity in its purest forms. And in the humanity we know today there seems to be nothing coming closer to that pureness than **maternal love**. That must be the reason why **motherliness** knows no borderline with a sign-board posted at the road-side, bearing this inscription: "No TRESPASSING. So far, but no farther please?"

About Women, p. 157.1

Maternal love is a **woman's** strongest "passion." But why does that "passion" so rarely lead her to infringements and crimes? What we actually observe taking place, is, in a certain sense, the very opposite: Far from blindfolding a woman, maternity has the effect of making her more seeing than ever. **Motherliness** becomes a sort of eye-opener. It makes that **mother** only better prepared to consider things in a pertinent and unbiased manner, morally as well as practically. **Motherhood** is conducive to a philosophy, not of sentimental romanticism, as people tend to think, but rather of sober-minded realism; that is the philosophy culminating in the true **Agape**, the great fundamental motif, prepared from eternity by the God of Rock-bottom Christianity. This is what I am trying to make crystal clear in a later work: **THE PART OF THE STORY YOU WERE NEVER TOLD ABOUT AGAPE AND EROS** and now also in an important sequel to this present book: *In Jeopardy: The Natural Mystery of **MOTHERLINESS**, The Last Hope of Survival for a Dying World.*

About Women, p. 172.5

[Editor's Note: Carsten's document entitled the *The Natural Mystery of Motherliness* has not been located. He lists elsewhere what appears to be an alternate title for the same--

The Phenomenon of Motherliness: That is, the Part of the Story You were Never Told about a Mother and Her Child.]

And something seemed even worse by far than that negative reputation kept in reserve for alterocentricity. I had dared, from the beginning, to postulate an identity between that alterocentricity (other-centeredness) in the history of human culture and the great **Agape**--nothing less than that. So whatever qualities of basic goodness--in heaven and on earth--were heralded as characteristics of alterocentricity, should also apply to the heavenly love (God's perfect Agape).

On the other hand, if feminine alterocentricity (also called the Spirit of **Motherliness**) was proved to distinguish itself as a trend of sheer *irrationality*, then **Agape** must here be assumed to manifest the same features of "distinction."

Agape and Eros, p. 3.1&2

Here I shall only make some general statements about the main results of my study. Males are seen to be noticeably more egocentric in their all-around attitudes in life. Females are significantly more alterocentric. I have endeavored to explain, naturally and intelligently, why this had to be expected. I have established without a shadow of ambiguity the following phenomenon of simply biology: The irresistible forces of simple **MOTHERLINESS** exert a transforming influence on all aspects of a **woman's love**. This transformation then is not limited to her affection for her child. Such a limitation would be simply impracticable. The out-stretched arms of alterocentricity are bound to reach out much farther than that. Her **love** for her *mate*, as well, is seen to adopt an amazingly alterocentric form. The same applies to her **love** for any object in that curious world she knows as her own.

Agape and Eros, p. 15.1

It is the secret instinct of a purposeful **motherliness** that affords a constant protection for her life, a protection from having **love** disintegrate into the mere flight of a butterfly fluttering capriciously from flower to flower. Potential maternity is the inherent grace in her life that whispers to her, as it were, words of anti-playboy wisdom, words of carefulness and care, words of sound everyday reason.

Agape and Eros, p. 20.3

Here is the great law of life for any person: *He will experience wholeness and harmony, fulfillment and true felicity in the same degree as he is able to find his main values outside himself.* That rule, by the way, holds good, regardless of sex or age. The only condition is that the person be willing to give up himself as the great center. He must submit to the great *elan alterocentrique*, the mysterious spirit of **motherliness**, or, as we might as well say, the great Spirit of *Fatherliness*! For true alterocentricity corresponds exactly to the heavenly **Agape** in every respect. We may, of course, distinguish here, saying:

Other-centeredness is, on the *biological* plane, a faithful type of what **Agape** is on the *religious* plane. But what is Bios? Life is simply Jesus Christ. This applies to true life, wherever you turn. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There is no life outside of Him.

Agape and Eros, p. 21.3 - 22.1

What, precisely, does **Agape** have in common with the spirit of **motherliness**? Of course, today, in our human world, **maternal love** can only provide a weak and most imperfect picture of **Agape**, the resplendent source of heavenly light, emanating from the glorious **Love** of the Eternal One. But the essential effect is always the same. In both cases there is a practical trend of thorough transformation taking place. Right into a **woman's love** for her mate there is bound to enter a considerable element of her peculiar **love** for her child. The alterocentric pull--or rather *pushing* and *lifting*, since the trend is *outwards* and *upwards*--will always assert itself as a standard phenomenon in a **woman's** affection for those to whom she devotes her life. The other-centered urge is unmistakable: With quite a particular ardor of self-forgetfulness, her yearning heart reaches out for the persons who *need her most*, or for whom she has already got into the process of *sacrificing herself*.

Agape and Eros, p. 24.2

But the main project of our study has never been Eros. It has never been self-centeredness. The positive angles are so much more encouraging and also more promising. So, in the first place, what we must get better acquainted with is not the Eros "values" with all their spectacular display of sham glories. What we need to concentrate on is **Agape**. It is **Agape**, as unobtrusive other-centeredness, spurning all outward display. Right in a world of vainglorious splendor we must get sight of new aspects to those "more tedious" qualities we have found to survive at least in the potential **mother**. I have called it *true respect* and *realistic esteem* for the other one. It so happens--and this is a most significant historic fact, although it is almost never mentioned--that the word "**Agape**" in the Greek language of classical times had a sense corresponding fairly well to those "tedious ones." It was not **Love**, the "many-splendored thing." No, its splendor did not go one single step farther than to the modest concept of "respect" or "esteem." So you see how inconspicuous and (considered from an Eros angle) downright *tedious Agape* is, even in its literal linguistic extraction.

For a realistic understanding of **Agape's** nature, it may be more to the point than most men might tend to believe to listen once more to the anxious cry of that human female, confronted with her "this-worldly" **love**: "I do not dare to skip realism in my choice of a **love** partner. I must choose, as an object for my great, great **love** experience in life, a person whom I can truly respect and realistically esteem. As a prospective **mother** I have moral obligations which I cannot betray. That is what forbids me to be unrealistic in the way I choose my loved one."

Agape and Eros, p. 42.3 - 43.1

The conclusion of my argument is bound to be: We must admit that God is entirely fair, entirely just even in demanding of man that total **love**. For He always consistently remains in harmony with what I call the fundamental motif of other-centeredness. That will have to be, in His case as well, the decisive criterion. God's basic trend is that of turning outward--like the natural **mother** does, to use the best illustration we could ever find in an imperfect world. This simply means--on any plane of living personalism--the fact of seeking, and finding, the center of one's life outside oneself, rather than in oneself; that is, looking to the objective world, the world around one, the world of the "objects," as the place where one comes across one's dearest values.

Agape and Eros, p. 162.4

[Editor's Note: This illustration touches on the New Covenant and "easy to do right" concepts, in light of our dual themes (motherliness and agape)--]

DID YOU EVER TRY TO MEASURE THE RATIONALITY OF THE "LAW IN THE HEART"?

In his matchless little book on the sanctuary service, *Ransom and Reunion*, W.D. Frazee has given an illuminating and most intelligent illustration of what it really means to have the law written in one's heart. I am referring particularly to chapter 9 in the book: "When it is Easy to do Right."

The inner motive making it so "easy"--and I would say: intelligent--to follow the written commandment is, of course, precisely **Agape**. No other power on earth, either in the Old Covenant Era or in the New, could manage that master stroke.

And now, find out for yourself whether it is a power stripped of all sound human reason. You should, in the following, make it a point to check exactly *where* reason and un-reason have their respective places in this little incident:

In accordance with Frazee's scheme, I accept the role here of meeting a **mother** who happens to be visibly embarrassed at the moment by the fact that her little child keeps whimpering or crying all the time. Then I pluck up my "courage" saying to her (I am making myself somewhat worse, it may appear, than average human beings would like to have the reputation of being. I apologize for the hyperbole):

"Say, madame, why don't you kill that embarrassing child of yours?"

What will that **mother** answer me? Shall we, for the experiment's sake, make her just as inhuman, with regard to both heart and head, as I have just proved to be in my question? Good. Suppose her answer would go approximately like this:

"Sir, I am afraid I do not quite get your idea. Do you really suggest that I should take the boy's life here and now? I just do not see how you could make a suggestion like that under the present conditions. Don't you realize, sir, that there does exist, in this land, a written law directed against such killing? You should go to the office where the law codes are kept and you will get to know about all the awful punishment they threaten against those who kill babies. Now, if I yielded to the thing you are speaking about, what would happen? The police would be there right on the spot, and I would be taken to prison. I might have to spend the rest of my life in jail. Do you understand that there are hard-core laws in the land that keep me from doing what you so temptingly suggest? I think I have some good reasons, after all, why I treat the little fellow the way I do. You must be careful these days about the way you treat kids. Of course, there are moments when I wonder if I shall manage to control myself. But when I think of that life-long imprisonment, I just don't dare to give in to my feelings. You understand me, sir?"

Now what do you think about that answer? Does it sound intelligent to you? Of course not. Why not? You know something essential about **mothers** and their feelings toward their children. They have a certain law of **love** written in their hearts. So they are infinitely more intelligent than all that, aren't they? A **mother** would not spoil the reputation of her heart with an answer of that kind. If my question should be ever so foolish in the direction I have intimated, that **mother** would never respond to my wicked suggestion with a corresponding foolishness. She is simply too reasonable for such nonsense.

Let us continue to roam about in the kingdom of incredible imagination. We assume the presence of the same **mother**, the same boy. Even my own question to her remains the same. Only her answer this time varies slightly, according to the setting of the theme. We imagine her

as a lady having some theoretical knowledge of the world of theology. Otherwise her response is very much the same:

You don't seem to be in your right mind, sir. Do you really propose that I should commit murder against this child of mine because he keeps crying all the time? You seem to be ignorant about the law written with God's own finger on tables of stone at Mount Sinai of old. You should also know that those very commandments remain written on tables in the heavenly sanctuary. One of them says: Thou shalt not kill! Now, if I did kill, what would happen to me? Do you quite realize what the result would be to me if I yielded to the temptation in this case? I would risk burning in the lake of fire. Of course, I do not want that. If you are intelligent, sir, you can't blame me, can you? I have some valid reason for not putting that boy to death. Do you get me? The temptation to transgress is certainly there, but as soon as I start thinking of the flames in that lake, I become sensible and behave myself."

Did you ever hear such madness from the mouth of a **mother**? Hardly. But what is it that makes us think this reaction just as splittingly mad as the challenge to which she reacted? It simply is the absolutely intelligent assumption that a normal **mother** does have a certain law written in a certain place. Where? In her heart. She **loves** her child. She **loves** him with a kind of **love** having more in common with **Agape** than anything else we human beings on this earth happen to know: **maternal love**.

And what then about the relationship between true reason and true **love**? Is it a strained one? Do you arrive at the conclusion that there is bound to be a bitter strife between the two? No, at least not intelligently so. There must be something wrong with your own mind if you think that a **mother's love** for her child will tend to make her less intelligent because intelligence is "supposed to have a standing conflict with genuine heartfelt **love**." Parents who are under the influence of the spirit of **Agape**, will in this very fact have an excellent guide for their sound behavior in life's most precarious situations. And that Spirit of **Agape** is none but the Holy Spirit.

Here some may say to me: "You are not so naive as to think that it is the Holy Spirit influencing and directing all those parents, most of them completely worldly in their ways and views, are you?" I am. In other words, I do not happen to be among the many who believe that Christians have a "monopoly" of the Holy Spirit and His gentle influence on human hearts. On the contrary, I am convinced that every person having a generous feeling of any kind in his heart, is thus influenced and guided, a wisdom-creating influence and guidance, directly from God. Not a single one among us would, in ourselves today, produce one single good feeling or practical deed of **love**. It is the Spirit's doing in every case. So the "law written in the heart" is a phenomenon you may observe every day in all kinds of environments. This is the only thing making our world tolerable and habitable at this late hour. It is **Agape** that keeps us all from turning mad, and committing the most awful crimes. **Agape** makes life tolerably easy for every one of us.

Agape and Eros, pp. 169.1 - 173.1

Agape Herself does not for one moment cease to be the tender **Mother** of mankind. I say "**Mother**" just to accommodate myself to the grammatical fact that the Greek noun **Agape** (if we shall still insist on thinking of it as Greek) is feminine. It is Eros that is masculine (and that is undeniably Greek, whatever way you look upon it). Here, though, we might be safer if we went back to a more original imagery of spiritual themes: According to Hebrew thought-forms (or image-forms), God is the tender Father. His stern patriarchalism does not prevent Him from having all the tenderness of **motherliness**, as we tend to think of it. For that great Father, you

see, without for a moment stripping Himself of His perfect virility and stern justice, manifestly reveals the most intensive feeling of sorrow over the wayward son's tragic alienation of himself from the paternal mansion. Nor is there a moment's respite in His heartfelt concern to run to His prodigal son's encounter, and rapidly apply the balm of consolation and restored happiness to the life of that erring child, at the very first moment, in fact, when he finally returns home. There is no repentant sinner so deeply immersed in sin that the Father does not take pity on him.

The Maligned God, p. 169.1

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