

GOSPEL OF LOVE

by

Frederick Christopher Bouter

ISBN: 978-1-84753-778-2

© 2007- Institutio Scripturarum

First Edition

EXPLANATION

Hail to the reader!

Lo, my first booklet! A fictional tale about three persons. These three persons are all three aspects of my own personality.

One is conscience, the parent person, so to speak according to the psychology of Eric Berne; one is the child person (the *id* according to Freud) and one is the adult personality.

These three persons run all three their own dangers (!) and they pose questions about the state in life after death, in heaven (that is the third heaven or paradise) and in hades and in the lake of fire . . .

This tale does not have a good end, but certainly a good conclusion!

I hope you will enjoy this little story!!!

May almighty God give you forgiveness and true blessedness, now and unto all eternity . . .

Frederick Christopher Bouter (At the city of Gouda in Holland)

INTRODUCTION

This christian bloggish novel is among other things a discussion about what heaven will be like. Will it be like the Muslim's paradise, or like the Christian's heaven? It is interspersed with background events to embellish the story. Also I have interlaced it with my ethical theology to lend backbone to the plot. If you are looking for compelling narrative drive, look away. This is more a fictitious diary full with philosophical ideas, a play of sorts, and is meant to educate rather than to entertain.

The bible says very little about the state of the blessed in eternity. One might argue that people imagine a heaven that appeals to their own fancies. Yet, by using biblical principles and ideas, one can undertake to at least think about this. But of course also I cannot come up with clearcut answers where God Himself in His wisdom keeps silence.

What then is the use of such a line of reasoning, one could ask. Well, it is useful to make us at least think about what is important now, by weighing our lives with the conscious knowledge that the short span of time allotted to us should embolden us to at once relativize our ambitions as also make us more serious about what our priorities should be.

Ideally a person's vision of eternity should determine his life on earth. Unfortunately we fail to be lifted up sufficiently from our vicissitudes to realize this. We tend to bog down in worldly cares. In this novel also the question is posed whether or not there is sex in heaven and whether or not children will be born in eternity on the new eternal earth and in the endless ages of future paradise. Despite the influences of unisex and militant feminism, men and women by nature regulate their lives as men and women. Our sexuality makes us determinedly men or women. Wisdom decrees us to allow for each other's natures, but our deepest longings are solely our own.

It is with these initial thoughts that I invite you to read this novel and to set out to re-evaluate your theology and philosophy of life. If all I succeed at is to make people at least wonder about the Christian's heaven, then I will be satisfied about this work.

CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
Prologue -----	9
I Orientation -----	10
II Memento Mori -----	39
III Miserere me, Domine! -----	65
IV Confrontation -----	92
V The Conflict Deepens -----	125
VI What would heaven be like? -----	152
VII Blasphemy Rebuffed -----	179
VIII Excommunication -----	207
IX God's Infinite Greatness -----	229
X Quo Vadis, Domine? -----	252
Epilogue -----	277

GOSPEL OF LOVE

PROLOGUE

Dear reader! Let me tell you the story of three very interesting people and of a few of their acquaintances. I had the honor of observing their lives during the course of a number of years. They are so interesting because on the one hand they are always entangled with each other and even embroiled in the occasional ruckus. But on the other hand they cannot seem to do without each other. And in this they complement one another. They are a living witness to the fact that the human being is and always will be very intriguing, even a sort of mystery. A mystery to and for each other and even to and for him- or herself.

The reader might attempt to sort it all out, as also I, in humbleness and at times with the necessary difficulty, have undertaken to do. Beware! For thou shalt enter a world of contradictions. But the will to carry through to the end will hopefully lead thee to the rainbows of a reasonably integrated self!

GOSPEL OF LOVE

CHAPTER I

ORIENTATION

John MacNutt had prepared for his calling for years. Now the time had arrived, finally. He was about to go onto the streets of the slums of Los Angeles, at least one of them. He had attended bible school for four years to make himself ready for evangelizing the less privileged. He had rehearsed his plans a dozen times, but had come to the conclusion that it would be best to leave things in the hands of the Lord. That would also make him spontaneous and natural, he hoped. With all the devotion he could muster he prayed that the Lord would guide him as he set sail in a world largely unknown to himself.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

He opened the door of his modest apartment, slowly and thoughtfully walked down the steps and took a right on 'Sunset Boulevard'. There was nothing sunny about it. Garbage and debris lined the sidewalks, but John hardly noticed it. A local character was leaning against a telephone pole, smoking a cigarette.

'You're new here, ain't ya?'

'Yes. How do you figure that?' replied John.

'cause I saw yer bringing in your stuff yesterday.'

'Yep, that's correct. You live here yourself, I take it then.'

'Yes.' John estimated the man about close to his forties. The stubble stood out on his cheeks and chin and he certainly could use a change of clothes.

'My name is John MacNutt,' and he extended his hand.

'I go by Arthur,' accepting the handshake with some hesitation.

'Pleased to meet you. How about a coffee over there? I would like to get acquainted and catch some of the news on the local scene here.' Arthur stroked his beard, looked away and then slowly accepted. They walked over to a simple diner. On the window pane it said 'Dining Room'. A generously obese lady was serving a table, at which a few guests were

GOSPEL OF LOVE

eating a cheap meal. They happened to be the only visitors, regulars apparently for they were behaving in a rather familiar way. They looked for a few seconds at John and Arthur, but paid no further attention to them. The lady came over to their table and John noticed her heavy make-up. She had done her best to offset her obesity by her dressing style.

'What can I do for you, sirs? Hi, Arthur,' she added.

'For me a coffee and donut, and for Arthur . . .,' and he waited, while looking at Arthur.

'For me the same,' said Arthur.

'Comin' up,' replied the lady and she went about her business. John was wondering what approach to take. Would he say immediately that he was an evangelist, or would he simply try to socialize? Arthur decided the outcome.

'What do you do for a living, Mr. MacNutt?'

'I happen to be an evangelist. And please, call me John.' Arthur grinned and observed:

'Not too many people are gonna take your message seriously here, John. The kids prob'ly never heard the word evangelist. I know, for there used to be a church around here.'

'O yes? So what happened to that church?'

'The ol' pastor died and the few people that remained, decided that they could not afford to go on.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

There is not much religion to be found around here. People just live by their own rules.'

'Do you still happen to know any of these church people?' And an idea formed instantly in his mind. Maybe he could organize some kind of open house for the local population.

'No. I attended services a couple of times, but was never asked to visit with them.' nodded John simply.

'And what do you do for a living?' Arthur was silent for a while, looking through the window as if he were taking in a far away picture.

'I don't have a steady job. My back is often killing me. Right now I'm on the dole, as they used to call it. So what church do you represent as an evangelist?'

'Let me first say this. I am not here to win souls for any particular church. My purpose is to spread the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for this world and anybody that accepts His sacrifice is forgiven and can experience healing.'

'You're Pentecostal then.'

'Yes. How do you gather that?'

'You use the word healing.'

'Yes. But I'm a moderate. I do not believe that one can claim riches and every good thing in the Lord's name. Often God works in mysterious ways through sickness and setbacks. When I say healing, I refer in the first place to spiritual health.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'He certainly works mysteriously. Who can figure this world out with all its misery everywhere. Even when one is rich there are often all kinds of relationship troubles. It's the ol' problem of whether there is any reason to the rhyme.'

'Reason to the rhyme?' John was glad to have met this talkative fellow, but lost his train of thought. Also he could not help but think that there was something peculiar about the man, something funny even, but he failed to define it.

'Yep; what is the grand purpose of life? Have you never heard this expression, or the philosophical question, rhetorical really: "If all the galaxies have come to a frozen halt and their machinery have failed, do you think there will be a greater thinking thing that gives a damn?" My, where do I get all the words from? You seem to have touched me somehow!'

'That sounds rather cynical. The purpose of our lives is that we are meant to praise God for evermore. Heaven will be one long feast of adoration.'

'I'm afraid I can't share your enthusiasm.'

'That is because you need to be lifted up above the sorrow of life. When one contemplates Christ one can do that.'

'What is it about Jesus that attracts you religious folks so much? Granted that he was an extraordinary man, he was still only human.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'He is the perfect human and God the Son at the same time. Him has been given all power upon earth and in heaven. He is the Name above every name.'

'What's in a name? Shakespeare asked, probably wondering what the human personality is.'

'In this Name there is everything. It sums up all God's riches. In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' Seeing and feeling John's fervor, Arthur exclaimed:

'Wow, you almost sound high!'

'Not through drugs, mind you. Drugs are linked to sorcery in the Bible. In Revelation, the last book of the Bible, the word for sorcery is pharmacy, probably meaning mind altering substances.' At that Arthur became totally silent, even expressionless. Then he started smoking a cigarette. John felt the difficulty of the moment. Wanting to avoid a deadlock, he observed.

'But you seem a well educated man!'

'I know a thing or two,' said Arthur, coming out of his stupor. 'I used to be a college major in philosophy, but trouble over a girl triggered a devastating process in me. I was on alcohol for years and even tried cocaine. I still smoke the occasional marijuana cigarette.' Silence fell again. John broke it.

'So how did you get out of this?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'It took a long struggle, a battle of life and death. AA helped me with it as well. I owe a lot to those volunteers.' Regaining his composure, Arthur said:

'But let me put the following question to you. You do not mind drinking coffee. Let's call that a heart warmer. It certainly is not a mind altering drug. But so there are a host of substances. Thanks God I am off the cocaine.'

'Amen to that!' interrupted John.

'My question is, where must one draw the line. The bible is not against alcohol either, Jesus himself changed water into wine.'

'That is true. I do not drink myself, but I see no reason against a social drink. But I catch your drift. You mean that there must be somewhere a fine line that one can overstep. This calls for the wise art of living. But can I offer you another coffee?'

'Certainly, I got practically all afternoon. And you do not seem to be in any rush yourself. Excuse me.' And while Arthur absented himself to the bathroom, John ordered two more coffees. The lady brought them and John said cheerfully:

'The weather is nice today, isn't it, ma'am?'

'It usually is here, sir. You are not from around here?'

'That's correct. I am from Memphis Tennessee, but I live here now.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'O, you are from Elvis's place. I love his music. This house music I don't like. Every weekend it is the same thing next doors. The teenagers dance till deep into the night.' Arthur returned and she went back with a friendly nod.

John asked himself how to continue the conversation. He was glad to have some rapprochement, but realized all of a sudden that it would be hard to get people like Arthur interested or re-interested in the gospel. Also the fear crept up on him again that his enthusiasm for the Bible might be experienced as overweening preachiness. And he prayed quickly that God would help him to set also examples and not just to be a preacher and when preaching, to do so tactfully.

'You are a very religious man, John,' said Arthur, picking up from where they had stopped. 'I respect that in a way. Religious people are often very well meaning people. Too bad you will be considered a do-gooder around these places.'

'What's wrong with that?' asked John.

'In my opinion there is nothing wrong with it. But here in L.A. it is very much a matter of cutting out your own piece of the pie. People do not go for your kind of line.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'But that is what makes us egoists and careless maniacs that forget about a whole lot of things such as true love, sharing and the like.'

'There I must agree. That is why I kind of feel left out of the picture myself.'

'Do you mind if I ask why?'

'Not at all. For example take the fact that on the one hand there is welfare, but no or hardly no work integration for people like me. Then there is medicare. I have seen it happen that the police threw a blanket over a wounded drifter and in the night he died. In Canada at least they would have paid the hospital bill. This could happen to me as well! And then they will say that it was only a junkie.'

'Yes, these are important issues that won't be solved overnight. Therefore the message of the gospel is such a real one. What a Friend we have in Jesus is not merely idle talk.'

'I sense that to some extent, but why all the growling, snarling and killing even by both nature and man? Why does God allow all kinds of trouble?'

'We live in a fallen world, mind you. A world that once will be judged for its actions. But God calls out individuals like yourself and maybe particularly like yourself to be saved from a hell bound racket, to put it that way.' Arthur grinned a little at that and repeated hardly audibly 'hell bound racket'. John went on:

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'The Bible doesn't state for nothing that the Lord has elected the weak of this earth. The wise and strong do not see what the truth is all about. God has hidden it from their eyes. The message of the cross is foolishness to them.'

'Well, I will seriously reconsider the ol' tidings of the cross, after having run into you. But I have to go now. I just now remember that I have to make a call about some part-time job. Bye now.'

'Good-bye and success with job hunting!' replied John. He ordered another coffee, sat musing over things past, present and future and then went outside again after having praised the lady for her delicious coffee and donuts.

John walked passed a few blocks and then saw an elaborate drawing on a run-down apartment block. 'Now, why would somebody make such detailed graffiti?' he muttered to himself, without paying further attention to it. Little did he realize that it was the work of a local Hispanic gang that had staked out that turf. It featured a few gang bangers dressed down in sagging pants with sunglasses and dog faces. It showed a challenge--*y-que putos*--but John's knowledge of Spanish did not include the word *puto*. Hardly had he rounded the corner when he noticed a Latino, who addressed him.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'De donde eres?'

John tried to explain in his best Spanish that he was from Memphis and was now living in the neighborhood. Again he simply could not know that the phrase *de donde eres* did not simply mean where he was from. It was pregnant with meaning, in fact it was a direct challenge in the sense of 'What gang do you belong to?' Luckily for him the guy was in a patient mood and had understood that John's mother tongue was actually English.

'You do not belong to the 'vigils' then?'

'I have no idea who they are,' replied John.

'You are really a stranger then?'

'Yes.'

'Good. I have something nice for you.' And he hollered up the stairs: 'Maria!' A scantily dressed Hispanic girl of about fourteen came down right away. It was then that John became rather uncomfortable and he sent up an ejaculatory prayer.

'Sorry, but I am not into this kind of thing,' he said looking as apologetic as he could.

'You do not like her full shapes?' replied the guy.

'It isn't that.'

'You go for boys maybe?'

'Not at all!' The Latino gang banger became impatient now.

'Just what kind of a guy are you anyways?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'I am just trying to mind my own business, man. There is no need to get upset.'

'You get the hell out-a-here, then!' And the guy showed the holster of his magnum, stuck in his pants. John turned around immediately, without looking up or down. A few streets further he dared think. 'My, that guy surely was packing with that piece!' And even that was a line from a book he remembered.

With every step he took John regained himself, particularly because he was praying. 'This place is infested with gangs, Lord!' 'Please, guide me in your way through gangland!' 'Please, help me to reach some of these people, victims of circumstances, but also choosers of evil in those circumstances.' 'Life is certainly complicated, o God! The one moment you talk to a thinker, the other moment to a pimp or gang master. People are so different. Yet You love them all!' And so he went on musing for a few streets. After a while he started paying attention to the surroundings again. So he noticed that coming back towards where Sunset Boulevard must be, the houses were better kept. Some had even nice looking gardens. The apartment complexes were well painted, or had clean bricks. He also observed that there was a school with an adjacent park. He decided to take a stroll through it. Teenagers were leaving the

GOSPEL OF LOVE

school, apparently a highschool and some of them were chatting in the park, feeding their leftover sandwiches to the ducks, or just hanging around. The clock on the main building counted about four hours. John sat down on a bench and took it all in. 'Who cares about their eternal souls? It is hard enough to educate them, to get them to speak English, let alone to teach them about you, o Lord!' 'Indeed we live in a secular age, postchristian, even postmodern.' For a minute John wondered whether the school board would permit him to speak at the school, or perhaps teach a voluntary class in religion. 'Maybe I should talk to the principal.' A girl of about sixteen walked by and John accosted her.

'Can I please ask you a question,' he said, getting up from the bench.

'Sure. What do you want to know?' The girl wore jeans, Nike sneakers, and sported a leather jacket. She had medium long blonde hair.

'I wonder whether at your school they teach any religion.'

'Yep, they do. Are you interested?' She was also chewing gum.

'Yes, that is to say I would like to teach myself.'

'You would have to ask the principal, but she is into meditation and Buddhism herself. They do allow all

GOSPEL OF LOVE

kinds of viewpoints, though. People from different streams get a chance to talk about their beliefs.'

'Thank you.'

'You're welcome.'

Our young evangelist now decided to see the head of the school. He found his way to the principal's office and was led in by the secretary on the promise that it would only take a minute.

'There is a Mr. MacNutt here to see you,' said the secretary. 'Something about religious class.'

'Simone Dupont, pleased to meet you,' said the principal. John was somehow taken aback by her. She seemed awfully sure about herself. She wore a long skirt, had short brown hair and gave an overall impression of having panache. John noticed that she wore no make-up of any kind.

'What can I do for you, Mr. MacNutt?'

'Well, I just learned from one of your students that you also offer religious classes in this school. I understand that various speakers state their views.'

'That is correct, but we are booked solid for the year.'

John felt his courage sagging, but did not give up without an effort. 'In case one of the speakers are hindered for any reason, would you consider me?'

'What are your credentials, Mr. MacNutt?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'I am a graduate of Wickliffe Bible College and would represent the let's say more traditional viewpoint.'

'That one is well taken care of by the local priest.'

John had the tendency to turn around away from these terse and to the point remarks.

'One more question. Is religion a voluntary subject in this school?'

'Of course it is an elective, Mr.MacNutt. We have no desire to force anything on our students.' John nodded sheepishly and gave up.

'Thank you for your time, Mrs.Dupont.'

'You are very welcome, Mr.MacNutt.' And the school ma'am closed a book of some kind and put on her coat, making herself ready to leave the office.

'Must be some kind of feminist,' grumbled John in himself as he left the school building. 'I have my fill of this day as it is written: "Unto the day sufficeth the evil thereof."' And John headed home. But then he realized that he did not know the way home. The park was empty; nobody he could ask. Coming out of the park he saw a gas station. 'Good, I'll ask there. I must get more acquainted with this neighborhood.' At the station an attendant was filling up a car with unleaded gasoline.

'Hi, can you tell me the shortest way to 'Sunset Boulevard'?''

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Sure can. You bear left over there,' and the attendant pointed to the right of the gas station. 'on the opposite side. Then the second road on your right. That's it.'

'Thanks,' replied John.

'No problem,' said the attendant cheerfully. John could feel his stomach demanding a refuel. 'I'm gonna make myself a hearty good meal of macaroni,' he said to himself. As he turned around the corner into 'Sunset Boulevard' he saw a banner across the street from one tree to another. 'Keep Sunset Boulevard smiling,' it said. Pickup trucks were hauling off garbage and debris. Arriving at number eleven, his apartment building, he noticed the difference. Everything breathed as it were so much cleaner. He recognized one of the workers, carrying in a broom, as one of his neighbors.

'What is going on, neighbor?'

'We are tidying up the street. It looks like the town garbage haulers will be on strike for a long time to come. Some of the guys are gonna dump the refuse right in front of city hall,' said the neighbor chuckling. 'They are sick and tired of being the victims of an age long dispute. Also the owners of the apartment buildings have stuck their heads together to get the entire block painted by a local contractor. So we renters will get our money's worth after all.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Well, that's a good thing then,' replied John.

'Sure is,' the neighbor added. Apparently he had something else on his mind, but decided to keep it in; or he simply was waiting for more of a reaction on John's part, and then he went inside with a mere 'See-ya.' John looked the apartment building up and down. 'It could use some paint,' he said to himself. He noticed it had four levels and a nice gable of intricate woodwork. Also the iron railings alongside the steps at the front were of intricate design. But they were well painted. The wooden plate over the entrance said in clear white letters: Rushmore Manor. On the right door two ones were painted. 'Eleven, fool's number,' John said. 'Now why do I only now observe this building with some attention? I am not usually a stickler for details.' He shrugged his shoulders and went inside as well.

Inside he checked the mailbox not expecting any mail so soon. He took out a flyer and a letter. 'Mom wrote! So soon!' He opened the door of his apartment, sank down in his armchair and quickly read the letter. 'John, we want you to know that your dad and I support you in this work for the Lord, even though the congregation was less enthusiastic. We pray daily for you and hope that God will bless the gospel as it is preached by one of His most devout

GOSPEL OF LOVE

students.' John smiled and nodded. Upon reading this encouraging letter he went about and cooked himself his 'hearty good meal.' He gobbled it down with a soda as he was a quick eater.

After eating his first supper in his new apartment he read for half an hour in the Bible and doing so he completely regained his strength. Then he went on his knees in front of his armchair and prayed. 'Lord, as I am about to go knocking from door to door, I beseech you to guide me in what I am to say to people answering the door.' With that he went outside. He singled out a nearby street, the one with the tidy lawns. Coming up to the first house, he rang the doorbell. A man in his fifties answered the ring.

'What can I do for you?' eyeing suspiciously at the bible in John's right hand.

'I wonder whether you read the Bible and whether you have any questions about it?'

'I am not interested in a conversation. This isn't the bible belt. If I need to know anything I'll go to the library. Bye.' And he closed the door. At the next door he repeated the same question.

'Are you a Jehovah's witness?'

'No ma'am.'

'A Mormon?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'No, I'm just an evangelist trying to point out to people the timeless wisdom of the Book of books.'

'Not to me you won't. My son is a vet of the Gulf war and his first baby is totally misformed. Is that fair? When you die, that's it, all over.'

'That is very terrible indeed, ma'am, but let me share some verses with you.'

'No, I don't think so, bye-bye.' And she also closed the door. At the third door he was sent away because they hadn't finished supper yet. At the fourth door there was no answer at all. At the fifth door there was an answer after a long time.

'What do you want?' said a bearded Hasidic Jew. He wore long curly locks dangling in front of his ears.

'I wonder whether you have read the New Testament and whether you have any questions about it?' said John, rephrasing the question. It was silent for a minute and then the Hasid sneered almost undetectably.

'It was the so-called Christians that killed six million of our people.'

'You are partly right there,' answered John. 'It was a nominally Christian nation that did this. However were they really Christians?' asked John with the emphasis on Christians. The sneer was repeated more detectably.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Our people have been persecuted by Christians since the beginning of Christianity. Either they proselytized us or they suppressed us with few exceptions. It all culminated last century. I do not think it is any different with you.'

'I am not here to reach out to you for personal reasons, sir,' observed John. 'But I hope that the Holy Spirit will show you that Christ is the only efficacious sacrifice that can cleanse us from our sins. God does not take delight in the sacrifices of bulls and goats,'

'But in a contrite heart,' finished the Jew. 'I know all that and I practice it too.'

'I do not doubt that, sir. But no matter how religious a person is there is but One Name by which one can be saved. One cannot save oneself by being religious, howsoever humble one could possibly be. Isaiah chapter fifty-three shows you as a Jew the true Messiah.'

'That chapter is a difficult passage for us indeed, I'll admit that readily.'

'Then you know that Isaiah predicted that through His stripes we are healed and that He was crushed because of our iniquities.'

'I know all that and I have concluded that the people of Israel is pictured here as a servant of God.'

'Sorry, sir, but that would mean that Israel died for the rest of the world. Nobody takes that seriously.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

And all of a sudden the stately Hassid started sobbing lightly, weeping like a little child. John did not know how to react.

'Let me alone now, please,' the Jew said and he closed the door slowly. John was very impressed and prayed, deciding that he would revisit this man. At the next house a young man answered the door. John asked:

'Do you read the Bible by any chance.'

'I've read in it, yes. Particularly the Song of songs. We're just married, you know.'

'Good, but have you ever wondered where you will spend eternity?'

'Sure, everybody thinks about these things, but nobody ever came back.'

'O yes. Christ Jesus, for instance, came back.'

'That's what you say.'

'It's what the witnesses say that saw Him after the resurrection.'

'How can I know that? Seeing is believing.'

'So you are demanding that God give you personally additional proof, after He has given so much proof already?'

'Well, I don't know. I'm only young, what do I know?'

'I'm glad you show humbleness. Let me invite you for a weekly Bible study at my home. You can make

GOSPEL OF LOVE

an hour a week available can't you? You can try it once at least.'

'Yes, why not,' answered the young man friendly. 'My wife may be interested more than I am. Her parents are Baptists.'

'Good. Here is my card. Please show up next week Wednesday evening at seven thirty at my place.'

'Will do,' he said. John went on to the next door. No answer at first. After some time a kind of hippy answered. The man was covered by tattoos. John plied his trade.

'Now let me ask you,' started the hippy, 'where was your God when the two towers of the WTC collapsed and thousands of innocent people were crushed to smithereens!? I can't find a God anywhere.' John hesitated to answer, but after some time said:

'I agree with you that something like that is experienced as so awfully meaningless that one might doubt just about anything. But what did you do personally to get over it?'

'I smoked a joint and kept turning the telly off and then on again, out of sheer disbelief. The next day I took off to the beach and found some rest watching the waves and the ocean.'

'You see, my friend, the grandeur of God's creation quieted you down in a world where the most awful

GOSPEL OF LOVE

crimes are committed. The Bible teaches us that creation is a witness to God's divinity and power.'

'That's a question of belief, Mr. what's-y'r-name?'

'Please, call me John.'

'John, who is going to tell me that your God made everything?'

'Not in the first place my God, but the God of the Bible.'

'Why not Allah of the Koran?'

'The difference between Christianity and all other religions, including Judaism and Islam, is that in Christianity one is saved freely by Christ. In the other religions, all of them, you have to work yourself up to salvation. But God is so holy that one single sin is enough to spoil all your good deeds. That is why Christ died on the cross, also for you!' The 'hippy' fell silent and then observed:

'You seem to know your stuff! I might even start reading the bible again!'

'You do that!'

'Yes, I think I will. But excuse me now, I was about to prepare my supper. See-ya!'

'See you too and a promise is a promise!'

'O.K.' and the 'hippy' went into the house with a smile.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

At nine o'clock John called it quits and went home. Returning at Rushmore Manor he saw a bag lady had installed herself in the corner of the steps and the building. Seeing John she reaches out and holds up a cup for donations in front of her. John gives her a couple of bucks.

'Do you know the significance behind the smile of the Mona Lisa, sir?' asks the bag lady.

'I have no idea,' replies John.

'She smiles because she realizes that she is happily expecting.'

'Are you drunk by any chance?' asks John, seeing the head of a wine bottle stuck from one of the bags.

'Not at all, sir. I just wanted to tell you a beautiful thought. It's a feeling only women can have, a very special feeling, you know.' John did not know what to say for a few seconds, but then he took charge of the situation.

'You know, the Bible says that the man is out of the woman, even though the woman is there because of the man.'

'Yes, it's a man's world; I know. We women are called to serve. I did all that and then my husband kicked me out for a young girl.'

'That's awful!' replies John.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'I am trying to save money to get back to my family in Maine. It's too bad you can't get welfare without an address here.'

'Is that so? I'm willing to give you mine.'

'That is very kind of you, sir.' And John gives her his card.

'Tomorrow I will go to the welfare department with this address, thank you. Apparently there are still kind people in this world.'

'Give thanks to God, ma'am,' and John goes inside. Reaching the third storey, John is about to enter his apartment. At that moment the door of the adjacent apartment opened and a woman in her sixties addresses him.

'Can you kindly help me to move my table around, sir?'

'Certainly!' responds John and coming over they shake hands and exchange the normal formalities. Entering her abode the first thing he notices is an enormous portrait of the president. Looking around he observes all kinds of political paraphernalia.

'You must like the president, ma'am.'

'I certainly do. I helped him in the local campaign and I am very proud of that. God bless America!'

'Amen to that, ma'am!' And John ends up assisting her in moving around most of her furniture. For when they had moved the dining table, she found that the

GOSPEL OF LOVE

other things were out of place. Having finished after three quarters of an hour, the neighbor offers John a coffee.

'So, are you a republican or a democrat, Mr. MacNutt?'

'I do not like to discuss politics, ma'am.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Don't be sorry. I'll tell you; I consider myself on the one hand a-political and--'

'What does that mean?' she interrupts.

'A-political, you mean?'

'Yes.'

'It means non-political.'

'Non-politician?'

'I mean that I do not like to involve myself in politics. And on the other hand I consider politics too complicated to understand and even more so for the fact that it seems to be impossible to be fair to everyone.'

'You're a thinker, neighbor!'

'Well, a little bit maybe. I am afraid America, and any other country for that matter, cannot solve its problems. Daniel, the prophet from the Bible, warned his king against forgetting about the poor and unfortunate. Before him prophets of old preached against the mistreatment of the poor, and of widows and orphans.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'My, you are a thinker. My husband and I never could live the good life. He worked hard all his life, but even the union double-crossed him when his back went.' They talk a bit more and at ten thirty John returns to his own apartment, leaving a contented neighbor who was able to conveniently forget for an hour that her husband had spent too much money on booze and on the tracks, and who would never realize that the union had abandoned her husband, because he had never learned to take sides.

John sat down with a cup of coffee from the percolator he owned since his student days. He mulled over the facts of the day, while looking around his living room. There was the sturdy dining table with four chairs, the grandfather's clock, but most of all the sitting area, large enough to seat a dozen people close to the windows. 'Lord, bring them in!' he whispered. And he prayed for most of the people he had met that day, particularly for the Latino gang master and the stately Hassid. Before turning into bed, John usually did his readings, often till deep into the night. This night he studied a book that was devoted to the spiritual meanings of the six days of Creation. They were said to represent six consecutive stages of growth in the Christian, beginning with conversion when God's light

GOSPEL OF LOVE

commences to shine in a person's heart. John finished the book at two thirty a.m., brushed his teeth and kneeled down in front of his bed. In this way he always commended his loved ones to the throne of grace.

When he lay in bed he suddenly experienced inspiration, turned on the bed light and wrote with some difficulty the following poem.

LUX FIAT

There once was darkness in my soul.
My heart was far from being whole.
But God His Spirit was at work,
And marvel wrought despite the murk.

Yes, lost I was in all my gloom.
Awaited me a damning doom.
But God said:'Let there now be light!'
And so He clothed me all in white.

Two natures now in me do strive.
The one brings death, the other life.
My war is not 'gainst blood and flesh,
With armies upon high I clash.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

The dry did then appear in time,
Containing treasures gold and lime,
Yes, trees and plants that bore their fruit.
And I grew slowly from the root.

O Sun so righteous, shine in me,
And like the moon reflect you free!
And though this vale bring me no joy,
At least increase my weight in troy.

In higher spheres may I soar,
As God increases blessings more.
As butter curded from the milk,
So pain now weaves a dress of silk.

At last it's Christ Who reigns in me.
At last I'm more than ever free.
Transformed from glory unto more,
I'm changed a Christian to the core.

HALLELUJAH!

It was then that sleep found a happy John.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

CHAPTER II

MEMENTO MORI

'I am the personification of sublimized tragedy, the ultimately paradoxical indiscrepancy.'

'What!' said John.

'Just mouthing off some depressed nonsense, man.' John answered nothing, but thought the more. 'Perhaps he has smoked a joint and is coming down from it,' he thought.

'I have the feeling that I am nearing the ultimate implosion of my inner being, or whatever.'

'The naked truth can hit us hard, Arthur,' observed John, not knowing what else to say. 'But more often than not we bring it directly on ourselves.' Arthur rubbed his eyes and face as if he were trying to wake

GOSPEL OF LOVE

himself up. The lady was cleaning a table behind them.

'You know,' said Arthur, 'this morning I went into a store to buy a gold ring, but as I held a specimen it dawned upon me that the gold could have been from teeth melted down from holocaust victims and I put it down quickly.'

'Sounds to me you were high, Arthur.'

'No, I was conscientious. And as I stepped into the street it occurred to me that there is hardly any spot on earth that is untainted by bloodshed and I was uncomfortable walking back to my apartment.'

'Yes, Arthur, this is all true, but one would have to leave this planet in order to walk on holy ground. This all just shows how corrupt the human being is and that we need to be saved from ourselves.'

'You know, I once came very close to turning my life over to God. This was at some kind of crusade where Billy Graham was preaching. But I did not get around to it and never did up to now.'

'It is still not too late, Arthur. As long as you live there is hope and opportunity. But one can never tell how long or how short one's life will be.'

'Yeah, yeah,' said Arthur, stroking his face again. 'There are some questions I have.'

'Shoot!'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'You are really a Protestant, whether you realize it or not.'

'I'm not protesting anything!' grinned Arthur at the pun and went on:

'We'll check that out. For instance, I was raised by a Catholic mother. She never went to church, except with Christmas. But she said that the church taught that Mary was immaculately conceived. What is your view on that and on the saints and like matters?'

'Well, indeed I would have to protest against that. Christ was immaculately conceived in Mary through the Holy Ghost. Mary wasn't. In fact Joseph, to whom she was betrothed, thought that she had slept with another man, when he discovered that she was pregnant. It is purely a misconception of the Roman church, reminding one of pagan mother goddesses such as Astarte, Diana and so on, queens of the heavens. No, mariolatry leads one away from Christ, Who deserves in the end all honor and glory. Christ is Holy, Mary was like any decent woman. Christ is resurrected, Mary is still in her grave till Christ resurrects her and gives her an immortal body.' Arthur nodded a little in acknowledging John's opinion.

'This Mary stuff appeared to me also as way overdone, particularly in Hispanic countries.'

'As to the so-called saints,' continued John, 'when reading about the ancient Greek and Roman

GOSPEL OF LOVE

religions, I found out that their gods and minor gods had practically the same functions as the Catholic saints. That would lead one to conclude the obvious.'

'Well, the church in christening the heathen, incorporated pagan religion, so as to facilitate the transition to Christianity.'

'But the result is confusion.'

'Yeah, you're probably right. You see, you are a Protestant!'

'I never claimed the contrary, but I rather say that I am simply a Christian, trying to stress the positive sides of the biblical message.'

'What is your view on the evolution theory,' kept Arthur on prying. 'You probably are a creationist too, ain't ya?'

'Affirmatively so and proud of it. The term says it all, it is just a theory. They never found all the missing links they thought they would find after Darwin had formulated it. In fact some people actually dared make fakes to fool the world and in order to be famous. Your brother is not an ape, and your great-grandfather is not a fish. God must have created certain basic types with all the genetic codes enabling the wide variety of the species. That is called sometimes micro-evolution, which is a far cry from macro-evolution, according to which all the species derive from one another in one line of descent.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Once again thou hast answered positively, o scribe!' joked Arthur. 'But what about Stephen Hawking's theory that before the Big Bang the universe was the size of a pea.'

'Peabrain when it comes to theology! Excuse me, but I mean that. Where the heck did that pea come from then?'

'He would ask you where God came from.'

'That's the wonderful thing and ineffable mystery of God. He always IS. In human terms, He always was, is and will be.'

'I suppose you agree that since God is omnipotent He could have created the universe in a nanosecond?'

'In a picosecond or smaller, my friend! I am rather disgusted by theologies that need some kind of theological evolution. God does not need the gods of evolution, which are the impersonal, chance and endless time. Theology and macro-evolution simply do not mix. If evolution is true, then God is both the author of sin and of death. However the Bible explains that through the sin of one man both sin and death has been with us. In fact it is the unconscious denial of our natural enmity against God that lead people to sway to macro-evolution. Just like neo-nazis deny the horror of the holocaust, so neo-theologians deny man's adamant hatred of God,

GOSPEL OF LOVE

which is really decide. They do not understand that anybody of us would in all likelihood have crucified the Lord. And indeed the Holy Bible predicts that when Christ returns in glory, the whole world will rally against Him. But He will rule them with an iron fist.'

'My goodness, you are really a bible basher, John!'

'The mouth speaks from the fulness of the heart, Arthur. Yes, the Bible is indeed the Book of books. It educates a person in all necessary areas of life.'

'I have been attending your Wednesday evening studies now for a few months, and I must say that some of your arguments are very interesting. So you state, against atheism and humanism, that their world is really a Swiss cheese riddled with meaningless evil. If there is no God, then there is no meaning just because of all the evil. Not the other way around, no god because of all the evil.'

'Yes, let me elaborate on that. Jesus Christ's infinite suffering on the cross is THE answer to all the stark raving evil that besets us in this sublunar vale of tears. True, we have brought it upon ourselves, for you and I would have done the same thing as our first father Adam; but God provides the remedy in Christ's substituting sacrifice. He will actually recreate the universe that the devil destroyed and there will be an earth on which righteousness dwells in all perfection, despite the prating of some sociologists that there will

GOSPEL OF LOVE

never be perfection, arguing that then the slightest mistakes will be considered as tremendous crimes.'

'But why didn't God do that in the first place? He would have spared us all this misery.'

'Frankly, I don't know, I have no idea. He must have had His reasons, else He wouldn't have. Apparently He wanted a universe where both man and angel could sin, in order to see who would choose for Him out of love, not because He controls us like robots or marionettes that dangle from His strings. How it is possible that we will be holy like Christ in the world to come and why Christ first had to die to make that possible, again I do not know. So I do not comprehend either why little girls are raped, mothers with child are ripped open and what else the so-called human is capable of.'

'That is homo sapiens for you! Man's inhumanity to man,' observed Arthur. 'I take it you do not agree with those theologians that say in heaven we have the possibility to sin, but we simply do not want to anymore?'

'Definitely not. These liars also argue that Christ could sin, although He never did. Christ is Holy and so we will be. Christ cannot sin, not just because He doesn't want to, but because He sees through the vanity and vaingloriousness of sin and most of all because He is holy. He is altogether beyond the least

GOSPEL OF LOVE

inclination towards sin. There is no sympathy whatsoever in Him for sin.'

'Why then does it say that He has been tempted in all things like us?.'

'Tempted in the sense of tried out by the devil, but to his chagrin he found out that Christ is of the finest gold. Where Adam failed in the garden of Eden, Christ stood firm in the desert.'

'I'm surprised how thought through your theology is. Sure, you do not know why God allows incest and genocide. But I think you would say that He partly allows it to confront us with ourselves, for we aren't better than those perpetrators, really.'

'Exactly. As C.S. Lewis would say, pain is God's megaphone to rouse us out of our lethargy. And I would like to add, anybody that thinks or feels himself a better man than a Hitler, or a Nero, hasn't apprehended what it is all about. It is grace that prevents most people from going all the way. He allows certain miscreants to carry out their terror to show us that it is us that are doing it. When a Jew, who was asked to testify against a war criminal, walked into the court room, he froze all of a sudden.'

'Why?'

'Because it dawned upon him, that here was a HUMAN. In other words, if the tables had been

GOSPEL OF LOVE

arranged vice versa, he would have been capable of the same things!

A long silence set in between the two men, who had come to appreciate one another over the last few months. John sensed somehow that he should let the message of the gospel sink in. They sipped from their cups and finished their donuts. Arthur played with his doily without looking up or down. That little piece of paper suddenly had all his attention, it seemed. But John knew better. Arthur was rehearsing the developments of the last few months.

'Another cup of coffee, Arthur?' asked John after some time.

'Yeah,' responded Arthur, momentarily looking up, out of politeness.

'You want to try the almond taste for a change? I know you are addicted to strong coffee, but you should try flavored coffee for a change. You might find it a delicacy.'

'Alright, then; who knows.'

'Two almond coffee, please and two pina collada pies, Mrs. Weber!'

'Certainly!' answered the lady and poured them in.

'Arthur kept folding and re-folding the doily into any possible shape, till it became a crushed little piece of paper full of wrinkles. At one moment he put it back on the table. He looked John in the eyes and was

GOSPEL OF LOVE

going to say something. John waited patiently, but Arthur turned his head away again. Instinctively John looked into the same direction, but there was nothing special to see. They were the only customers at the moment. The lady was cleaning a table. John observed how relaxed she went about her business. She and her little establishment somehow exuded peace, security and contentness. 'How clean and tasteful she has made this place!' he thought. 'One can work wonders with simple things.'

Then his thoughts drifted away to his youth. He had never doubted the existence of God. His mother had told Bible stories almost every time she brought him to bed. His father had educated him with the Bible in one hand and pointing things out in nature with the other hand. He remembered his puberty problem of pilfering and reading dirty books. His parents did not have a clue, but his little conscience cried foul all over him. Then came the accident that brought him within an inch of his life. He had a concussion and suffered many a headache the following year. He had refused to take aspirin, as he had been some kind of homeopathic health freak. Instead a towel drenched in ice cubes had to relieve him. He remembered his competition with his elder brother. He had become a pharmacist and now was running his own business. He wasn't much of a

GOSPEL OF LOVE

talker, but he was as good as his word. His sister, elder by two years, hadn't been much of a problem. She was the paragon of virtue in his eyes. He remembered that after the accident he had become afraid of the prospect of eternal hell and had asked God fervently to forgive him. That reminded him of Arthur again and he prayed for him.

This had taken but a few minutes, even though it seemed like a long time. Then John saw that Arthur removed a tear with his pinkie.

'What's the matter, man? It seems you are crying!'

'I fear God is altogether too holy to stoop down for me. I knocked up a girl once and persuaded her to have an abortion. But she wanted that child, man; she desperately wanted my baby!'

'God is not just willing to forgive you, but eager to, Arthur,' said John, reaching over and putting a hand on Arthur's shoulder. Now is as good a time as any to get things straightened out between you and the Lord.'

'How can He forgive a bastard like me! I'm trash, social refuse, man!'

'Not at all. You are precious and God wants to bless your everlasting soul. Listen, even though you feel like a great sinner, and we all are, the apostle Paul was the greatest sinner. He persecuted the church, had men, women and children killed who

GOSPEL OF LOVE

professed faith in Christ. He actually made them curse and blaspheme God. If the chief of sinners can be forgiven, so can you. All you need to do now is to ask for it and it is all yours. That unborn baby is now with God in paradise. Do not let that withhold you from giving yourself up to God. That would be false humility.'

'O God, forgive me the sinner!' whispered Arthur and he actually started to sob.' John was overjoyed to witness this.

'The angels are singing now, man! They are joyous that a sinner turns everything over to God.'

'Are they?'

'Most certainly!' and John flipped out his Bible from his pocket and read the passage to him. All Arthur managed was some kind of grimace, which had to pass for a smile. He simply could not handle himself. This was all so new. One moment he was overcome by guilt and the other moment he was steered towards enthusiasm.

'What am I to do now?' asked Arthur after the two had been silent again for some time.

'You should read the Bible on a regular basis. You are like a newborn that needs pure milk. The Bible provides that.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

That morning had flown by as if it had been so many seconds. John praised the Lord for seeing a man converted in his presence and that through his own preaching. He thanked God for working the miracle of conversion in Arthur's heart. He had preached the gospel to many people, but never had it happened in front of him to see the result.

'Lord, let Arthur grow on in you and let him be a witness for others!' he prayed as he walked out of Sunset Boulevard.

'Hi, straight John!' An acquaintance accosted our evangelist by his nickname. For John had acquired the reputation of a do-gooder. A do-gooder in a positive sense, not pharisaic or naive. 'Can you lend me a buck for a cup of coffee? I just lost my job and won't get my pay till Friday.'

'What happened; did you do crack again?'

'No, but my boss found that I smoked too much. Man, I really do need the occasional puff now I am off the tokes. I told him that, but he did not take too kindly to it.'

'You do not seem to be bothered by it.'

'Not me. Something will come up, it always does.' That reminded John of a Scripture verse according to which the children of the righteous will never go hungry. Charlie's parents had been devout Baptists

GOSPEL OF LOVE

up to their tragic end in a car crash. He was now living with an aunt, but she was into mysticism and New Age thinking. Some of that rubbed off on Charlie. But she did insist that he be educated properly. And that he succeeded at. Unfortunately he was consorting with dubious characters at the university's fraternity since his bizarre initiation as a freshman.

'Summer will be over soon and you mean to tell me that you haven't saved a single dollar from your summer jobs?'

'I have, but I am too lazy to walk to the bank. I haven't blown for two months now and hear this, my professors want me to do the honors program!'

'That's great, Charlie, in fact fantastic. I'm happy for you. But I am not the bank.'

'C'mon, man, one buck only.'

'You know what, since I am in such a good mood I'll treat you. Let's go to Mrs. Weber's Dining Room.'

'Back so soon, Mr. MacNutt?' the lady said. 'Are you bringing in another convert of yours? Arthur told me all about his decision to trust God in all things from now on. You certainly have a way with people.'

'Thank you for your compliment, Mrs. Weber. To answer your question, Charlie here is a hard nut to crack. He trusts his own powers too much, especially his mind.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Cogito, ergo sum!' quipped Charlie.

'You bring in a wide diversity of people, Mr. MacNutt.'

'Actually Arthur is the first,' answered John.

'I mean into my establishment,' the lady replied with a puzzled look.

'O, I thought you meant something else.'

'Well, it is good for business. I should be giving you commission,' she joked.

'That won't be necessary, but some day I may want to rent your backroom for I intend to plan a lecture for local residents.'

'We'll see, we'll see.'

While drinking almond flavored coffee John and Charlie were embroiled in an exciting conversation, Charlie plying his wit and John accentuating the Bible, not without being able to counter and sometimes even rebuff this obviously brilliant young student.

'You are disappointed, then, in your aunt's mystic antics,' observed John.

'Yep. I now consider her misguided. It is pathetic even. But did you know she turned away from Christianity because she was assaulted in her youth? She was actually raped, man.'

'I didn't know that.'

'Yes. She is only now opening up about it.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Who did it?'

'You'll never guess.'

'I won't try then.'

'By the pastor of the former Community Baptist Church. It used to be around the corner here.'

'Awful, terrible,' muttered John. 'Is that the church Arthur referred to; the church with all the old people?'

'It probably is. I haven't spoken Arthur yet, for instead of going to your studies I have spent my evening hours surfing the net in the library. But here comes the real eye opener. This pastor had been doing it for thirty years! Thirty years of abuse of women and young girls, man! A cynical reporter observed that he saved their souls by day and invaded their bodies by night,' said Charlie chuckling.

'O, my goodness!' was all John managed to say.

'He must have been a hell-of-a manipulator.'

'You can say that again. And now people might consider me as just another wolf in sheep's clothes.'

'No, you shouldn't be afraid of that. Most people are sensible enough to go by what they observe and they all say that you are on the level.'

'But all the same, it is a disgrace for Christians and the world does not forget lightly.'

'It might even work in your favor.'

'How so?'

'First of all, they may want a church again.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'No, unfortunately not. I have held a survey and I haven't met one person that wants a moderately charismatic church in this neighborhood.'

'My you really are upset, John,' said Charlie, seeing John's serious expression.

'It reminds me that also I am a man of flesh and blood and it scares me to death.' Charlie shrugged his shoulders in indifference, which had to pass for hardheaded savvy. He had no inkling of what went on in John's heart. Charlie, though he hadn't touched a woman yet, which was to his credit; entertained very pragmatic notions about sexual matters. For him women were not sexual objects, but some kind of cheap emotional extension of manhood. This was not machismo: he considered women useful compliments to fill up where men often lacked behind; useful in the sense of utilitarian.

John wandered through the city almost as if in a daze, so much in thought he was. The conversation of this afternoon had stuck him sharply in the liver, so to speak. He had been reminded painfully of his own need of a female companion to share in his life. At college he had been very much in love with a brilliant girl, very much. But God had smothered that love and the question was whether he would ever get over his blonde flame, whose twin sister had fouled everything

GOSPEL OF LOVE

up. In her virgin youth she had appeared as some kind of goddess to him. Hardly a moment went by or she was on his mind. But things had come to an abrupt end and it left a wound in our young evangelist. A very deep wound.

And so it happened that John walked straight into gangland, a place he rather avoided. From afar gang bangers had seen him approach. They knew John a little and his wandering into their turf was a welcome opportunity. They were throwing their respective 'sets of keys' over to each other on both sides of the street. They were dressed down alright, complete with 'locs' and tattoos.

'Earn your bones, Creeper,' said the gang master, inciting Victor, a Hispanic of fifteen, calling him by his moniker. He was about to be tested on the blood-in-and-blood-out code of conduct. Victor stepped out onto the street and positioned himself in front of John. John wanted to circle around him and it was then that the Creeper decided to play around first, instead of earning his grizzly degree without a second of respite. He grabbed John's coat and John turned around and looked the Creeper in the eye. This was his bodily salvation. Because of John's deep soul exercise that afternoon there was something in the way he looked

GOSPEL OF LOVE

that the Creeper had never seen before. Had Victor been hardened like the others, it would only have angered him. Now it was a case of a nervous pupil meeting his master. Victor looked away for a second and saw the guys signaling to him, but he did not understand the sign. He saw the gals watching and knew they would get laid by him if he went ahead. He saw Maria and all of a sudden desire for her body re-awoke the purpose. He punched John in the face, but the punch was brought on halfheartedly. Our young evangelist was stunned. He was totally unprepared. He believed in self-defense, but had never been in circumstances to apply it. This again was to his advantage. He stood there as if he had felt nothing, even though he was hurt, but it did not show. The Creeper was surprised and hesitated for a second. John tried to run away in that moment, but a stick from the bushes tripped him. It was the gang master that had done that. Then John noticed more people; their boots appeared below the undergrowth. He was shocked. It dawned upon him where he was. The Creeper wanted to finish his task and struck his stiletto with great force into John's side, just before the latter had regained himself. But Providence decreed that John had his pocket bible there. The blade slid off the book, tore John's coat and only nicked his skin. Victor was taken by surprise, but

GOSPEL OF LOVE

wanted to redouble his effort. This had given John precious time to regain his composure. With the courage only despair can give he rolled away and ran off. A shot rang out. Bang! The gang master had hit John in the leg. Pain seared through his body and he slumped to the ground the second time. The Creeper grinned. He was going to earn his bones and then he would possess Maria's body. John lay there, hopeless apparently. But not so hopeless as those that have no hope. He prayed: 'Help me, my Lord; help me!' Maria heard that. This made her think of her father, a strict Catholic and who had died from cancer. Her mother had been on the booze ever since. Her instincts got the better of her and she stepped out of the bushes.'

'Let the preacher go, Victor. He is a good man.'

'I have no beef with you,' put in John and he got up with considerable difficulty. The bullet had hit his upper femur and was lodged against the bone there.

'Baby, what is this? I want to earn you,' said Victor.

'Not this way, you won't.' That came very unexpectedly for Victor and not only for him. The gang master stepped forward as well and with him the other members. John whispered a renewed prayer.

'You have eaten more hamburgers than cola and now you turn softie on us.' The leader spit out the words. John had no idea what he meant.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'I know I have given more head than coke, but let this fellow go. He reminds me of my father. If you guys don't let go of him, I will turn nun.' The pimp, alias gang master, alias coke dealer, alias prison frequenter really got miffed this time and hardly saw that John was limping away. The Creeper alerted him.

'Go get the worthless do-gooder, that's an order!'

'Only if you will force Maria to be my babe.'

'No way in hell, Victor,' she said.

'You see. I won't kill for nothing,' said Victor. The gang master got increasingly angry over this development, moreover John was almost around the corner. Cursing he pointed his magnum at our desperate evangelist, and looked down the barrel. In a split second Maria jumped in front. She knew that if she struck the aiming gun away, she would be as good as dead anyway.

'Bang!' The second shot rang out. The bullet hit Maria in the chest, but John never saw it. He kept limping, blood streaming down his leg.

'You can thank your lucky stars that the bone in your upper left femur wasn't shattered by the bullet, Mr. MacNutt. Your muscles must have been made out of steel,' the doctor said, while John lay comfortably in the hospital bed. 'We won't keep you

GOSPEL OF LOVE

long here. In a day or two you should be able to return home.'

'O.K., doctor.' John thanked God that he had escaped with his life, for the second time in ten years. The doctor gave some instructions to the nurse and left. He had a room all for himself, because he carried excellent insurance. He laid his head back on the pillow.

'I am going to give you an injection against tetanus now, Mr. MacNutt. It will only be a little sting.'

'Don't sting me in the wound,' making an effort to joke.

'We are no sadists,' quipped the nurse back.

John lifted his head to observe what the nurse was doing. She prepared the syringe and stuck it in his largest muscle, the buttock. Just then John heard somebody walk by in the hallway. Instinctively he looked through the doorway. His blood practically froze in his veins. He saw Victor pass by, who did not notice him. The nurse saw the reaction and was surprised.

'O, God, not again.'

'What's the matter, Mr. MacNutt?'

'The boy that tried to kill me this afternoon just walked by. They must still be trying to kill me. Apparently they want to prevent me to testify.' John was really agitated this time. The nurse finished her

GOSPEL OF LOVE

job and went into the hallway. A few minutes later she returned.

'I see nobody, Mr. MacNutt and it is unlikely that they would try to kill you here. You must be in shock.'

'I beseech you to believe me and I am NOT in shock. He wore a leather jacket with a skull on the back.'

'Alright, to calm you down I will check this out.'

'In the meantime lock the door.'

'That's not allowed. I'll call security and have them look into it.' The nurse left and closed the door. John went out of bed, totally against the rules of health and positioned himself so he could not be seen immediately upon opening the door. He armed himself with the bedpan. A few minutes lapsed and it seemed like an eternity to John. His legs were trembling like crazy. Then he heard voices and recognized the nurse. The other voice was male, but not the Creeper's. At the moment that the door opened John fell to the floor for sheer exhaustion. The bedpan clattered to the floor as well. The nurse rushed to his aid.'

'What are you doing, o my! Wasn't the bedpan under the bed? Anyway you are not supposed to move your leg, Mr. MacNutt.' After the commotion subsided the security guard entered.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Mr. MacNutt, I am Wayne Kaiser and have already alerted the police. They sent two patrol cars as soon as I told them you recognized a gang member. Apparently you are referring to the teenager that came in fifteen minutes ago or so. He is making inquiries about a girl that was seriously wounded around the same time as yourself.' John looked away and was still trembling all over.

John was woken up after two hours by sounds from afar. When he opened his eyes he saw two policemen entering the room. That was comforting.

'Mr. MacNutt,' they said after exchanging the formalities, 'we have apprehended the suspect and transferred him to the precinct for questioning. We would like to get your statement, if you feel up to it. It is important.'

'I'll be glad to tell you everything,' answered John.

'Good, let's begin with what you were doing in gangland.'

John explained everything in detail. The two hours of sleep had wrought wonders and he proved totally up to giving a coherent account of the events. One of the officers took notes of everything and after three quarters of an hour they left, wishing him luck.'

'Luck favors the prepared!' was John able to joke. The officers left with a smile.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

The next day John developed infection in his bullet wound and he was ordered not to leave the bed. The bedpan was put within reach. That afternoon he was allowed to have visitors. And what do you know; the one after the other came in. First of all Jocelyn, one of the elder students that attended his Bible studies. She brought flowers and had some good news. A woman named Marion had become interested and wanted to attend as soon as he resumed his Wednesday evening classes.

'You are going to continue, aren't you, John?'

'Most certainly. If this infection is not too bad, I should be able to resume the studies within a week.'

'Horrible, what they did to you!' observed Jocelyn, pressing his arm as a sign of affection.

Next came Chuck Ward, a local painter, whose wife was paralyzed from the waist. He brought a little basket with fruit and sundries. Then Arthur and Charlie arrived and the first two visitors left again. The visiting hour passed too quickly for everything that could be discussed.

The nurse came in with antibiotics and John inquired after Maria, who he understood was in intensive care. 'Detective Boothe will inform you and

GOSPEL OF LOVE

ask you some more questions. He should be here any minute,' she answered.

Just then somebody knocked on the door. The nurse answered and it was indeed the detective. John was filled in and shuddered. The gang master had been killed, presumably by Victor. He had been a very notorious criminal and wanted for skipping bail and an entire list of crimes, from pimping to trafficking. The Creeper was in jail, but probably not for long, since no proof could be laid against him for murder. There were no witnesses and the other gang members were not known to the police. The Creeper was resisting all co-operation and it depended on John whether he would be prosecuted. Against the will of the detective John decided not to press charges, which took him by total surprise.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

CHAPTER III

MISERERE MEI, DOMINE!

John had been visiting the hospital the last few weeks to see Maria through her ordeal. He had heard her version of the story firsthand and he thanked her for saving his life, risking her own. Hers was a story of corruption, manipulating and being manipulated even though she was only fifteen years old. He discovered that she was in fact an intelligent girl and to his great satisfaction she accepted the gospel after he had explained it to her, witnessing about Christ's Work on the cross. He was surprised how beautiful she was in fact, lying there all in white in the hospital bed and he was embarrassed that he experienced desire for her, a mixture of sexual longing, genuine

GOSPEL OF LOVE

concern and curious intrigue. It frightened him a little, but gradually the feeling grew more mature as they talked every afternoon. There was ample opportunity, for he was the only one to look after her.

'What am I to do, John, after they let me out of here? I have no family to turn to.'

'I am sure back home there will be somebody in the congregation that is willing to take you in. You can finish highschool and learn about Christ, your Savior.' She smiled happily and for a second John noticed something of a teenage girl in her expression, even though she had been robbed too early of her puberty.

'We're glad to have you back, John,' said Arthur. 'Is that infection taken care of by now?'

'Yes. I am almost off the antibiotics. It appears that I have no trauma left over from this harassing experience.'

'A good thing too. We need you, John.' nodded John in response.

'What I have been meaning to ask you, but haven't come around to yet is, how do you support yourself?'

'The congregation in Memphis supports me and my parents help me out as well. Moreover, my granddad donated a few thousand dollars in a fund, when I was born. It is a small fortune now after twenty-three years.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Phew!' whistled Arthur. 'I wish that had happened to me. I would have started my own business and would try to parlay it into an even greater fortune.'

'We can't take anything with us, when we go, Arthur.'

'I know that, but all the same, I would like to run my own shop.' After a short silence he continued. 'I have been reading much in the Bible since I gave my heart to God. Your studies have been a great help. You explain things with such lucidity. Actually you are something of a depth psychologist as well, you know. The way you relate human responsibility to the conscience, particularly pointing out that excesses are evidence of our corruption. That has been the main argument that convinced me to become a Christian. For we are not any better than soldiers that go wild. It shows what is below the surface.'

'Right on, Arthur. I'm glad you picked up on that and that it served as an occasion for belief.'

'You ply your trade well, John.'

'It is not a trade, but a calling and in fact a universal Christian responsibility.'

'You know, the feeling had been creeping up on me as I listened on during your studies, that ever since my adulthood I had been sitting on some kind of throne, from which I looked down upon this world. As a child this wasn't so and in certain moments of

GOSPEL OF LOVE

wonderment, gazing at the stars or a beautiful landscape, it wasn't so either. But my throne crumbled under me. Thanks God for that. This throne is called vainglorious pride. It is not for nothing that Jesus calls upon us to be like children. It is the only way to enter His kingdom.' responded Arthur, nodding his head excitedly.

'I am also trying to quit blowing. According to Romans thirteen God expects me to obey the government and our government outlaws all mind-expanding drugs. I suppose, if I had lived in Holland, I would have been tempted to continue. But there is also another reason. It is better not to be addicted to anything.'

'Right on; first Corinthians.'

'Does it say so in the Bible, then?'

'Yep, it is better not to be overpowered by anything and not to be a slave to anything. It can be gathered from various texts.'

'I intend to continue smoking, though. The occasional cigarette won't harm me any.'

'It remains to be seen whether you will keep it up. Tobacco is addictive as well, you know.'

'I disagree. Substances are not addictive in themselves. It is ourselves that react addictively to them. The same thing with coffee, or alcohol for that matter.' That made John think it over.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Stepping out of Rushmore Manner the next day John saw somebody that made his heart skip a beat. He stood right in front of Victor. Manning himself he managed to ask:

'Out of jail so soon?'

'Yes, they let me go, when I told everything.' A painful moment fell between the two men. Victor broke it.

'I came here to say I'm sorry,' he said to John's pleasant surprise.

'How come?' And Victor told him how he had come to his senses during his temporary stretch in jail. He finally had relented and had listened to his mother's pleas, so much that now he went to church with her, occasionally. It proved that not Victor, but a rival gang member had killed the gang leader. He had seen it as an opportunity to take the lead. Also the fact that John did not press charges had made him think and actually had made him ashamed of himself. He was going back to high school and John promised to assist him in making up for lost time.

Walking back together to his own neighborhood, so as to introduce John to his Spanish speaking family--for John wanted to brush up on his Spanish and talk to fellow Christians at the same time--Victor saw some girls.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Are you going to stay away from groovy chicks now?' asked John, trying his slang out, 'Or do you call them foxy babes here?'

'Not that either. You just call them babes, or sexy babies. Man, you're from the stone age! Anyway those girls are the Ammies or Amazones; they beat me up this morning, for they had heard that I have gone straight.'

'Are you gonna, though?'

'Gonna what?'

'Straighten out your sex life as well?'

'Sure. By the way, they call themselves also holy devils and brave bitches; ain't that somethin?'

'That's an oxymoron.'

'A what?'

'A contradiction in terms, like true lies, or honest theft.'

'Whatever.'

It was next Wednesday evening and our evangelist, cum Bible teacher, was preparing for the study of that evening. The doorbell rang. It was Marion dressed way too sexy again, but John hesitated to say anything of it, out of fear he would lose her altogether like some others, for which he tended to blame himself.

'Hi Marion!'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Hi John!' Marion went into the living room. The bell rang again and this time it was Chuck. After a while the usual group were present and John was happy that this time Charlie took part as well. John looked the little group over and all of a sudden felt a powerful feeling of both contentment and purpose. In the corner sat Charlie, the irregular and promising intellectual. On the chesterfield in front of the window sat Marion, Chuck and Arthur. The latter was really very serious at getting to know the Bible. He used up all his spare-time to read both the Bible and any kind of commentary. John was glad that Arthur hang on to his job this time, as a sales clerk in a stereo shop.

'This evening I would like to ad-lib it; I haven't really prepared for tonight, but hope to make something of it,' started John. 'First of all I would like to ask Arthur to tell us why he now turned his life over to God and what prevented him from doing that before. My friends, this is of the greatest importance. Christianity has been called the sunlight that makes a dirty lake stink more and that makes a pure lake shine in brightness, all the more. God warns us in his Word that everybody has to die and after that there is the judgement or evaluation. It is not so as in the Egyptian book of the dead that God will weigh our actions in a pair of scales and that if the bad outweighs the good everything is lost, or saved if it is

GOSPEL OF LOVE

the other way around. No, in that case the murderer who was nailed with Christ on a cross would have been lost forever. The point of the gospel is that we cannot save ourselves. The smallest sin and sins are spiritual mistakes--smallest in our eyes--is enough to make us lose eternity once and for all. Not even angels can save themselves. For demons, who are fallen angels, are lost. And the elected, or chosen angels, also live by God's grace. Therefore an angel could never have died for us to save us as Jehovah's witnesses believe, for they say that Christ was Michael the archangel. Angels are creatures living by God's power and their strength is altogether insufficient to atone for us, that is to die for us and in our place and make us one with God. Therefore it is called at-one-ment. Their holiness, if they are holy at all, is just sufficient for themselves. No, God had to send His own Son to do the job. But I am running ahead. Arthur, would you like to tell us why you now want to do God's will and not before? Maybe your witness can convince others, not to say convict.'

At this all eyes turned towards Arthur, who blushed a little, as he was not accustomed to address people in public. After some hesitation he began.

'Eh, well, like, it is so really. I have heard the gospel many times before, but never so clearly as

GOSPEL OF LOVE

John tells us. Or if that is not the case then it is because it finally sank in.' And he fell silent.

'But why then did it now sink in,' asked Chuck.

'Because, well, maybe it was the time for it. I felt dirty and sinful and felt that God could clean my conscience and help me to live in a way that is not only proper but wise.' Most of them nodded, but Marion did not budge.

'Thank you, Arthur,' continued John. 'Arthur confided to me that my bit of depth psychology, to use a bookish word, also convinced him of the truth of the gospel. I am not a psycho-analyst, but through the Bible I have come to the understanding that civilization is just a veneer, as any well thinking person can come to realize. But to see for yourself that under certain circumstances practically anybody can turn wild and murderous and understand that this is because we are guilty sinners, are two very different things. I hope and pray that everybody in this room will come to understand that no matter how high and developed human achievement may seem, it is so much rubbish when it comes to standing before God in all His holiness. Again, anybody can conclude that we have put man on the moon, but we stand at a loss when it comes to crime, war and all kinds of acts of selfishness.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

A short silence fell and John looked through the window, sending up an ejaculatory prayer that the message may sink in. Then he went on for some time preaching the gospel. After forty-five minutes he said:

'But it is time for coffee now. Jocelyn, can you do your thing, the percolator should be ready by now?' They all drank coffee and ate tidbits.

'Let's now start the question session,' he said, after they had finished and talked to each other. Chuck was first.

'The other day I met a guy at work, a colleague, and after talking about God to him he said that he hadn't asked to be born. Therefore he did not feel responsible towards God. What would you have replied?' John reflected for a few moments and then said:

'I would have asked him what he thought a judge would say to somebody that had robbed a bank and that used that argument to defend his behavior. Just as we are responsible to our fellow humans, so we will be held responsible for our attitude towards God.'

'Good point,' said Chuck, 'but I'm afraid he would say that that is a far different thing.'

'Different alright, but of a greater magnitude and therefore harder to understand for our callow and seared consciences.'

'What is your view on marriage?' asked Charlie.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'What do you mean?'

'Do you agree a man and woman are married as soon as they have performed the marriage act?'

'No, that is a misconception. If that were true, then prostitutes would have been married and divorced as many times as they have done it. Moreover many marriages would have been ended because of that. The marriage act is not called for nothing the consummation of the marriage, the latter consisting in the public celebration, including witnesses. Any kind of sex outside of marriage, probably with the exception of onanism, is called fornication in the Bible.'

'Excuse me, what is onanism?' asked Jocelyn.

'Ipsation, or masturbation with a contemporary term,' replied an obviously embarrassed John.

'Are you telling me that this is wrong? You cannot come with such an argument in this day and age!' protested Charlie.

'Well, I think it is up to the individual conscience to decide about this. I am not going to preach on this. Perhaps Charlie is right that that is out of place nowadays. Moreover, the Bible does not say anything about it. The story of Onan has in fact nothing to do with it.'

'The other day you said that one day there will be a new earth and in fact a new heaven. I have a

GOSPEL OF LOVE

question about that,' said Marion for the first time opening her mouth. 'If I'm right, then the Jehovah witnesses think that on the new earth there will be children born as well and the Mormons believe that in fact all over the universe there will be new worlds populated with budding civilizations. What is your view on this?'

'I do not agree with that. Christ says that we will be as the angels, not marrying and not being given into marriage. So obviously there won't be any children born then.'

'O what a pity!' said Marion and the others chuckled at that. The question and answer session went on for some time yet and at ten o'clock John called it quits. They left the one after the other, except Charlie remained.

'John, do you want to come fishing with me this weekend out in the country? I am allowed to borrow my aunt's car and we could have a real good time out in the open.'

'I would like to, but can't this weekend. Moreover I wouldn't want to use my Sundays for sports.'

'What about next week? We could leave on Friday and return Saturday evening.'

'Seems fine to me.'

'O.K., let's call it a plan.' And he went out.

'There's one problem.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'What's that?' asked Charlie, turning around.

'I never learned how to fish,' said John sheepishly.

'That's no problem. I'll teach you how to angle. The main thing is that we're having fun doing it.'

'Where do you intend to go?'

'North.'

'What's there?'

'Actually about a hundred miles North-East. You'll see it. I know there some beautiful hills with sparkling clear brooks,' he said, gesticulating enthusiastically.

'Alright.'

'Will do, then. See-ya!' and he raised his hand, even though he had already turned to look the other way.

The intervening days went by fast, John doing his usual things, a routine of knocking on doors and witnessing, giving Bible studies and studying seriously himself. He looked forward to the trip with Charlie, for he knew that he was a budding intellectual and he considered himself also a bit of a book worm. He had read extensively himself, but Charlie appeared just as much an erudite. Prayerfully he thought of a way to reach Charlie's heart. It was in such a mood that he found himself seated next to Charlie in the jeep. The weather was exceptionally bright. The sky was soft blue and the occasional white cloud drifted along.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Birds enlivened the scenery. The two talked about all kinds of things and John sought an opening to witness to Charlie. The distance was covered quickly as they were discussing things ranging as widely as eugenics, psychology, string physics, the balance between matter and antimatter and the cessation of natural laws at magnetic hills and in black holes. They even discussed the fact that often science fiction precedes normal science such as in the idea of space and time worm holes. The jeep slowly climbed quite a high hill. John enjoyed the look of an escarpment with a stand of trees, above which rose a gigantic scar. He marveled at the natural variety, varying from lichen and undergrowth to tall trees, chipmunks scurrying up trees and sparrows flying around.

'There is our fishing spot!' observed Charlie enthusiastically, pointing to a cascading brook and leaving the road, he parked in a natural clearing. They were both glad to be out of the concrete and asphalt of the City for a change. Their eyes exuded a certain energy. They made their way to the stream through tall grass and sat down on their respective fishing stools, taking in the welcome sight of ever streaming water.

'Panta rhei!' quipped Charlie.

'Christ is the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow!' John answered. After a short period of

GOSPEL OF LOVE

silence Charlie got up and showed John how to handle the reel, throw a line and watch the float. They were busy some time fishing, without catching anything.

'You know what the opposite of murder is?' asked John after some time.

'You mean love?' said Charlie.

'Yes, that is the opposite towards the good. But what I meant is the other extreme, the opposite on the other side of the true happy medium.'

'I don't really catch your drift,' answered Charlie.

'I mean suicide.'

'That makes sense,' Charlie observed. 'And healthy love for oneself and for one's fellow man is then the true golden mean according to this theory?'

'Yes, you are a quick learner.'

'What is the opposite of genocide then, which is the worst form of murder.'

'Well, of course mass suicide.'

'Yes, naturally. And the truth in between would be healthy intercommunal relations.'

'Yep. You know, Charlie, I have discovered for myself that not only in nature there is a question of delicate balance, but also in any kind of human behavior, from emotional issues to ethics and faith. Just as one's thyroid gland can either be too slow or too fast, developing either hypothyroidism or

GOSPEL OF LOVE

hyperthyroidism--which makes one too fat or too thin--so one's emotions can be out of wack. One can be a workaholic or a lazy bastard, whereas one should be simply diligent, observing the right balance between leisure and work; in both of which there is honor by the way. The dishonor consists herein that life is full of drudgery, which is Adam's punishment for transgression and which we have inherited from him. And it becomes an honor again to accept that and deal with it. Because we do not accept the common curse, we become frustrated and take it out on each other through all kinds of psychological games. One can be an adulterer or attempt to be a saint, developing some kind of Victorian or puritan attitude, whereas one should be simply chaste.'

'My, John, you should become a psychologist or counselor.'

'One can be either reckless or too cautious, actually fearing too much, whereas one should simply be courageous, discretion still being the better part of valor,' John continued. 'People can be either like the prodigal son in wasting their money or they are too stingy and greedy, whereas we should maintain the right balance of both saving and liberality. We can be too much like gluttons or too ascetic, whereas we should simply keep the right balance of culinary pleasure and abstinence. We can be too much

GOSPEL OF LOVE

burdened by self-pity or too much overcome by vainglorious pride, whereas we should simply be humble and sober. One can be too ignorant or too pedantic, whereas we should strive for wisdom and effectual knowledge.' And here John paused.

'My goodness, John, you have really thought this through!' said Charlie.

'I have only scraped the surface, my friend, just begun to dig for hidden treasures of wisdom and true knowledge. Now in some wise people these things are realized more or less subconsciously, but we all fail where it comes down to the true happy medium. In most cases we opt for an easy way out and we choose a compromise either on the left or right side between the truth--which is experienced as too hard or too soft--and the respective extremes.'

'You seem to have a fish interested in your bait, John, interrupted Charlie. 'Strike, man, strike!' And pulling up, John, caught a fish, not at all knowing what kind it was. Charlie came over and released it from the hook and let John return it to its natural environment.

'To come back to where we started,' continued John, 'the lefthanded compromise between love and hatred, or murder, is indifference.'

'That would make the right-handed compromise obsequiousness, or exaggerated regard for one's

GOSPEL OF LOVE

fellow man and the right-handed extreme outright idolization, isn't it?'

'Didn't I say you are a quick learner! I am really surprised, Charlie, it took me years to come to realize these things and you catch on like it were A. B. C.'

'I must have a good teacher,' responded Charlie.

'Now comes the real catch, the reason I went through this lengthy introduction. But first I would like to know where you stand in your mind as to God. You do not seem to be an atheist and certainly not a polytheist. But perhaps you might be a deist or pantheist, without realizing it?'

'No, my aunt is a pantheist, with her New Age notions. I read a book that belonged to my dad that explained the monotheistic position clearly. God is transcendent above creation, yet omnipresent in His embrace of it. The deist might confirm this as well, but would say that we are more or less on our own, whereas God in His concern for us has true Love, with a capital 'L' for us.'

'You see, this is also why I went on this trip with you. I somehow sensed that it would be worth my while!' said John enthusiastically. Charlie smiled a content little smile.

'But to continue. The idea of a happy medium holds here as well. The atheist, absolutizing the reality of matter, is the left-handed extreme and the

GOSPEL OF LOVE

polytheist, absolutizing the powers of the spirit, is the right-handed extreme.'

'Let me see,' interrupted Charlie, 'that would make the pantheistic notion of God's oneness with nature the right-handed compromise and the deistic belief that God thrones in cold-hearted silence above us, the left-handed compromise.'

'Exactly! I love it!' exclaimed John and Charlie grinned. 'But are you conscious of the fact that deism is too rationalistic and pantheism too mystical, the one overly accentuating the mind and the other the feelings of the soul?'

'Now you mention it, yes, something dawns upon me. Voltaire was a deist that exaggerated the power of reason and my aunt attaches too much worth to mystical feelings about the universe. What's your point?'

'My point is that the Bible, the Book of books, contains lessons that teach us the right balance, the proper and wise regard for matter and body, mind and thinking, soul and emotion and spirit and faith.'

'Could well be, John,' answered Charlie. 'Since there is one God,' he continued, 'there must be one right way to interpret the Bible. After all it is His Book, but we have made a mess of it.'

'We certainly have. But now something personal. You have a great mind and are very knowledgeable.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

But I am afraid I have to tell you that you are doing this by your own strength, without your heart being in a dependent relation with your Creator.'

'By the strength He gave me, John.'

'Yes, but I do not see or hear from you that you have been reconciled with your Maker through finding forgiveness in Christ. That would make you independent from God and would mean that you are taking advantage of what He gave you for personal satisfaction only.' This made Charlie silent for some time. After a while he replied:

'We'll talk about that, John, we will see yet. I am not going to be impressed by the first evangelist that comes along. Let's set up camp for the night now and have something to eat to strengthen the inner man, for man cannot live by religion alone.'

They set the tent in the clearing and Charlie dug a little gutter around it, for he, as he admitted himself, was paranoid of rain. John went to gather some leaves, twigs and sticks for the campfire. It did not take long or he returned with his arms full. He put some stones into a small circle and set the tripod above it. He laid the primitive fuel under the pot, lit a fire and started preparing the stew. Charlie waited patiently for the food to be ready. As they were eating, Charlie talked anglers' wisdom.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Tomorrow I'll teach you hand fishing. The stream is too wild for a float. That's why I didn't catch anything, I think.'

'Why then did I?' asked John.

'Obviously your float was in the little bent, where the water was quieter.'

'I see.'

'I'll teach you to fish upstream. The reason for upstream fishing is that the fish do not see you. Maybe we will catch the occasional brown trout with some wet-fly fishing.'

'Really, to be honest,' said John, 'I am rather a fisher of men.' This made Charlie think for a few seconds.

'Perhaps you can learn from real fishing, John. People cannot be won just like that. An evangelist has to learn to fish. I could teach you spinning, life baiting and worming. There is much to learn. Different methods for different fish. There is a wide variety of baits that can be used, small frogs, bread, maggots, caterpillars, wasp grubs, you name it. Most of all you need patience. Honestly, I am surprised that you have won over a man like Arthur, much like an eternal doubter. Or Maria for that matter.'

'They were obviously prepared already by the Holy Spirit, Who had worked on their consciences.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'You know, John. I myself am very much attracted to Christianity, but the great difficulty I have is why God took away both my parents in a car crash of all things.'

'Who says He did. Maybe it was the devil,' replied John.

'But God allowed it. And I became an orphan at ten.'

'It is and always will be hard, yes. I have no idea why God in His infinite wisdom permitted this. I can only try to be sympathetic.' And the two men kept quiet for some time. They listened to the sounds around them. A beautiful sunset promised good weather for the next day. After eating the stew and drinking coffee Charlie showed John the surrounding terrain. In the evening they enjoyed the campfire and Charlie played his mouth organ. The following day they hand fished upstream and Charlie smoked little cigars for a change. In the early evening they returned to L.A.

It was next Wednesday and John was delivering his little speech. There were a few more people present, but his living room was not filled to capacity yet. Maria was there as well, enthusiastic about the new direction her life had taken and glad that John

GOSPEL OF LOVE

had found a childless Christian couple that took her in temporarily.

'This evening I would like to bring to your attention the fact that things in nature are in perfect balance and harmony. For instance if a person's body does not produce enough sugar, that person develops hypoglycemia. Excuse the technical term. And if a person has too much sugar, he or she is troubled by diabetes. Now comes my point. The same thing holds in the immaterial realm of the spirit and the soul and also in matters of thinking. I would like to point out to you this evening a healthy, balanced view about sexuality.' And scraping his throat, he continued. 'In the middle ages some people held the opinion that sex is evil. They reasoned that the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden had been sexual intercourse. To this day priests in the Roman catholic church are not allowed to marry, which causes a lot of problems. Naturally this holds also for monks and nuns. They do not admit that this false ideal is unnatural and extreme in fact. On the other side there are people that go all out in their sexuality. Swinging, swapping, group sex and incest; we have all heard about those things. This is just as unhealthy and also causes all kinds of psychological problems. What I would like to make clear to you is that true virtue steers clear from these extremes and in fact holds the exact middle

GOSPEL OF LOVE

ground. Most of us have difficulty practicing virtue and it is indeed a gift from the Holy Spirit. If we try to lead virtuous lives in our own strength rather than in dependence on God, we will unavoidably fall by the wayside anywhere between true virtue and any of the extremes on either side. The truth will either sound too harsh for us or too soft. And so some Christians think that birth control is wicked or even that sex is only for procreation with a difficult word, for the birth of children only. So there are still cultures that practice female circumcision, some going as far as removing the labia minora and majora, with all the problems associated with that. You know that I am unmarried, but that does not mean that I do not understand the mind of God in these things. Such people are also against sexual experimentation and I surmise that they only practice the missionary position and outside of the bedroom they are as dead as dried beanstalks.' This caused some giggling and chuckling in his little audience and John smiled sheepishly. 'These people fall between virtue and aversion. They would do well to follow Isaac's example, who was seen 'dallying' with his wife by the Phillistine king. On the other wayside there are people that break away from virtue and they fall between perversion and virtue. They practice premarital sex and overstep sexual limits within

GOSPEL OF LOVE

marriage as well. The Apostle Paul said that we must not possess our wives as the heathen do. He must refer to anal sex and perhaps fellatio and cunnilingus.' This time his audience looked serious and some even expressionless and our clever evangelist knew all too well what was behind those dead-pan faces.

Next it was time for coffee and donuts and they talked to each other about what was appropriate and truly virtuous without becoming either perverted or averted. During the question and answer session they asked John many things, to all of which he did not have an answer, nor the personal experience and he said that it was inappropriate for him as an unmarried man to go into all details and he referred them to sound literature.

'I would like to hear your views on marriage and divorce,' said Chuck.

'We can go into that next time around. It is rather on the late side now,' answered John. Then Arthur put a query to him that made all curious.

'John, one of the other times you said that no children would be born on the new earth and that that was because of the fact that the Lord said that we will be like the angels without marriage.'

'Yes, what about it?'

'Well, I cannot imagine that God will do away with children.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Indeed, a perfect world without children can't be imagined!' fell in Marion.

'I cannot see it differently,' observed John. 'If Christ says that there will be no marriage, I can't imagine any children being born in heaven.'

'Perhaps not in heaven, but on the new earth,' said Arthur.

'That is speculation,' replied John.

'It seems to me that perhaps you are forced by prudish anguish and fear of the unknown to conclude this,' answered Arthur, this time getting over his fear of speaking in a group.

'The Bible restricts sex to marriage, my friend. I cannot imagine a world where we are free to break God's rules,' said John.

'Who says laws will be broken? Before Noah's flood God allowed brothers and sisters to marry. But in the Mosaic law the divine legislator restricted this, probably for biological reasons. And maybe there will be such a thing as an angelic marriage, not necessarily platonic,' observed Arthur.

'Again speculation. Moreover the Mosaic law was not just biological, it anticipated the truth of Christ and the Church. Brothers and sisters and uncles and nieces are too close to carry out this spiritual meaning. And there must be sociological and psychological reasons as well.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'That might all be true, but the fact remains that the Lawgiver is free to change the law. It seems to me most Christians are too sober when it comes to thinking about heaven. Who says there will not be many things going on that we are involved in also today, such as technology, education and so on. Yes, who says that we will only play harps and sing spiritual songs?' replied a this time emotional Arthur.

'Or sickness, going to the bathroom and paying for things with money?' answered a little bit frustrated John and Marion giggled.

'I can answer to that!' said Arthur.

'It is getting too late, Arthur and these things are just not important. We have to wait and see,' responded John.

'But they are important! The way one expects heaven to be influences if not determines one's way one lives now,' continued an enthusiastic Arthur.

'We'll talk about it in private some time. Now I must allow the visitors to go home.' And with that John closed the evening. Arthur wanted to stay to talk it over, but John made it clear that he was tired and wanted to retire to bed early.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

CHAPTER IV

CONFRONTATION

'God's Love is so great, Maria,' said John while he was sitting with Maria in the departure hall, waiting for a plane to take her to Memphis. Her temporary stay with the Christian couple had ended and now his own parents were going to take care of her for an undetermined time.

'I know; I'm experiencing that already through Christians like yourself. If all the world was made up by people like you, most of our problems would be literally gone out of this world,' said an excited Maria.

'O that is nothing!' said John with a chopping movement of his hand. 'What the Church, which is supposed to be the pillar and stanchion of the truth, can and should do now, is nothing in comparison with what God will give us in the end. In Romans eight it is

GOSPEL OF LOVE

written that "If God has not spared His own Son, but has given Him over for us all, how will He not give us graciously with Him all things!" And elsewhere we are called inheritors of God and co-inheritors with Christ. Never forget, Maria, that God in the end will not hold back anything we may desire. Now often He cannot give us what we want, because He has to purify us through trials and setbacks, but when we are with Him then His work on our personalities is finished. Now often we pray trying to use God as some kind of Saint Nick to get things done for our own egos and that He cannot honor. But even now it is true that if we would really delight in His Person, He would give us what we wanted, for we would ask for things that are in agreement with His holiness.'

'My, you are really a wise preacher, John! I'm sure I could listen to you for hours on end!'

'And sooner or later you would be disappointed. Never bind yourself to one so-called great spiritual leader. Always test them in independence by means of the Bible as your own source of inspiration. God tells us not to build our confidence on princes and why? Because He wants to be our Confidence directly Himself, not through intermediaries. A really great leader educates people to make them independent of himself, not to bind them to his own little, miserable ego. According to true Christian

GOSPEL OF LOVE

principles it is unnatural for one man or woman to be the hub and center of a Christian community. Such a practice is in fact in direct competition with the fact that Christ is the Head of the Church and that He wants to act through all of us under direct leadership of the Holy Spirit. Of course that does not mean that we must all go it alone. We also need each other and are given to each other. Here again there must be a delicate balance of individual freedom and collective team spirit. I read somewhere that organizations in the Church are from the devil, because they are unnatural growths in what is supposed to be a divine organism inspired by God Himself. If we try to accomplish something by artificial means we may seem to reach a great length, but God is only in it as far as it is in link with the natural organism, the invisible Church, the Body of Christ. Organizations tend to be artificial and as such they stifle the natural Work of the Holy Spirit.'

'That all reminds me of the greatest attempt to organize, the Catholic church. I never told you this, John. But I left that church at the age of thirteen, because the local priest had made me drunk and then he robbed me of my virginity. I tried to tell my parents and others, but they did not believe me. I ran into a wall of dogmatism. I was that hysterical girl that tried to blame someone else for her problems. And when I

GOSPEL OF LOVE

joined the gang that you found me in they thought that their convictions were only confirmed.'

'That just goes to show that celibacy is one of the great evils of the Roman church. In fact, despite of all its false holiness and misguided idealism celibacy is as sick as all kinds of dirty sex on the other end and indeed it leads to those excesses. God grants true celibacy only to a few. To force it on people is a grand stupidity.'

'And I have become the victim of its cruel and criminal results,' said Maria and she picked a tear away. 'But thanks to God I've run into you.'

'Flight two seventeen now boarding!' it was announced over the intercom and John and Maria said their goodbyes.

'Do write me, John! I'm not much of a writer myself, but I promise I'll keep in touch.'

'Will do. Hasta la vista!'

'Hasta la vista!' and they shook hands. John waved after her as she disappeared in the crowd and he went back, all of a sudden sensing a form of loneliness as he headed back towards his apartment.

It was next Saturday evening and Arthur had invited John over for a meal at his apartment. At first John had been a little wary, but to his surprise Arthur focused the conversation on the difference between

GOSPEL OF LOVE

law and grace. He obviously had prepared himself and had read extensively on the subject.

'You know, John,' said Arthur sipping from his mug with coffee, 'what I do not understand is what a Christian is to do with the Law of the Old Testament. On the one hand I realize that Christ for me is Grace and Truth, but I know also that the Law is perfect. In fact it goes as high as saying that one must love God with all one's heart, soul and might and secondly, but equal to the first, one's fellow man as oneself, thus showing that interpersonal love is a direct picture of one's love for God.'

'Yes. So what?'

'Well, if the law is perfect, why then was Paul so disappointed that the Galatians tried to keep it?'

'Because for us Christ is to live and to die gain. Christ fulfilled the Law for us. If we try to keep the Law out of thankfulness, or even as a proof of conversion, or even still as the Catholics, to secure our salvation, then we approach life from a negative point of view.'

'But how can something so perfect be negative? We cannot just live like sinners and say Christ saved us anyway!'

'Indeed not! But the letter killeth, the Spirit quickeneth. That is to say, the Law shows that you cannot do God's righteous demands, but the Holy

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Spirit can give you true life. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, or perhaps usefulness, or moral integrity, goodness, faith, mildness, or meekness, self-control. Notice that it says fruit, not fruits as something that is to be gathered piecemeal. If you try to attain this through the Law you will undoubtedly fail as you will be attempting to do it in your own strength. That is why Paul exclaims in Romans seven something like "Who will save me the wretched sinner from this body of death?" And in chapter eight he describes a man that has learned to live by the Holy Spirit. The Law was meant as some kind of taskmaster to show people that they need God directly to live a holy life. David said "Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered up!" He and countless other pious Jews learned that one would practically have to offer up animals continuously if one were to keep the Law perfectly. It was one of the great sins and selfdelusions of the Pharisees that they believed that they were righteous and safe in God's eyes through their law keeping. They thought that they had attained and were maintaining full righteousness and that this revolutionary Jesus had to be removed, because He was a threat to their very existence. But on points of the Law Christ could not be convicted of one single transgression. And indeed

GOSPEL OF LOVE

even in thoughts He was and is holy, now seated at God's right hand.'

'So Christ is to be our Law then?' asked Arthur.

'Not just our Law, also our Freedom, our very Life. If we remain in Him we cannot go wrong. But if we fall back on ourselves, we will invariably go wrong.'

'Do you think we can reach perfection, a state of complete sinlessness and holiness, John?'

'No, we cannot.'

'Why then does Jesus say "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect?" '

'Well, He cannot possibly say that we must only be half perfect, or for seventy percent only, can He? We must strive for holiness, not through keeping the Law, but by being led by the Spirit. We will be perfect in heaven only and holy like Christ, through Whom we are in fact born again.'

'That reminds me,' said Arthur. 'I am sorry that I elicited such a cynical reaction from you the other day. But I must say that I detected a little bit of Freudian regression in you when you implied that in heaven we will not have to go to the bathroom. Freud would say that you never got over your toilet training!'

'In heaven we won't need food like here on earth. Here we die if it is withheld from us.'

'But that does not mean we will not enjoy a wide variety of it.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'The heavenly kingdom does not exist in eating and drinking it says,' answered John patiently.

'But that does not mean we won't do those things. In fact Christ says that He will drink wine again when He enters His kingdom and in the Old Testament it says that wine gladdens the heart of God and man. So apparently even God drinks alcohol!'

'Well, I wouldn't know about that. I never saw God drinking a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon!' said John quipping. 'But on the other hand I am not one of those that say that Christ turned the water into grape juice. For it says that they drank till they were merry, or at least that that was the custom and Christ gave the good stuff when they were already halfway. Of course it also says that we must not be filled with wine, but rather with the Holy Spirit; but indeed that does not mean that alcohol is evil as some say that even the process of fermentation is a result of the Fall of Adam and Eve and that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were grapes.'

'You see what I mean, John? What one expects heaven to be influences one's way one wants to live now,' said Arthur trying to drive his point of view home. 'In the early middle ages Athanasius broke a lance for monkery, because ascetic behavior was seen as a preparation for eternity.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'But you expect things as mundane as technology and boring school banks! Up there everything is perfect, we won't need improvement in the Father house.'

'Not there, but perhaps in the new universe. And as to boring school banks. The divine teacher, in Whom are all treasures of knowledge and wisdom, He will not be boring for one single second.'

'What about money, will we need that as well on the new earth?' said John, showing visible signs of frustration again.

'No, for Christ clearly calls it the unrighteous mammon. It is unthinkable that in a perfect world God as the bountiful Benefactor will limit people by what they have in the bank. On the other hand our lives will also then partly depend on each individual's input, everybody being different.'

'Well, at least I am glad that you think so much about heaven. But I warn you that you guard yourself in imagining what it will be like. The Bible is virtually silent about it. But you really do have some nice, stuffed animals, Arthur,' said John, bringing the conversation down to an ordinary level.

'Yep. I inherited them from a granddad. He used to go hunting a lot as he was well-to-do. Legend has it that he was blood brothers with an Indian chief

GOSPEL OF LOVE

named Eagle-Eye,' said Arthur, looking at a sea eagle with spread wings.

'My, that sounds intriguing. Isn't it horrible what the white man has done to the Indians? But I suppose one way or another an inferior culture had to give way to a superior one,' said John letting out a sigh.

'But that does not mean that we cannot learn anything from the natives. The theory of the noble-savage has put them into a totally negative light as if they were only ignorant, underdeveloped tribes owned and ruled by the land and the seasons. We can learn from their sense of community for example, since we tend to be too individualistic.'

'I agree with you there, Arthur.' And the two went on for some time, till it was time for John to go home.

A week later John found himself in Charlie's room, having feasted on a good meal prepared by Charlie's aunt. There was a computer positioned in a corner on a desk with a printer on the floor. Bookcases were lining the wall. There were books everywhere. A poster of Einstein was put on the door with the sentence: "A question of mind over matter?" John was glad to see a Bible lying on his bedside table. Charlie and John were discussing various isms and were theorizing how possibly one could bring order in the increasingly complex specialisms of modern

GOSPEL OF LOVE

science. Charlie proposed that one needs a very widely embracing anthropology and philosophical system for that. John was cautious about that.

'It is not for nothing that the Bible warns against philosophy along with an exaggerated interest for the angelic world in the same chapter. The one warning is directed to excesses of the mind, the other to the mystic emotions of the soul. The former tends to turn its attention outside to the world of matter with all its phenomena and forms of life, the latter inside to the hidden world of higher powers. The first is meant to be objective, but is in most cases, if not all, a highhanded attempt to play God over creation. The second is a subjective and falsely humble veneration of the higher spiritual world. Elsewhere the Apostle tells us that we once will judge angels, which is supposed to serve as a pre-emptive measure to guard us now against morbid interest in this world. And again elsewhere we are promised that once we will know as we have been known.' Here John stopped and Charlie had listened attentively.

'Maybe you are right, John. Many Pentecostals make much ado about the spirit world, more or less like my aunt, but from another perspective. And as to philosophy, there have been as many fruitless attempts as there have been philosophers.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'And in both cases the gospel is not really served and Christ is left out of the picture,' added John. 'On the other hand I do realize that we all are philosophical to a lesser or greater extent and that Christians all tend to have some kind of notion about angels. But the Bible warns us not to go off on a fruitless tangent.'

'This reminds me,' said Charlie, 'of our conversation during the fishing trip. I have been pondering a little about it and it relates also to our present discussion. You referred to the external world of philosophy and the internal world of angelology. I suppose you agree that atheism tends to bog down in the impracticality of the freedom versus determinism problem. Their exaggerated belief in the stark reality of matter leaves them with the problem of how we can be free in a world of molecules and atoms. And on the other hand the overly spiritual Hindu, for instance, is bogged down in the problem of how he can be free in a world where matter is an illusion and the magic of the spirit the ultimate reality. Having attended your studies a few times now I keep thinking of Christ's words that the truth will set you free. On the left side there are the perversions and external concerns of mind and matter and on the right side there are the aversions and the false ideals of the soul and the spirit. I am very much intrigued in your idea that the

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Bible teaches the proper balance of all these elements, from which seem to stem the great divisions of philosophies and theologies in history. You have given the practical example of sex and I understand you intend to discuss marriage and divorce next time. But I would like to understand how these things are related to the body, mind, soul and spirit, which you say underlie these perversions and aversions.'

'I'll attempt to do that, Charlie,' said John, nodding his head. 'If you concentrate only on the matter of the body and believe that that is the only given, then you must end at atheistic hedonism. Physical pleasure will seem to you like salvation for the sinner. If, however, you believe that homo sapiens is essentially rational, then you are stuck with any form of rationalism that appeals to you. Your redemption will consist in science, theory and if you are consequential, deism. This is the external world and in many cases it leads to perversion and compromise at the best. On the other hand if one is convinced that one's spirit is the ultimate form of reality, then one will end up in the world of magic, or some form of ritualism that pervades and controls and actually enslaves one. In the very end this leads to polytheism. If, however, one believes that the invisible and immortal soul is one's very essence,

GOSPEL OF LOVE

then one will end up in mysticism and ultimately in pantheism. All kinds of exaggerated emotional notions are supposed to keep the soul pure and unsullied by earthly life. I am afraid health freaks are a vestige of this as well. And in all these cases Satan has his demons to keep us busy, as long as we do not turn to God. The devil seems to have an endless book of tricks to keep us occupied. And this leads me to the subject of Satanism, which is only possible in the Judeo-Christian world. At the very bottom, situated between the left and the right, are the Satanists. One could picture these philosophies and theologies as falling down from the truth as the golden mean, with a semicircular motion on both the left and right side. In the very end one can fall as low as openly believing that the devil is just, that God is the great evil schemer and that good is evil and evil good. That is indeed the worst form of self-deception and slavery. But all these people are kidding themselves that they are free, whereas in reality they are bound hand and foot.' And here John paused.

'While you were talking I realized suddenly that before Christ's incarnation, the gentiles, since Babylon, felt that they were directly dependent on the gods in all aspects of life. But now the pervasive Zeitgeist of atheistic humanism, despite the vague

GOSPEL OF LOVE

notion of postmodernism, makes people to relate everything to themselves,' observed Charlie.

'Yes. Then there were the idiosyncracies of all kinds of cults and now there are the idiosyncracies of all kinds of humanistic movements. That is to say in Western society. In that time the wise Jew kept himself separate from the cults and expected the Messiah; now the wise Christian must keep himself separate from modern day movements and await Christ's return, while at the same time redeeming the time for Christ's sake. Then people served the gods and were actually slaves, now people are the gods themselves and are accordingly enslaved to themselves. But Christians are meant to be called out from all this and serve their heavenly master.'

'Then the gullibility of superstition reigned and now the so-called emancipated, but just as gullible, scepticism blinds the minds of people.'

'Very well put, Charlie! You see, you are not far from the kingdom of God, man.' And so the two kept talking late into the night, John pressing on Charlie's conscience the fact that he was responsible to turn himself over to God.

That night after John had left, Charlie went into the kitchen, took the dog collar and let out his aunt's dog Miffy, a little scoundrel of a dachshund.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'C'mon, Miffy, it is time for your round!'

'Woof, grr!' answered the dog, showing its excitement. Outside Charlie yawned and almost lost his balance as he passed the pool. He opened the gate and went into the street. There were hundreds of stars blazing visibly in the firmament and a sultry breeze blew softly through the tree tops. He could smell the blossoms. It was as if the moon's crescent smiled at him. The silence was like a bath and it enabled him to think clearly about that night's discussion. Miffy stopped him at a lamppost and he watched as the dog sniffed for some time and then left its mark. Walking by the neighbor's house he sees to his surprise that Mrs. Rosenthal is sitting in her bathrobe in the lawn chair, smoking a cigarette. He notices a bottle of wine on the ground, lying there empty. They exchange greetings silently, she with a wave of the left hand and he with a short nod of the head. Miffy starts barking without reason and Charlie responds with a cutting pull. A languid, almost prurient feeling rises up from his loins and he swallows down a sigh. He pretends the dog has to do its business there below the hedge and repeatedly turns his head away to avoid staring at Mrs. Rosenthal. Instinctively she pulls the upper edges of her bathrobe together and looks the other way. With a final leer he continues going down the hill. Gone

GOSPEL OF LOVE

are all magnificent thoughts of a coherent system to organize human knowledge. Gone is the resplendent desire for psychological counseling according to the new insights he had learned from John. Gone is the memory of John's last words: 'The reverence for the Lord is wisdom and to turn away from evil is understanding.' He walks as if in a daze and can hardly wait to return past Mrs. Rosenthal's lawn. After a minute or two he returns, avoiding going around the block according to habit. He increases his pace, hoping to catch a glimpse of those beautiful legs and to be fascinated by his growing desire. Rounding the bushes his heart starts beating faster, for he sees Mrs. Rosenthal leaning over the edge of the gate. She looks brazenly in his direction and waits till he stops in front of her. He tries to have eye contact, but fails to come higher than her bosom, the shadow preventing him from getting a clear view. He can only guess what it would be like to make love to her.

'Charlie, would you be so kind to bring the garbage bin to the street for me, for I have this terrible ache in my back?'

'Sure!' and he follows her into her kitchen like an animal heading straight for the trap.

'Would you like to drink an excellent Whiskey? I have one twelve year old Scotch here.'

'Definitely!'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'I thought you would want to try that,' she answered, still weighing her chances to seduce this student. And to her satisfaction Charlie sits down and forgets all about the garbage. As she reaches for the cupboard her robe falls open but she holds it loosely as she pours in the drink. She gives Miffy a few biscuits and then sits down, taking care that Charlie has a view of one of her breasts inside the robe.

'It's been lonely here of late, Charlie. The husband has been out for business for a week now. And he won't be coming back till after this weekend's convention,' she said casually, while pretending to yawn. Charlie almost lets his glass drop and he has difficulty drinking, hardly being able to prevent his hand from trembling. He decides to swallow the liquor quickly. Immediately it hits his stomach and he feels a strange sensation of courage and yearning. He stares at her figure and smiles, then looks up into her face. Their eyes meet and Mrs. Rosenthal thinks she has won.

'You want another drink, don't you?'

'Most certainly!' And as she pours the hopefully fatal potion, her bathrobe slips open, allowing Charlie a full view of her shining white body, standing right in front of him. She takes the glass and brings it to his lips. He begins to drink and as he drinks she takes Charlie's knee between her legs. Charlie is now fully

GOSPEL OF LOVE

drunk with coveting and halfway to being intoxicated. She brings Charlie's hand to her breast and nature never had to teach him what to do. And while she raises his other hand, planning a steadily increasing intimacy, the two would-be lovers do not hear the footsteps of Angelina, Mrs. Rosenthal's little daughter.

'What are you doing, Mommie?' asks the little girl in her innocence.

'Shit!' mutters Mrs. Rosenthal. And Charlie, seeing the child with long, curly, blond locks experiences a grievous shock.

'You have to be in bed, darling!' says Mrs. Rosenthal, regaining her composure quickly.

'I had to go to the bathroom, mommie.'

'Sure. C'mon and go to bed.' And she brings Angelina to her room. Charlie makes use of this moment to sneak out of the house and he practically runs home with Miffy, pulling the dog repeatedly and preventing it from sniffing. This time he senses a totally different kind of daze; his subconscious spelling out: 'I've been caught!' At home he returns Miffy to her basket and goes outside. He smokes two or three cigarettes, while slowly coming to his senses. Then he decides to cool off in the pool. He dresses down to his boxer shorts and immerses himself into the water. Having swum a few laps, he is able to think.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'That was close!' he stammers. And after another lap: 'I almost made love to another man's wife! I almost became a so-called consenting adult. O God, have mercy on me! And safeguard me from this kind of dirt in the future. It has nothing to do with true love and romance. It is plain lust, sinful desire!' And as he returns for bed he thanks God and finally turns his life over to his Maker to the delight of a host of angels.

It is next Wednesday evening, seven-thirty, and the usual visitors are present. They even brought along a few extra persons as the topic was promising to be important as always, but this time extra important at least for Jocelyn and some of her friends.

'My dear friends and fellow believers,' set John out to say, 'this evening the subject matter is controversial. Much has been said, preached and written about marriage and divorce. As a student of the Bible I see it as my duty to understand the mind of God in this matter. And after much weighing the pros and cons I think I have made up my own mind about it. Once again I will employ my schema of right and left extremes and the compromise positions that fall also by the wayside of the truth, which also here can be felt as too harsh or too soft. On the right-hand extreme we have certain sects and cults, both in the past and in the present, that see marriage and sex as

GOSPEL OF LOVE

evil. They forbid people to marry. I know of one cult in the past that went as far as mutilating their physical bodies. But on the lefthand we have extremes such as sex communities, where the women are shared between the men, or families that consider incest as something natural. However, also living apart together, or shacking up together without official marriage, is at least a false compromise, unfortunately considered acceptable by many.' Here John paused and took a swallow of water from a glass that he always had ready. 'Now I come to the more or less frequent compromises that people settle for. Whereas the first extreme is associated with far-out spiritual activity and the latter with plain hedonism, the pleasure and cheap fun philosophy, so the right-handed compromises are due to exaggerated mystical feelings. Some Mormons think that death does not dissolve marriage and that they will be married literally for ever. Tertullian in the early ages of Christendom believed that one should be allowed to marry only once and remain unmarried after the death of one's partner. The least harsh compromise on the right is the belief that divorce is wrong under all circumstances. These people think, falsely, that marriage is only breakable by death. I will return to them shortly. One of the left-handed compromises, all of them based on human unenlightened reason, is

GOSPEL OF LOVE

virtual polygamy through repeated divorce for reasons of supposed incompatibility. People that think they are incompatible have not tried hard enough to make it work. One of the more serious reasons of supposed incompatibility is that one of the partners is unbelieving. The apostle calls upon the believing partner to remain faithful, but at the same time says that he or she is not bound, meaning that one is free if the unbelieving partner remarries; but not until then. And the least wicked compromise is the belief that a one-time unfaithfulness is reason for divorce. The only justified cause for divorce and remarriage is found in the gospel according to Matthew. In chapter nineteen verse nine and also in chapter five, Christ says that *porneia*, that is New Testament Greek for repeated adultery, prostitution and whore mongering, is the only ground for divorce and remarriage.'

'So, that means that you think that a beating and repeatedly drunk husband cannot be divorced,' said Marion.

'Please, don't interrupt me, I was planning to mention that,' answered John. 'Of course God allows separation in very serious situations, but not divorce. The only ground for divorce is a lifestyle of adultery. One-night stands must be tried to be forgiven. But a course of repeated infidelity is so serious in God's eyes that He considers the marriage annulled. And

GOSPEL OF LOVE

now I would like to return to the idea that marriage is only voidable by death. These people believe that what God has put together cannot be broken, but Christ Himself teaches by implication that it can, when He said to the woman at the well that she had had five husbands. He did not say that she had had one husband and four adulterous relations. Probably she was the victim of easy divorce each and every time for supposed reasons of incompatibility and in the latest relation she was shacking up with somebody else's hubby.

'Moses allowed divorce for reasons of incompatibility, but Christ makes clear that that is taking things too lightly. The disciples found Jesus so serious that they concluded that it is then advisable never to marry. For they realized that one is stuck with one's partner till death do them part, excepting *porneia*. This means that one is free to remarry if one's former partner has married someone else. For by divorcing you and remarrying the other, the marriage has been broken by repeated adultery. You are now free and your former partner is bound to that new marriage. But it is time for coffee and donuts again and then the question and hopefully correct answer session!' A very contented Jocelyn got up and went about her selfassigned task.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'What about native men that have married more than one woman; must they divorce the others and keep the first when they become Christian?' asked Arthur, posing a curious question after they had finished their coffee and donuts.

'No, that would be adding sin to injury. The natural thing is indeed that only two be one flesh, but to conclude that a polygamous man is living in adultery with the other woman, is an emotional tendency for overzealous holiness. The Bible makes clear however that two Christians that have married each other on the ground that they be faithful to each other only and believe that the woman is a picture of the Church, they are bound to each other. A third person, like a mistress, would indeed mean living in adultery and as such would be sufficient ground for divorce.'

'You are saying then,' said Jocelyn, 'that I am not bound to my former husband, who since remarried?'

'No.'

'But my pastor says that if I marry again I would have two husbands.'

'That is plain overly mystical nonsense. Don't let pharisaic, exaggerated notions of holiness crush your hope. A person cannot live with hope for eternity only. One needs also hope for one's life on earth and indeed the Bible does provide that, for instance in the passage in James where it says that we must take

GOSPEL OF LOVE

comfort in Job's history in that in the end God showed His pitying consolation.'

'But does the right to divorce also imply a right to remarry?'

'Absolutely. The apostle advises us to remain unmarried though, but if one cannot contain oneself it is better to remarry. You certainly have the right to marriage, just like the apostle, who probably had been married himself. Your former husband, with the emphasis on former, has broken what God had put together by marrying somebody else. That means that you are free and he is committed to his now wife. Don't be pained out of your freedom by overzealous people. They should consider and learn from what Solomon said, namely that we must not be righteous too much, nor wise too much lest we destroy ourselves.'

'But what about my case?' asked Jocelyn's friend. 'My husband has left me, then divorced me and now goes from one girlfriend to another.'

'Then he is not your husband anymore. He is even worse than Jocelyn's ex. You are most definitely free.'

'Well, the master hath spoken, who will contradict him?' let Marion go with some noticeable sarcasm.

'The Holy Bible teaches the true happy medium, Marion,' was all John replied.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Do you agree that the truth of Christ and the Church is allegorically pictured in Adam and Eve, Christ being the last Adam and the Church like Eve taken out of Christ through His work on the cross?' asked Arthur.

'Most definitely. One of the mysterious riches of the Old Testament consists of allegories like Adam and Eve, Abraham and Hagar, the Law, and Sarah, Grace, also said to be Sinai and Zion respectively.'

'Do you think that Adam and Eve would have been married for ever if their Fall had not taken place, the institute of marriage predating that event?'

'Yes, but speculating about what would have happened if the Fall had not taken place is an unfruitful business. God knew it would and He had His answer ready and that answer is Christ. So there are Christians that speculate that if Adam had continued in his innocence, he would have gone on to holiness. But holiness can only come through Christ, the final Adam.'

'And in the last Adam the institute of marriage is annulled for ever?'

'Yes.'

'And you think that that means we will never know sex anymore, angels being sexless?' continued Arthur.

'Yes,' replied a suspicious John.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'But why do you think that angels are sexless, or at least without sex. Almost everything in nature is either male or female. So, why not angels as well? The Bible does not say they are sexless.'

'But the Bible does say that there is no male or female in Christ. I take that as an indication,' answered John patiently.'

'Well, I think that angels are male and female. And I can show you from the Bible,' went Arthur on.

'I would be very surprised indeed, for most certainly you must be wrong,' answered John with a chuckle.

'One indication to the contrary is the fact that one of the gospels mentions two angels, described as young men and another gospel calls one angel a man. This not only means that angels are male and female, but also that they procreate.'

'What does that mean?' asked an attentive Marion.

'That they have sex and generate little angels that grow up, I am sure.' And John shrugged his shoulders.

'Another proof, even, is that the sons of God, meaning angels, materialized and went after earthly women in Genesis six. The New Testament says about that that they went after other flesh, like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah that went after homosexuality and bestiality. Now, I say they would only do that if they are sexual in nature.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'What do you have to say to that!' said a pleasantly surprised Marion to our evangelist, looking almost triumphantly.

'Speculation, speculation, my friends,' answered John. 'Moreover it remains to be seen that the sons of God in Genesis six are indeed angels. Perhaps the line of Seth is meant.'

'Certainly not,' replied Arthur. 'The result was that giants were born and the plot was to prevent the seed of the Messiah. Mixing human blood with angelic input meant that the Messiah would have to be born from demons, fallen angels. And angels are never to be saved according to the Bible, but only humans, called symbolically the seed of Abraham, he being the father of faith and all believers described as children of faith, naturally also the ones born before him,' a this time enthusiastic Arthur said. 'In Jude it is said of these angels that they had left their original state. Some Christians think that this is a separate group of angels, but that is unlikely. It was a demonic plot and also answered to their desire for beautiful earthly women.'

'Perhaps that is why God also had to send the deluge,' fell in Chuck, 'to wipe this mixed race out, Noah being in the pure line of Adam and Seth? There are hundreds of accounts about the flood among all kinds of nations and tribes all over the

GOSPEL OF LOVE

world from Africa to America and elsewhere, thus showing it was world wide.'

'With that I agree,' observed John. But I am sceptic about Arthur's opinion.'

'That must be due to prudishness. Perhaps you yourself are too bent on holiness,' said Arthur.

'Or perhaps you are reasoning out of fear,' observed Marion.

'No, I don't think so. Everything earthly is temporary as can be gathered from first Corinthians thirteen. Things like sex, no matter how beautiful and pervasive they may seem, must be temporary, heaven being a spiritual place.'

'I do not agree with you, John. Also the evidence for succubi and incubi, male and female demons that make sexual advances to people in their sleep, and even before they sleep, affirms what I have shown from the Bible.'

'Are you dabbling in occult theories now as well, Arthur?' said John, cautioning in his tone.

'Well, excuse me. You refer to heaven all the time and if one tries to think about it you turn discouraging.'

'Because it goes beyond anything we can imagine. The Bible says that what no ear has heard, no eye has seen and no heart has imagined that has God prepared for those that love Him,' said John, more sure of himself again.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'That is very promising indeed, John and it gives the weary battler hope beyond anything the unbelievers can have in their lives without God. But that does not take away from the fact that many things will be the same, or at least similar. Christ after the resurrection was recognized by the disciples as the same man, speaking a human language and eating, showing love, concern, friendship and what not. And so I wonder whether the Lord ever had a wet dream, or maybe masturbated.'

'There we go again,' said John with some frustration. 'Why not propose the theory that He married and had children!'

'Some people argue that he had Mary of Magdalene,' ventured Marion.

'Nonsense! That is pure fiction,' answered John, showing a little anger.

'I agree that that is nonsense,' observed Arthur. 'So, evil tongues have actually claimed that He was gay, since it is said that John, the disciple that Jesus loved, leaned on his breast.'

'These are only degrees of perversion that you people open your hearts for,' said John, showing his despair by looking towards heaven.

'No, not at all. I am only mentioning it. The truth is razor sharp as you yourself have taught us on many occasions, now as well. If Christ ever had a nocturnal

GOSPEL OF LOVE

emission, for it cannot be argued that His *membrum virile* did not carry any semen, for He was and is also fully human, then it was without sinful fantasy. For He taught that to desire a woman in your heart is already turning her into an object of adultery. On the other hand, if He did not, then they were right in the middle ages to use iron prick rings to prevent the slightest erection during one's sleep.'

'No,' said John smiling with difficulty. 'On the one hand you show evidence of taking things too seriously and on the other hand you talk too lightly. Moreover I do not want to involve myself in discussions that give the slightest hint of compromising the Person of Christ. He is altogether too holy for me.'

'O, but you are involved! And Christ is holy indeed, but He is also human and as such He was also tested by the devil on sexual strength, for it is written that He was tempted in all things like unto us. You can be sure that Satan showed Him the most gorgeous woman to test Him with during those forty days in the desert. But Christ could appreciate her beauty without using her as a sex object in His heart. Of course He could, for He was also her Creator!'

'The Bible teaches us in the New Testament on three different occasions that Jesus did not sin and that in Him was no sin and that even He knew no sin,' a serious John observed. 'This means that a host of

GOSPEL OF LOVE

preachers is wrong in arguing that He possibly could sin, but chose not to.'

'I agree with that,' replied Arthur. 'As you have taught us He is holy and it is far from my heart to compromise Him, unless it is out of ignorance. So, I personally feel that masturbation is not evil, but it is the concomitant fantasies that go too far to the left, to talk in your terms. And if one in one's sleep gets an ejaculation, the sex instinct being so powerful, then why couldn't one do it more actively; if only one tries to avoid phone sex, dirty magazines and even using women as a sex object in one's heart. The truth being razor sharp as you are clearly demonstrating to us also this evening, I wonder what Christ did with His sexuality, for it should be clear that He had one.'

'Of course He contained Himself! What else do you want me to say,' responded John, almost turning his eyeballs in the very sockets.

'Well, I don't know,' replied Arthur. 'He never married or the Bible would have mentioned it. But I do wonder whether He never masturbated, or had a wet dream; I myself like you, wanting to follow His example.'

'I wonder now,' asked one of Jocelyn's friends, 'what happens to my baby, which you all see that I am carrying--I am going on six months now--if Christ would return this evening?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'I am sorry! What was your name again?' asked John.

'Serena.'

'Serena, I simply do not know and honestly it is getting too late to continue this conversation.'

'Well, of course, she would have to carry it to terms in heaven!' observed Arthur, getting more sure of himself all the time. 'God wouldn't abort that foetus! This shows that I am right all along. In heaven, when she has her glorified, resurrection body, she will be just as female as here on earth. In fact more so. For then she will experience no pain in bringing it out through labor, that being Eve's punishment.'

'One thing is for sure,' concluded John, 'that child will also have a transformed immortal body. That is all I know to say. But I have to let you folks go now, it is almost eleven o'clock!' And with that he closed this evening that had been experienced by all as worth the while and even exciting.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

CHAPTER V

THE CONFLICT DEEPENS

It was one Thursday afternoon and a few weeks had lapsed. John reflected on the way his Bible study was going and he was worried. 'Lord, if this goes on, then the elders of my home congregation will call me back and certainly will send me abroad, which was their initial intention anyway. Arthur is getting more influence every time, particularly on Marion. Quo vadis, domine?' And after praying about it he went outside to knock on doors. Hardly had he set foot outside or a quaint type accosted him.

'Heh, preacher man, can you show me the way to heaven!' It was a former buddy of Victor, mocking John.

'If you honestly confess your sins to God and believe in your heart that Christ is His eternal Son and

GOSPEL OF LOVE

that He came to die for your sins, then you certainly will go to heaven,' replied John.

'Come again, you talk to fast,' said buddy.

'Do you have a conscience?' asked John.

'Sure, but I play by my own rules,' he answered.

'Have you ever treated anybody with a double standard, demanding from them more than you would give to them or do for them, or double-crossed anybody?'

'You're always serious, ain't ya?'

'Not always. So what about it?'

'Everybody makes mistakes, preacher man. Perhaps you have made a few whoppers yourself.'

'Yes, but God calls them sins. You think about that!'

'What are sins, if they are not mistakes?' asked buddy halfheartedly, showing more curiosity than interest.

'Sins are wickedness or evil against God and one's fellow men. Forms of injustice, lovelessness and so on.'

'I'll think about it, preacher man,' and buddy went along, shrugging his shoulders. John took his bicycle and drove to a suburb he had never visited. He left his bike with others at a stand designated for that purpose and started ringing bells. He did not expect to find many people at home, as it was still afternoon

GOSPEL OF LOVE

and most would still be working, or attending school. And indeed he rang at eight houses before there was a response.

'What can I do for you, sir?' asked a friendly looking ebony girl in her late teens. John figured she might be the nanny, for she carried a white baby in her arms.

'I wonder whether you ever read in the Holy Bible and whether you have any questions about it?' said John, posing his usual question.

'You know, I have orders not to let any Jehovah's witnesses into this house. My employer has specifically forbidden it, along with Mormons.'

'No, I'm not a Jehovah's witness, or Mormon, ma'am. Anyway, they will never come to your door alone. Don't you know they always come in two?'

'Do they? Then it is alright. Please, do come in. I have a few questions for you. I did my chores and have some time.' John found out to his interest that her employers were well-to-do Christians who were taking personal care of her and paying for her college studies. They had taken her in as a nanny after her mother had died with cancer. Her mother had belonged to the same church as they. She explained to him that she was not permitted to let anybody in that denied the divinity of Christ, according to the command of second John. But she knew a girl that

GOSPEL OF LOVE

went to the kingdom hall and wondered what she could possibly say to her to warn her. John made sure that Kim, which was the nanny's name, was a Christian herself and after finding out she was, he suggested she show the girl Zechariah chapter fourteen verse four, where it is predicted that Christ will return bodily upon mount Olive. He explained that Jehovah's witnesses believe that Christ was the first angel, Michael, whereas in fact Satan was the first and highest angel and that after His death His body disappeared and He became Michael again. In addition he mentioned the verse where it says that there is one mediator between God and man, the human Christ Jesus. He found that in his personal experience that were the best verses to show them, along with the fact that it is improper to worship angels, who in fact are called upon to worship Christ themselves in Hebrews chapter one. The angel in Revelation forbade the apostle John to worship him. But John warned Kim that they are simply too brainwashed to understand that Michael cannot be a god, but is simply an angel and that that is indeed the point of the divinity. God is One and there are no gods besides Him. Angels are sometimes called gods and even humans, but that is only in as far as they are God's representatives. John enjoyed talking with

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Kim and the afternoon flew by. Returning home he decided to eat at Mrs. Weber's.

Dining on chili con carne and sipping from a large coke, Charlie came in to his pleasant surprise.

'I thought I could find you hear!' said Charlie and he sat down opposite of John and looked him in the face with a mysterious smile.

'Charlie, how are you doing? Where were you yesterday evening? I missed you and Arthur just kept rambling on.'

'I'm fine and yesterday evening I simply couldn't put a book down. I had to finish it in one sitting and as to Arthur, I must admit that I find some of his thoughts very interesting, even though you seem vehemently opposed and also too worried about it.'

'Perhaps, but he is a dreamer. He floats somewhere up there and does not stand on the ground with both his legs,' said John, gesticulating appropriately.

'Yes, but he is a very thoughtful dreamer and I cannot condemn his efforts. You know, John, I've been thinking about the true faith, which is of course monotheistic. Would you agree with the statement that deism and atheism are degrees of scepticism and pantheism and polytheism degrees of superstition,

GOSPEL OF LOVE

respectively on the left and right side of true faith, the biblical happy medium?'

'Definitely and only the Christian faith is truly monotheistic. Judaism and Islam are either deistic in separating God and creation too much, or pantheistic in uniting them too much. But this can also be found among Christians, who also run the danger of becoming too rationalistic or too mystical. Too much reasoning leaves the soul cold and aloof from the Lord, but too much emotion dwarfs God. And what is this but the essence of deism and pantheism respectively?'

'This reminds me somehow of your advice to keep Bible study and prayer in balance to avoid pharisaism and fanaticism.'

'Yes, of course. Unchecked prayer leads to fanaticism and dry biblicism breeds legalism. A similar kind of equilibrium is mandatory as to the use of reason and emotion. Dry intellectualism leaves the soul destitute and emotional preachiness by itself is like an overly concerned child, too eager to please his parents,' said John, preaching as usual as if shaking out corn from a garner.

'What I've been meaning to ask you; I have never once heard you express a political opinion. Do you at all vote for any particular party?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Absolutely not! Faith and politics do not mix very well. True faith goes far beyond politics. The moment I get bogged down and identify with any party, I become a narrowminded nitwit. Christ now reigns in a mysterious way through all the parties and when on earth He was not so foolish to tie the gospel down to the cart of the Herodians, Sadducees, Pharisees, zealots, or Essenes. I am not now called to govern as a Christian and shove my religion down people's throats. I am called to obey the laws of the land and as long as these do not contradict the true faith, I am to obey them. Moreover what am I to do in a world, or even with a world that keeps on crucifying my Lord, but to bring individuals out of this system to Him?' This was new for Charlie, as were many things he heard from his new friends these days and he simply shelved all the information and pondered about it thoughtfully as he continued in his faith.

'You know,' said Charlie, which had become more or less a stopgap for him, 'with all my intelligence I did not really reckon with God. I did think about Him, but did not care to realize where I stood in front of Him as to my eternal destiny. And that is the most stupid thing a person can do. I understand now that most people enter eternity on good luck.'

'Narrow is the gate to life and broad the way to perdition, the Lord tells us,' answered John. 'They

GOSPEL OF LOVE

say to themselves: "I'll see what happens." And that in fact is because they want to earn eternity on their own merit. Their pride prevents them from bowing their knees in front of the Almighty.'

'But what I really came for, John; the reason I looked you up, is that I want to be baptized,' said Charlie and the mysterious smile returned.

'Were you never baptized then?' asked John.

'No. My parents were baptists, you know.'

'That's right, I had forgotten. Well, well, isn't that something. And you want to be baptized by me, I take it, gathering from your expression?'

'Yes.'

'I'm flabbergasted! We'll have to borrow a baptismal font somewhere, then.'

'No. I want to be baptized at the creek, where my interest in the gospel was really aroused; right in the spot where we were fishing,' said Charlie with glowing eyes. And they talked on, John prying into Charlie's heart and soul, making assurance double sure that Charlie was really a genuine, born-again Christian. Charlie told John that he desired to show the world that he had made a choice for Christ. He was going to invite as many people as wanted to come from his friends, acquaintances and relatives. He mentioned the hymns he wanted sung and they set a date, Saturday in two weeks.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'When I told my pastor what you had said, John, he became angry, saying that he was my pastor and that I had no business going somewhere else,' said Jocelyn. It was next Wednesday evening and Jocelyn was recounting her experience to our evangelist, Charlie and Arthur, who were already present for the weekly Bible study. 'His wife almost became hysterical, mentioning that there had been already so many setbacks.' She paused for a few seconds and John only raised his eyebrows, waiting her out. 'Also he said that there are three great examples of marriage in the Bible. Adam could never have divorced his wife. God does not divorce Israel and Christ does not divorce His Church. It was all very painful and confusing the way it happened.'

'Well, first of all,' replied John, 'maybe your pastor should be reminded that God does not only speak through him. As to these three examples. The first must be true, but is an exceptional situation. As to Israel; Israel is called Lo-Ammi by the prophet Hosea, which means Not-my-people. So God has clearly divorced His chosen nation for now. As to the Church; if your pastor is maintaining that we must be like Christ so much, why then did he marry himself? For Christ never married.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Don't be proselytized into becoming a daughter of hell twice as bad,' warned Arthur, paraphrasing on Christ's indictment.

'Careful, Arthur! Perhaps her pastor is well-meaning,' said John.

'Well-meaning perhaps, I say perhaps, but then one of those exaggerated souls that live by a this-and-that-is-forbidden attitude, which, as you have explained, is caused by aversion, the opposite of perversion.' Charlie said nothing, but took it all in. The bell rang and Arthur answered it and while Chuck and Marion came in Jocelyn continued.

'But my pastor also claimed that the only verses in the New Testament that can be construed to support divorce, are in Matthew. And that is the gospel for the Jews and that it refers to sex during the prenuptial time of marital vows.'

'Your pastor is right in stating that these verses are only to be found in Matthew, namely chapter five and nineteen. But the Lord is clearly speaking about two people there who already have become one flesh. And in response to the question by the Pharisees whether one is allowed to send away one's wife for any reason, He answers that the only valid reason is whore mongering or prostitution, that is a deliberated course of adultery, not a one-time infidelity, let alone reasons of incompatibility,' answered John.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'But what about Paul's statement that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives?' asked Jocelyn.

'That must be seen in the context of Matthew nineteen verse nine and in connection with his own saying that one is not bound to an unbelieving partner that wants a divorce.'

'This reassures me,' said Jocelyn. 'My pastor must be taking things too seriously then.'

'Which goes to show you,' repeated Arthur, 'that a lot of religious people become pharisaic as a reaction to the perversion that is to be found in the world.' A few more people came in and it was time for John's weekly address.

'I would like,' started John out, 'to spend our time this evening to go over ground we have already covered, thus repeating and strengthening what I like to call the biblical theory of a balanced life, which is actually common sense, but our hearts are ignorant of it, unless God educates us. The theory of balance that I have been trying to explain to you is not simply a tool of human reasoning. It is true that a thinker like Aristotle already about twenty-five hundred years ago taught that virtue is the happy medium between two extremes, as for instance in the triad of chastity between lewdness and asceticism. But before him Solomon warned his audience that one must not be

GOSPEL OF LOVE

too godless, or too foolish, lest one die before one's time and not too righteous and too wise, lest one destroy oneself and/or others.

'This evening I would like to show you that the Bible is full of examples that corroborate this theory. Examples of falling short of God's sexual standards are everywhere in the Bible. The entire chapter of Leviticus eighteen is devoted to it. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah and of Lot's incestuous daughters is only the beginning in the Bible of a list of perversions. That sin was considered so horrible that for generations Moabites and Ammonites were not allowed to enter Israel. Yet God shows His love in the fact that Christ Himself was born of a Moabitish woman, Ruth.

'There is the example of David's adultery with Bathsheba. Solomon's warning, along with Christ's, shows that it all starts in the heart and that one must guard one's heart more than anything and that one must not even desire the adulterous woman's beauty in one's heart. Two Peter two verse fourteen speaks of theologians that have eyes that are always on the look-out for adulteresses.

'But there is also the example of going beyond God's standards in first Timothy four verse three, which mentions people that forbid marriage. And then there is the happy example of Joseph's and Mary's

GOSPEL OF LOVE

chastity and Paul's statement that the marriage bed should be—and therefore can be—undefiled along with the sexual praise for the male and female beauty in the Song of songs. In this context I would like to mention that both David and his son Solomon were aware that humans have what Freud called the subconscious. In Psalm nineteen David prays to God to purify him from his unknown transgressions and Solomon speaks at several occasions about the deep waters of a man's heart and that a man of understanding will fathom them.

'Personally I think that our subconscious has to do with the moral conscience. So a man can be conscious of his desire to have anal sex with his female companion, or indeed with a man, but be unconscious of his subconscious motive to dishonor the woman's body, or to transgress God's laws in making the male body the object of deification. And women that take pleasure in this kind of perversion are unaware of their subconscious motive of being sex slaves, totally subjugated by men, an example of gross inequality of the sexes due to the sexual revolution: which by the way has happened many times before in history in different societies; which serves to tell us that the godless are exposed to swings of the pendulum. The anus is for feces, not for semen; it is an exit, not an entree.' Moreover the

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Bible admonishes us not to possess our wives like the heathen do.

And here John took a swallow from a glass of water to moisten his throat. 'As to our dealings with money, there are many verses in the Bible. Solomon preached that he that gives graciously to the poor, lends to God, who will render the benefaction to the giver. Also Paul says that God loves the cheerful giver. For money makers there is the example of the talents and of the normal practice of interest, but not usury, certainly not to one's fellow believers. The example of the prodigal son shows what can happen with uncontrolled spending and Nabal's avarice is there to teach us that greed can be fatal. Then there is the impulsive behavior of Ananias and Sapphira and the reminder of Proverbs eleven verse twenty-four about bountiful givers contrasted with greedy people that hoard and yet suffer want. And this far from depletes all references to money. I would love to discuss, but time fails us, the kind of communistic sharing of the early Christians and the kind of capitalist woman that lived by selling purple vestures, an example of a female Christian that was into a luxury business. Which all goes to show that one must not identify Christianity with either communism or capitalism, or any other -ism for that matter.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

And John paused again to take a look at his notes. 'As to eating and drinking there is Paul's quotation of a prophet from Crete that called his own countrymen lazy bellies and then there is the interesting, theological statement in Philippians three verse nineteen that there are people whose stomach is their god. On the other side of this behavioral spectrum there is the example of Saul's exaggerated curse against taking sustenance before he had revenged himself on the enemy, along with similar behavior by Paul's personal enemies in Acts. As a reminder of false happy mediums there is Proverbs twenty-five verse sixteen against eating more than one needs and the overzealous phenomenon of fasting by routine in Luke eighteen verse twelve as an example of a false happy medium between self-control and extreme asceticism. This all should make clear that yo-yo dieters have neither learned temperance, nor the ability to enjoy one's food till one has enough, but they go from overeating to strenuousness, or from perversion to aversion. But Peter tells us that one can learn self-control through knowledge in two Peter one verse six. As to the need for action there is the example of Pharaoh's self-willed procrastination on the one hand and Peter's recklessness in cutting off Malchus's ear on the other hand.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'As an example of a false happy medium between perversion and truth there is the negligence of the five foolish virgins, who failed to act prudently due to halfheartedness. And on the other hand there is the false happy medium between truth and extremism, namely Jephtha's vow to devote the first thing to God, due to which his daughter was condemned to be a virgin for the rest of her life.'

And here John paused again, looked up from his notes and sighed. He looked down again and continued. 'I have given you only a few examples in matters of sex, money and timely action. Using my annotations here I could go on for days, discussing emotions ranging from outright paranoia, undue fearfulness, via courage to foolhardiness and outright insanity due to sinfulness against God. We could discuss extremes such as nonsense and utter triviality, with the false happy mediums of ignorance on the one hand and irrelevance on the other, thus showing that essential knowledge is a gift to be found between these extremes and false happy mediums.

'I could mention to you extremes of craziness on the one hand and of playing God over all on the other hand and of the false happy mediums of foolishness and pedantry between these extremes, all examples that the truth can be experienced as too harsh or too softie. There are examples of outright criminality in

GOSPEL OF LOVE

the Bible and of outright idolization and adulation, with various forms and many degrees of injustice, or obsequiousness in between; all examples of either falling short of true justice, or of going beyond it.

'This all serves to show that there is something timeless about the human being and the Bible addresses us as God's letter and manual in this timelessness, right in the middle of all human developments of technology, fashion, politics and what have you. The Bible, my friends, is indeed the Book of books and anyone that gets imbued with it will reap the benefits. And indeed it shows us the way to Christ, who says of Himself that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life and about Whom His forerunner said by way of advice to all of us: "I must decrease and He must increase."

'This because by nature we are full of ignorant hubris, which is the desire to play God over our fellow men and over anything in Creation. But I will end here, giving you opportunity to react, or comment.'

'Now I understand you better,' said an enthusiastic Jocelyn, in contrast with Marion, who looked as sullen as ever. 'What you are saying is that human behavior, from things as sex right down to thinking, is like some kind of line and the truth sits somewhere in between the middle of bad behavior on the one hand and far-out ideals on the other, with different

GOSPEL OF LOVE

possibilities in between both sides that aren't quite right either!

'You get the point, but the line is really more like a circle, where the two sides turn down away from the truth and bend again towards each other in Satanism at the very bottom. But before you could understand that I am afraid I would have to go on for several years yet. I would have to show you that there is some kind of bi-polar tension in the truth that sinful man cannot stand and therefore he breaks away from it and runs off with one side and so lands in a vicious circle that in turn very often drags him down further and makes him to break away even further. This happens on both sides of the truth. I could show you phenomena like bounce reaction, pendulum swinging by both individuals and entire societies. And if God grants it, I will show you all those things in order, but first things first. And the very first priority is that I relate the gospel, for I want to be an evangelist first of all. For indeed what would it profit a person if he or she has all this knowledge, but does not see the need to bow down before the Almighty and receive forgiveness for his or her sins?'

'So what you are saying, then, John,' said Marion, opening her mouth for a change, but with an expressionless face, 'is that despite the sexual

GOSPEL OF LOVE

revolution, yes, because of the sexual revolution, inequality between the sexes only has grown worse?'

'I didn't say that, but I was certainly implying it. Because of the sexual revolution a lot of people land in a maelstrom, a vortex, that drags them down without their noticing it; for ever looking for films and experiences that goad them even more. Films with women in all whose orifices pens are sticking out, gross bestiality, ever worsening forms of sadism and masochism. Some of them end down in ekchoramatophilia and the snuf film scene.'

'Ekchorio--what!' asked Arthur.

'You don't want to know,' said John.

'But we do,' protested Marion.

'Faecal sex,' said John with some embarrassment.

'Then I still don't understand,' said Marion.

'He means poop and piss sex,' observed Arthur and John's face turned into a grimace.

'I knew about that,' said Marion.

'It is not without interest to see that a beast like Marquis de Sade, from whom we have the term sadism, needed an understanding of Puritan virtues to be able to pervert the characters in his stories into as many vices as possible,' mentioned Charlie.

'Really? Interesting!' said Arthur.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Like lesbians and homosexuals still need the traditional role models of man and wife?' ventured Chuck, rarely putting in his part.

'You can surely conclude that,' said John. 'No matter how perverted people can possibly become, they simply cannot break away entirely from God's order in Creation.'

'Well, at least in eternity we won't have to put up with all these excesses that shock, pain and insult a decent person now. Things will be pure. Woman will be the glory of the man, as it is now according to first Corinthians eleven,' observed Arthur.

'Male chauvinist pigs!' muttered Marion and John tried to keep silence hoping Arthur would not hold one of his grandiloquent soliloquies.

'As I said before,' continued Arthur, 'in eternity many things will be similar to this temporary scene, sin having made it temporary. They will be new, but not totally different as if God were to reject His original Work and sci-fi something else into being. The little we know about Jesus after the Resurrection shows us that. There will be friendship, love, affection, childbirth and the loving that precedes it. There will be study and all the teaching and learning involved. There will be music, heavenly music and celestial food and drink, true nectar and ambrosia.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Is this all he can think about?' thought John to himself.

'Why then does it say that both food and the stomach will be annulled?' asked Charlie and John threw a sympathetic look into his direction.

'It says that God will bring both food and the stomach to nothing. I know that. But why then did Christ eat after the resurrection?'

'Perhaps only to show His disciples that He wasn't a ghost,' suggested Charlie.

'I could be wrong on this point, but I think the right interpretation of these apparently mutually opposing verses is that God will end our dependence on food. We won't need food to survive, but we will certainly be able to enjoy it.'

'But before the Fall Adam and Eve were physically immortal,' countered Charlie.

'Yes, but Paul was probably talking about our present mortal stomachs and food as necessary fuel. They will be brought to naught in being replaced by the stomach and food that go with eternal immortality. As to the difference between Adam's prelapsarian immortality and Christ's and the immortality of the glorified, resurrection bodies; I think it must be concluded that the first was a union of matter and spirit and the latter is more like a fusion of matter and spirit. Therefore the former is called psychical and

GOSPEL OF LOVE

earthly and the second is called a spiritual body and it can applace itself through space and time anywhere in the universe in a split second and also go through solid walls, as Christ showed. And what God said about Adam, "It is not good for man to be alone," holds also for eternity.'

'In eternity we will be solely occupied with Christ!' said a frustrated John, who could not help himself.

'That's what *you* think. But we will also be occupied with and involved in all His Works. And that we will not only be concerned about Christ, but also about other things, you could have known that from Revelation twenty-two, where it says that we will reign for ever.'

'But who will we reign over,' asked Chuck.

'The people that will live on the new earth and whose children will probably populate the entire universe and our own children not to forget. The entire universe will be open territory. That this must be so can be gathered from several scriptures. First of all it was promised to Abraham that his progeny would be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand at the shore of the sea. Now Abraham could see with the naked eye only a few thousand stars, but he could have presumed that their number was as astronomical as the sand kernels. Now there must be nonillion sand kernels and that with an exponent of

GOSPEL OF LOVE

nonillion and just as many stars. For we have only just begun to explore the universe.'

'Perhaps you are taking this promise to Abraham too literally, Arthur,' said Charlie.

'No, I'm not. Let me show you two more Scripture verses. What God said to Abraham is not just a figure of speech. It is symbolic only in so far as not only Jews are meant, but also the offspring of his other women and indeed in the sense of his being the father of all believers. But we read in Ephesians--' and Arthur took up his Bible and even a skeptical John looked it up, 'chapter three verse twenty-one the phrase "to all the generations of the age of the ages" and in chapter one verse twenty-one that Christ has been exalted above every name in the coming age.' And looking with a little bit of triumph towards John, he continued, 'Clearly this is proof that unto all eternity generations of children will be born, for Satan is called the god of the present age and the coming age is eternity. Aren't you proud of me, your student, that I discovered something new in the Bible?' And Arthur's face shone with pride.

'I'm sorry, Arthur. But I do not share your enthusiasm. You must be reading this into the Bible.'

'But why? I'm showing it to you, it is there! And you taught us yourself early on that every letter of the Bible is the inspired Word of God. You explained that

GOSPEL OF LOVE

a belief in the verbal and plenary inspiration is the happy medium between scepticism and superstition and you showed us at several occasions that the idea of inspiration behind the words brings one on a slippery slope that leads one to deny the historical truth of one thing after another. You taught us and convinced us, at least me, that humans were chosen by God to write the Bible in inerrancy, as the Bible says of itself in second Timothy three verse sixteen "Every Scripture verse has been inspired by God." And Christ said that not even a jot or tittle would go lost, which are the smallest parts of Hebrew letters or characters. You showed me many times that the Bible is a miraculous book, both in its truthfulness and in its consistency, which no human group of so many writers would be capable of and certainly not over so many centuries.'

'Yes, yes, you don't have to remind me.'

'Why then are you so skeptical yourself? I'm disappointed.'

'Because Christ stated that we in our eternal bodies will not know marriage. I told you before.'

'Yes, I know that and it does not have to mean that no children will be born. Now sex has been limited by God to marriage between two people, instituted before the Fall already, as it is written: "A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and

GOSPEL OF LOVE

these two shall be one flesh.” But that does not have to mean that God cannot change the rules, as He has seen fit to do before. Animals do not marry either, but some live by monogamous rules.'

'Well, there you have it. We will not be animals, but like the angels,' protested John.

'Can you show me from Scripture, then, that angels absolutely do not know sex?' said Arthur, hammering away at his pet theology.

'No, but can you show me that they do?' countered John.

'There you have it. You cannot back it up further and that is what I have been doing all the time. The Song of songs is intensely sexual and I cannot believe we will not be male and female in eternity.'

'The Canticles are intensely spiritual, depicting God's love for Israel and Christ's love for the Church.'

'Yes, but the spiritual meaning has been taken from the sexual one. If Christians had realized that in the early stages of Christendom and in the middle ages, then they would not have been so ascetic and overly prudish. The result was that sinners rejected the gospel and chose sin, openly or secretly. I am afraid your sense of holiness hails down from this attitude. Don't think that the revivals since the reformation would have been possible without the more normal look-out on sex. People could breathe again. The

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Roman church had been so suffocating in its exaggerated holiness, which you yourself explain as an aversion, a going beyond the truth and so becoming untruth, as opposed to perversions that fall short of the truth. No, the Lord Himself did not object to being born from a woman, so why would He object to childbirth in eternity and the lovemaking that normally precedes it? Nothing more horrible can be imagined than that God like some diabolical surgeon will change us into meaningless and sexless its. No, my penis will not fall off when I get my eternal body. We will all be male and female with manly and womanly bodies respectively. Man, I see myself already as the father of an entire nation!' And at this Marion, who was seated close to him, all of a sudden gives him high five. John shakes his head and concludes.

'There is no male or female in Christ. But it is time for you guys to go home. You have had your say again, Arthur. And, please, don't get carried away with this any further!'

'I want you to know,' said Arthur, 'that I appreciate your studies immensely. You are a very wise and learned man. An erudite and that with great acumen, but you could also learn from a simple soul like me, just a little.' And he held up his right hand, showing

GOSPEL OF LOVE

his index and thumb a little apart. And with this they all went home.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

CHAPTER VI

WHAT WOULD HEAVEN BE LIKE?

'Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
'That saved a wretch like me.
'I once was lost, but now I'm found,
'Was blind, but now I see!'

A group of about thirty people had come to witness Charlie's baptism. About half of them were Christians, friends of both John and Charlie and about half of them were acquaintances of Charlie that had come to show their respect for him and a few visitors had come out of curiosity. While they were singing a gang of bikers with long hair and wild beards roared down the mountain, but paid only fleeting attention to them as they passed.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Charles Immanuel Abbanius, do you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and that God has raised Him from among the dead?'

'I do so confess wholeheartedly!'

'Then I baptize you at your own request and witnessing to me about your faith in the only true God and His eternal son, Jesus Christ and I do so in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.' John and Charlie had been standing in the middle of the brook during the hymn and now Charlie went backwards and completely down under. They were wearing nothing special for the occasion. John had addressed the little gathering and had explained the purpose of baptism and the theological significance of it. Charlie wanted to show to the world that he was buried with Christ and risen again in faith, having been crucified in Christ to this world and risen again for Christ.

'Welcome into the battle, brother,' said one Christian and most people congratulated him, but one visitor triggered a confrontation and caused Charlie to give his first witness.

'Professor Higgins of the physics department, what a surprise to see you here!' said Charlie.

'I heard about your baptism and I combined my curiosity with an outing into the open. But really I cannot see what motivates a brilliant student like

GOSPEL OF LOVE

yourself, a student with straight A's, to be baptized of all things. It is so archaic!

'No, it is not at all an anachronism. Your physics philosophy is archaic and dates back to Democritus, who thought that everything boils down to a movement of atoms!' retorted Charlie.

'We stick down to the bare facts,' replied the professor.

'And what are they?' asked Charlie.

'We only trust what we can see with our very own eyes.'

'What then do you think you'll see if I put a red light on the rim of your car tire and drive around in the dark?'

'Well, of course a red light spinning around.'

'Definitely not! What you will see is a red light arching down and up again, so forming a series of arches.'

'Really? Of course! The light will hit the ground every time, because it is not spinning centrifugally. But what's your point?' asked the professor a little sheepishly.

'That people believe what they expect or want to see and they see what they want to believe. I'm afraid you would make a poor historian if you were to practice your rule of believing only what you see. The Greek contemporary of Democritus, Pyrrho, was so

GOSPEL OF LOVE

rigorous that he followed scepticism to the absurd extreme, claiming that one cannot even trust one's own eyes. I was baptized today to show my choice for Christ, Whose historicity is well documented by various faithful witnesses that took part in experiencing His personality and miracles. I fully believe what they passed on and my faith is corroborated by the historical facts, such as the resurrection. It is only by that event that Christianity could have been impelled forward by a small group of uneducated, fearful disciples.' Charlie paused and the professor shrugged his shoulders.

'I like to stick to the bare facts.'

'And that makes you a very poor man, believing that emotions such as justice and affection are caused by the clanging of molecules. If there are genes, or genetical combinations for such virtues and that could well be; then that proves that our material side is taken up into the complexity of our immaterial side.'

'That's what you believe!'

'Yes, indeed. And my point is that your physics philosophy that you pass on as established science and proven facts, is really just that also, a belief. But just like imponderable things like love and ethics are ultimately immaterial things, hailing down from the divinity, so my belief answers to something that most

GOSPEL OF LOVE

people can relate to, to a greater or lesser extent. O, you are so poor, professor Higgins, believing a thing like that! Who wants to be cooped up in the idea that we are just machines without even a ghost in it!

'I am the one that is sober-minded here. You think that you are so rich and fool yourself.'

'If we are machines and just that, then what is the point in fighting for life? Just a few million machines that break down from lack of fuel in Africa and elsewhere every year! Then the communists were right that might is right and that the mightiest machine must govern. Love comes over the barrel of a gun! Atheistic communism has caused more deaths in the twentieth century than fascism. The Leakeys of science go on searching for ever for that missing link that keeps evading them, like mystics search for the holy grail. The first to prove that there is no God, the others to prove that His descendants are my neighbors.'

'Punctuated equilibrium is still the answer.'

'I cannot take that seriously anymore. That would mean that an infinitely complex thing like an eye was mutated into being overnight. You see, evolutionists are forced to believe things that only become more absurd as science progresses.'

'And you want me to believe that this very mountain we stand on was covered by water during that so-

GOSPEL OF LOVE

called deluge, not to mention the Himalayas!' And the professor sneered.

'No, all the then mountains were covered during the flood. Afterwards, due to the movement of the tectonic plates such mountains as we have now were formed. And that probably did not happen after the flood, but in the time of Peleg, about whom it is said that the earth was divided in his time. You can judge for yourself that the continents formed a perfect circle, something the Bible mentions also. You could learn from creationist ideas. But because you only believe what you want to believe you laugh at their books and do not even take the trouble to read them. Sorry, but you are exactly what you believe to be, an atheist, that is a human without God. And so you will once have to face God and stand naked before Him with all your negative pride that rejected all the evidence in sight. The very universe witnesses to the fact that God is almighty and divine, but you kill off that feeling, that *mysterium tremendum* and you go on killing it off in your students! It is spiritual murder!' By this time the professor had turned around angrily to his car, muttering:

'Abortion is murder and now science is also murder. What will they think of next!' About a dozen people had witnessed this conversation and most of

GOSPEL OF LOVE

them wisely kept their mouths shut, but one enthusiastic soul exclaimed:

'Way to go, Charlie!' John stood there simply, smiling and the rest of them quietly went back to their private conversations and their coffee or tea and cake. And while the sun set they all went back home. John hitched a ride with Charlie. His aunt drove. And while John sat in the back, trying to find words to express his feelings, Charlie started out.

'Would you agree, John, that the various degrees of aversion that are to be found in so many things, are always reactions to the many degrees of perversion and that perversion is the easy cop-out that we are naturally drawn into and that aversion is an overzealous, false ideal; life being allegorically like a treacherous, icy mountain with the path of life as a narrow trail, sometimes more like a ledge, winding upwards to paradise? And some try desperately to climb straight up and fall back down again into the ravine, instead of following the path.' And Charlie paused.

'Definitely, definitely! O, I am so proud of you! You listen to me, digest it and no doubt you will take it further and transcend your teacher, one day. But life can also, allegorically, be depicted as a broad road, leading to perdition and the narrow way of life right in the middle of it. On the left side the various degrees,

GOSPEL OF LOVE

like lanes, of perversion and on the right side the various lanes of aversion. And do you know what happens if you follow a steady course in the middle?'

'No, enlighten me.'

'Then many people will bump into you, swerving from both sides into your path. And yet in the end, if you continue steadily, you win out.'

'So, what you are saying is that one should avoid both the fast lanes and the slow lanes?'

'Yes. And in this, the latter allegory, life is pictured as traffic in progress. In your allegory the slow lanes become the difficult and strenuous forms of aversion. Both allegories are true. The falling down you mentioned, are the bounce reactions some people experience in reaction to their impossible efforts. And then they, or others, bounce right back again as a result of that.' And a short silence fell in as they traveled back to Los Angeles. Charlie's aunt didn't say a thing. She didn't like arguing with Charlie. She was no match for his nimble wit. And as to this young evangelist, she found him sympathetic, but not more than that.

'I would like to comment on your harangue against professor Higgins, Charlie, and put in a word of caution. I hope and pray you will learn from this experience. You must realize that everybody builds up, over the years, a hedge around him- or herself, so

GOSPEL OF LOVE

much so that nobody can pierce it. Most people live by herd instincts. That is part of their hedge. They will invariably follow the herd and stick to that. Other people, like the professor, are thinkers, but also they form a kind of herd. Now, people from different herds will not at all be easily persuaded to change course and join another herd. If you try to persuade people with arguments alone, no matter how persuasive they may be, nobody will listen when push comes to shove. In the end it is mostly a fruitless bogging down by both parties to prove that their herd is the right one. And there are as many herds as there are degrees of perversion and aversion and many possible combinations of all kinds of aspects of life. As to your comments about creationism and Christian historiography. They are like all Christian sciences. They only serve to educate those that believe already. My point is that you must always be civil and in the future, when you try to win souls, first pray for them, maybe for years. But pray unceasingly! Only then God sees that you have true love and can then bless your efforts.' Not very much was spoken after that as the three drove back to L.A.

It was Wednesday and John's room was filled to capacity. What initially had been a very small group of friends interested in what John had to say, had

GOSPEL OF LOVE

grown into a sizeable class of Bible students. Partly thanks to the doing of both Arthur and Charlie, who both had passed on John's message of the biblical happy medium ardently.

'Welcome newcomers,' set John out to say. 'My Bible studies have centered around the theme that the truth holds the middle ground between things that fall short of it and things that are an exaggeration of it. People tend to either sin against the truth, or blow it out of proportion. So there have been people that actually denied that Jesus ever existed and others that claimed that He as a little boy formed birds out of clay that flew away after He had sculptured them. I am not saying that Christ could not have done this, had He invoked His divine powers, but I am maintaining that He never did this. Some pious Christians might think that one cannot exaggerate such a Person as Christ was, but people have done it.

'Now both the lacking of truth and the overstatement of it, makes for untruth, that is the lie. And many are the degrees, shades and colors of untruth on both sides. Whereas the truth itself seems to be positioned on the edge of a knife. Just as the truth is to be found between shortcoming and exaggeration, so virtue, the power to do well, is situated between perversion and aversion. Now,

GOSPEL OF LOVE

many have thought that they had attained to the truth, or virtue, whereas in fact it was a compromise between perversion and the truth, or aversion and the truth. On the one side the real truth still sounded too harsh and on the other side the truth was experienced as still too soft.

‘Both the understanding of truth and the gift to act virtuously has two opposites, one of which is a poverty and the other a false ideal. Both are lies and vices, no matter how appealing they may seem. For every aspect of the truth and for every virtue there are many sins and all of them are either shortcomings or exaggerations. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that education start at a young age. Children need to learn to eat and drink in healthy proportions and learn temperance. They must be taught to explore the world and be made aware of the danger of cars and strangers and so learn courage. They ought to learn to carry out small tasks in the right way and learn caution and prudence. One should teach them essential knowledge in different things and esthetics in acquiring taste for matching colors and shapes in clothing and furniture and so on. At an early age they should gain insight through stories, games and friendships to become aware of what is fair, that is just. And sooner or later they must realize that actions are ethically motivated, either to

GOSPEL OF LOVE

play up oneself or to edify one another. And gradually, but consistently, they must learn how to deal with money to avoid avarice or hoarding on the one side and high rolling on the other side and learn a lifestyle of sharing trustingly and yet saving.

‘And most importantly of all they must be brought to Christ their God and Maker and learn to pray and enter into a living relationship with Him through worship, dependence, forbearance, perseverance and so forth. Before the Fall Adam and Eve were completely innocent, they did not know what evil is, but did what is good naturally. Their relation to God and each other was spontaneous and perfect. With us that cannot be the case. We have to learn through trial and error. James three verse two says that we all stumble many times. And two Peter one verse five exhorts us to add virtue to our faith. Virtue is power or excellence in ethical behavior. Hebrews five verse fourteen says that, quote, the solid food belongs to the matured, who through habit have trained their faculties to distinguish between good and evil, unquote. A virtuous person is able to do just that.

‘An otherwise serious Christian, too serious in his zeal, once disagreed with me that unbelievers can be virtuous. But Luke wrote in Acts thirteen that Sergius Paulus, the propraetor of the city of Paphos, was an understanding man. Now, good sense, or

GOSPEL OF LOVE

understanding, is the happy medium between ignorance and irrelevance and ultimately between nonsense and utter triviality. Unbelievers can obviously show a certain measure of virtue. We don't live in the days of Genesis six verse five today. But the deciding criterion is, are we virtuous for Christ and by His Spirit?'

And our evangelist cum preacher stopped for a few seconds to moisten his throat with water. 'To perceive the difference between truth and corruption on one side and exaggeration on the other side, is not easy, particularly in fine matters. But we can follow guidelines. If you are rather safe than sorry you must pay attention to the fact that the human being is both material and immaterial. You must balance the body and the spirit in equilibrium. To overly accentuate one side is to neglect the other. A weak person is drawn feverishly to one side. It is because we tend to idolize things.

'The Bible, however, makes clear that we must love all parts of our being. Quotes, For nobody ever yet hated his own ***flesh***, but nourishes and cherishes it. Be renewed by the spirit of your ***mind***. He that gets wisdom, loves his own ***soul***. He that controls his ***spirit*** is better than he that takes a city. Preserve your ***heart*** more than anything that is to be guarded, for from it are the sources of life, unquote. By the

GOSPEL OF LOVE

way, I have taken the liberty to use my own translation.

'People have idolized, neglected, or despised any of these constituents of the human being. The point is to give them the right place. The above order ranks them in increasing importance.' And John paused for a second to look at his notes. He cleared his throat and continued.

'The real truth and virtue are indeed the happy medium, so foolhardiness is a state of too much courage, that is to say recklessness and cowardice is a state of not enough courage. One vice is often a reaction to its counterpart. Many people are controlled by the swings of the pendulum; whether it be the eating habits of one individual, or the morals of an entire society over the course of decades. Virtue is not simply a matter of a certain degree of a particular quality. Because different situations call for different degrees of say courage or generosity. Degree is the relative aspect of virtue and quality the absolute one.

'How is virtue obtained? Is it earned by hard practice, or is it a spontaneous gift from God? Is it learned or inherited? In the latter case only the fortunate could have it and the others would have an excuse. Certainly inherited character plays a role, but it is up to a person to work on his or her foibles and

GOSPEL OF LOVE

fortes, in asking God continually for grace and mercy with an open heart for criticism.

'Take notice that the baser vices have to do with the body and the others with the mind, soul, spirit, conscience, will and the heart. They are not simply relative idiosyncrasies. There is such a thing as a wrong habit, opinion, theory, affection, belief and so on. Today's relativism causes a regrettable bewilderment. The difficulty is to find the fine line between vice and virtue. People generally condemn extremes, but all vice is not extreme. The ancient adage says that one bit of foolishness can make the reputation of a wise man stink like a fly in a very costly ointment or perfume.

'It makes for a good exercise to try yourself to think up virtue-versus-vice groups, for instance diligence and leisure versus workaholism and laziness, or chastity and faithful sex versus asceticism and lewdness. Try to practice the happy medium in every area of your life, for just as vice breeds more vice, so virtue is conducive to more virtue. There is so much to learn about virtues that one starts to wonder where it all begins and ends. Well, I tell you there is no beginning or end. For God is infinite and from all eternity to all eternity. Remember therefore that all virtues flow out of love. Love is the alpha and omega of all good comportment. Love is the highest virtue

GOSPEL OF LOVE

and in love all laws are fulfilled. Against true love there is no law.

'Solomon says in Ecclesiastes nine verse one that man does not know love or hatred by observing the things around him. What he means is that both love and hatred are inspired intrinsically, the one by God and the other by sin; except for the hatred for sin, not the sinner.' And John took another swallow of water and peeked at his annotations. The bond between him and his audience was good. His voice was clear, he kept eye contact with them. His appearance was not too authoritative, but more concerned and sympathetic. And as he stood there, in front of his easy-chair he exuded not only self-made learning, but rather he conveyed the impression to his listeners that here was a man that really had something to say.

'Sooner or later a maturing person lands in the deadlock between dead orthodoxy and revolutionary progress, between fossilized, dogmatic traditionalism and uprooting modernism. However, a living faith is well rooted in God's eternal, unalterable principles, but also knows how to reach the heart of contemporary man. Peter says that we must be, quote, prepared at all times to give a defense to anyone that asks you for an account concerning your hope, unquote. Now, you have Christians that rain mainly fire and brimstone upon the world. They do

GOSPEL OF LOVE

not even reach the mind--and often ears--of the man in the street, let alone his heart. They are too ignorant to appreciate the concerns of their fellow men. They sit on an island and are ignored. But you have also Christians that understand the world so well that they lose sight of the essential message of Christ. They are good sympathizers, but not at all good soul winners. In the end both types lose out. In most cases, unfortunately, they do not supplement one another. They rather destroy each other.

‘Again I say it, a grave warning must be sounded here. Many have thought that they reached the golden mean. But all they produced was a compromise between truth and dead orthodoxy on the one hand, or between truth and modernism on the other hand. Paul says, quote, become unoffending to Jews, gentiles and the Church of God, just as I also try to please all people in all things, not seeking my own advantage but that of the masses. I have become all things for all people that by all means I might save some, unquote. This can only be done if one has a great understanding of the truth; else one is bound to please only one side. And by the way, when he says “all means,” of course he does not mean that the end justifies the means. Paul never became a thief to convert the thieves, or an ascetic to save the

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Essenes, or an assassin to preach to the zealots.'
And at this a snigger went through the room.

'The faithful Christian faces a lifelong battle. The danger therefore is to grow lax or rigid, to fall into a kind of legalism of countless thou-shalt-nots, under the pretense of faithfulness; or to become weak under the cloak of broad-mindedness. The end of the matter is that Christ and His Father must always increase, but I must always decrease. It is because our hearts never grow tired of playing God over our fellow men with whatever means. Therefore we must increase humbleness and Christ's Person must be valued more and more. He is the Savior and perfect human example, both fully God and man in one Person, with a capital p. Keep studying Him through the Bible, and in one way or another you will discover Him on every page, and eventually in every aspect of life. But it is time again for our usual coffee and donuts. Let me just read aloud for you a poem that I composed as a teenager.'

Behold how good and how pleasant
For brethren to dwell in unity!
When both the rich man and the peasant
Seek no evil with impunity.
For when gentle wisdom upbraideth,
Soon the one the other aideth.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Like precious ointment and like fresh dew,
So special is 'philadelphian' love.
By God's appointment they share th'old pew,
The Spirit, as a dove, hovering above.
For there God commands His rich blessing,
Where all hearts in Love's garb are dressing.

Alas! When all is well and fine,
The restless and wicked heart must say:
"Let there be mischief and let me pine
To disrupt the union, 'n Love betray!"
Pride, fear, vanity make a foul mixture,
Many the vices that tear at Love's texture.

O, Love, give me your gems and treasures!
By you only is virtue power.
And nothing does yield greater pleasures
Than vistas from your heavenly tower.
Ah, Lord, lift me from my ego's dregs,
To walk thy path with strengthened legs!

GOSPEL OF LOVE

And looking up he said with noticeable enthusiasm:

'All virtues hinge on love, my friends. The Bible teaches that love sums up all the laws of responsibility. Actually love is a well of spontaneity, whose waters overflow the boundaries of duty. God is Love!' And with that he sat down and Jocelyn and a few others took care of the refreshments.

'I found your sermon this evening exceedingly interesting, John,' said Chuck. 'Particularly what you had to say about the age old conflict between traditionalism and modernism. This holds even for things like science. But it seems to me that the controversy that has been going on between you and Arthur is also that, a disagreement between modern thinking and established opinion. Perhaps you are too stiff and he too loose, to put it that way.'

'Let me remind you of a few Scriptures, dear Chuck and I'll show you that all tradition isn't bad. A thinker like Hegel was wrong in assuming that progress always means the dissolution of the thesis and the antithesis, or of tradition and opposition, from which conflict the synthesis is born, or the new solution, only for the whole process to be repeated endlessly.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

There is also a good side to tradition. Therefore the Bible says that we must ask for the old paths and warns us not to replace the boundaries of our fathers and that he that breaks down a wall, a serpent will bite him.'

'Yes, John,' started Arthur and John just prayed that he would be spared another monologue, 'but you know probably better than I do that a lot of old boundaries are due to exaggeration. They are undue boundaries and encroach on the rights of the body, so to speak. Those boundaries must be put in the right and the wrongs corrected. Since the beginning of my conversion, thanks to you, John, I have talked to quite a few people and I have done a lot of thinking. And I am both pained and surprised that Christians are so ignorant when it comes to thinking about what to expect in heaven. Dante, the mediaeval Italian, thought much about hell and one of his great lessons is that every vice will have its proper punishment and every evil habit and course of action its own selfinflicting result, how speculating he otherwise may have been.

'Now, I myself like to think about heaven. So, the other day I met somebody from some kind of group called the Assembly. She said that in heaven we will not recognize one another, because else we would feel too much pain about our lost relatives. Also she

GOSPEL OF LOVE

argued that our resurrection bodies will have no blood, since it says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom. I replied that she was totally unthoughtful. I said, "Listen, to what you are saying, 'flesh and blood.' That means that we will have no flesh either. And the Lord clearly showed after His resurrection that He is not a ghost and has flesh and bones." She replied that He had shed all His blood on the cross. I answered her that she was being naive and that that does not mean that we will have no blood.

'Of animals it is said in the Bible that their life is in the blood. Of course the animals in eternity on the new earth will also have blood and so will we. And as to recognition, I told her that that was the stupidest thing I had ever heard. I will certainly recognize my family and I will weep for them a holy weeping and God will comfort me. Man, these people can't think!'

'But you speculate too much,' said John.

'Very well. At least be so gracious as to grant me the liberty to exercise my brain. So I wonder why Lazarus after his temporary resurrection, as well as the Old Testament saints that were resurrected at Christ's crucifixion, continued to sin. The girl I was talking about said that God was mighty enough to give them back their old nature. But this is so naive, it is laughable. As if God would do that!'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'So, what is your point?' asked Charlie.

'Well, I think it must be concluded that we will be delivered from our sinful natures only at the return of Christ, when we receive our glorified and transformed bodies. Apparently sin is so powerful and Satan's work so pervading, that our old Adam is not eradicated upon death. The believers that have passed away to be with Christ not only look forward to that event to receive their immortality, but also their holiness.'

'So, you think that the saints now may be fighting over there, just like us here over theological points!' said John with a sneer.

'No, they are not sinning like us here on earth. They are in the serene presence of the Lord in paradise. It is no doubt all very contained.'

'You certainly set me thinking, Arthur,' said Charlie.

'Using my imagination about heaven,' continued Arthur, 'I think that the very brain cells in our resurrection bodies will grow increasingly refined unto all eternity. For in Christ are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And we will be occupied with His infinite Person to the ages of the ages. And since He and His Father are infinite and we will remain finite, our very brain cells will have to develop along in this everlasting spiritual growing process.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'But what, for goodness' sake, are you trying to accomplish with all these theories?' exclaimed a visibly frustrated John.

'To point our eyes to heaven and to elevate us up from the dirt of this stinking world.'

'I can appreciate that, but I cannot allow you to compromise the blessed Person of Christ in this, as you are doing with your speculation about sex in heaven, of all things!'

'But that is far from my heart, John.'

'Also, I do not think I agree with your idea of an eternal growing process. Everything will be perfect. We will enjoy perfection.'

'Do you think, then, that we will be just as holy as God, from Whom the very Seraphim cover their faces and even their feet, exclaiming "Holy, holy, holy!" No, it should be clear that we will be far from that Perfection and Holiness, with capital p and h, even though as to our humanity we will be like Christ. There will never be a point in heaven at which we will conclude that we have seen it all. Therefore things will grow in relative perfection towards God's absolute Perfection, with a capital p. And He will simply bear with our ignorance on the basis of the sacrifice of His blessed and divine Son.' At this John held his peace.

'Why do you think, Arthur, that God is called male? That is a sexual statement,' asked Marion.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'It is more than that. God does not feel the need for a female goddess equal to Himself, like Adam desired a woman.'

'Are you maintaining, then, that on the one hand God transcends sexuality and that on the other hand He is still male?'

'Yes. This holds true for God the Father, God the Son, as to His divine side and God the Holy Spirit. Three Male Persons in one Triune Divinity, with all capitals. Moses saw only God's hindmost parts and he knew that God is male. Yet, the Bible says about God that He loves more than a woman loves her child. That is why I maintain that God transcends sexuality and incorporates both femininity and masculinity and yet is Male. We must hold on to both truths and not conclude that they are mutually exclusive.'

'But that leaves me with the feeling that my womanhood is secondary to your manhood.'

'No, why? Adam was created first. But in principle Eve was always there. Christ was there from all eternity, but the Church was elected from before the foundation of the earth. Surely the Church is secondary to Christ, but He died for her. You must not allow yourself to think that the Bible makes women out to be inferior. They are equal but different. And in Adam and Eve both have their own

GOSPEL OF LOVE

punishment and responsibility. Feminism is on the one hand a reaction to man's suppression of woman, but on the other hand it is a sick attempt to equate the sexes and make them the same through unisex, functionality and so on.'

'Well, thank you!' said Marion and shut up.

'Coming back now to the other Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham and the rich man in Hades, I take it as evidence that we have an immaterial soul and spirit body. For words like finger and tongue are used in that account.'

'Not so,' butted John in, 'it is symbolic.'

'What do you think then, when we die, will we be like a circle or a triangle, or is it a sphere!' retorted Arthur and Charlie had to grin. 'You probably think also, then, that the white horses of the Apocalypse, on which Christ and the saints return, are symbolical as well?'

'Yes,' said John quietly.

'Not so, my friend. Elijah was taken up by spiritual horses and Ezechiel saw something similar. From Greek mythology we have mythical animals like Pegasus. This is all evidence that there are also animals and things in the spiritual realm, even vegetation such as the tree of life in Revelation. In eternity we will roam both the physical universe and the spiritual universe, which are intertwined somehow.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

The human is unique in being both material and immaterial. O man, when I am a billion years old, I'm gonna throw some party!' And that drew hilariousness from the room and John thought he had to say something.

'In eternity there is no time.'

'Nonsense! All creatures have a beginning and know time. Only God is timeless and above space. In eternity there will be the new, or perhaps renewed earth and the new heaven. So clearly we will experience time. Things will become old and yet remain new. Even God in Daniel is called the Ancient in days. And I presume that the mansions in the Father house were made in the past eternity, before there were angels and before the stars and the earth were, so that even eternity past knew some kind of order of occurrence, even though it must be maintained that God Himself transcends time and space. Then we will not be bothered by dust, rust, or wear 'n tear.' And so Arthur went on a while, John wisely keeping silence, and unwilling to learn from Arthur, so that the conflict remained with all its awkwardness and danger. After Arthur had finished his glowing expectations about eternity there were some questions from the room for John and a few for Arthur. And so another evening passed.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

CHAPTER VII

BLASPHEMY REBUFFED

'Imagine the consequences of this blasphemous theory for the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is far above all these things!'

'Yes, it is really quite awful, I'm afraid,' said John, who was talking over the phone with an elder from his home congregation, telling him about the latest developments of his work.

'John, you may have to cleanse yourself from this man, cut him off like a limb full of gangrene.'

'But then my entire work here will be destroyed. Most people that attend my studies sympathize with him.'

'So what? You are still young. If you have to give up this bunch, so be it.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'But I love them and some of them came into the household of faith through me!'

'That is good, John, very good. I did not expect any less from a devoted disciple like yourself. However, you may have to restrict your love to just praying for them, if they continue in this sex craze. In the hope that the Lord will set them free, ***volens volens***, from this course, this slippery slope.'

'Maybe you are right. Any group in history that called itself Christian and that went wrong in the end, started with allowing some kind of heresy about Christ.'

'Right on. This man, this Arthur, is nothing but a heretic and a little leaven sours the entire loaf. In heaven we will be holy like Christ and entirely free from the needs and passions of our earthly bodies. Now God uses our bodily need so that children will be born. But then we will be free from all physical desire.'

'Arthur would say that the desire for sex is something beautiful in itself and meant to produce progeny for ever.'

'He is right that it is something beautiful. It is not for nothing that the Song of songs is taken up into the Bible. But he is wrong in maintaining that it is meant to be eternal. And he becomes heretical in the compromising implications as to Christ's Person

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Himself. Be careful that you keep yourself untainted, John!' After this conversation John went on his knees before the face of the Creator, committing himself and his work into the will of Him that knows all things.

'Hi, Chuck! How you're doing?' It was Marion meeting Chuck in the street by accident and dressed very sexy with a deep décolletage that showed her cleavage and a very short miniskirt.

'I'm fine and yourself?'

'Great!'

'Well, actually I'm not doing too well. Trouble with the missus.'

'Why don't you come and visit with me? We can talk about it and you can air your feelings. I'm a very good listener and my apartment is close by,' said Marion, looking him into the face with the cutest expression, blinking her long eyelashes.

'I suppose it might be good to share my feelings with somebody else.'

'Sure. You mustn't keep it all to yourself. And sometimes talking it over with someone else will clear the air.' And the two of them walked over to her apartment. It was on the second floor and she had furnished it very cosily. Bamboo chairs were set around a glass coffee table over a sheep's skin. Huge plants decorated the corners. Several lamps

GOSPEL OF LOVE

had been shaded with cloth she had cut herself. In the center of the main wall hung a picture of a beautiful gipsy woman.

'Make yourself at home,' said Marion, while she put down her selftailored hat made from plush on one of the chairs. 'Shall I make some coffee for you?'

'If it isn't too much trouble,' answered Chuck.

'No trouble at all.'

'You have a very nice room, Marion. It is so clean! And what is this scent?' asked Chuck, while she was busy in the kitchen.

'Aromas from exotic leaves and sometimes I burn incense as well.' When she returned and passed him a mug, Chuck noticed a text on it: She that dares not, will always be a virgin.

'What do you think about John, our preacher man?' started Marion.

'I've never met such a knowledgeable preacher before,' answered Chuck.

'That's true, but I find him kind of anachronistic, in certain respects even something like an atavism. He has thought a lot about many things and his research is incredibly immense. I respect that. There seems to be nothing about which he doesn't know at least a little bit. It is all very organized as well. But of course his notions about virtue and sex are hopelessly outdated, not to mention his antifeministic theology.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'He's on the level though,' observed Chuck.

'Tell me about the trouble with the missus,' said Marion.

'To make a long story short, you know my wife is paralyzed from the waste.'

'Yes.'

'She isn't allowed to have any children and that has made her kind of frigid.'

'I would say you do have a problem. Have you two consulted a marriage counselor?'

'We have been visiting a psychiatrist for two years now.'

'You have a serious problem. It must take the fun out of life.'

'It's a major put-down, Marion.'

'Have you considered,' and here she halted.

'What?'

'I don't want to give you any ideas, but have you ever thought about divorce, or involving yourself with a mistress? Of course if that is O.K. with your wife.'

'O, I've thought about that, believe me!' And Chuck leered at Marion, drinking in her pretty figure. 'Arthur claims that we will be making fun for ever, so why not start here, right?'

'That's right, my man!' answered Marion. 'I just love that Arthur with all his naive dreaming, don't you?' And after that the conversation was stranded

GOSPEL OF LOVE

by off-color jokes, mostly by Chuck, whose desire for Marion grew by the second. And when she came over to him, to pour coffee in his mug for the second time, he could not help himself and caressed her behind.

'What are you doing?' she said surprised.

'C'mon,' said Chuck, grabbing her arm, 'let's do the act of foolishness right here and now!' Marion just stood there motionless. But when Chuck touched her breasts, she exploded.

'Get out, you miserable bastard! You guys think that any sexy lady is instantaneously available. Go and screw a whore! Get out, out!' And Chuck, totally overwhelmed, went off with his tail between his legs, leaving Marion behind fuming and fulminating. After this confrontation Chuck drove around in circles through the city, not knowing what to do with his frustration. Then, suddenly, he made up his mind and went to a certain district. Navigating the infamous corner, he slowed down to a crawl and lowering the window he firmly pressed his jaws together, trying to muster strength.

'What will it be, honey?' asked a hooker. 'Blowjobs thirty bucks, the works sixty and for a c-note you can do anything with me your wife doesn't want to! Yeah, you look desperate, you want to poke me the Greek way, don't you, baby?' And she puckered her mouth

GOSPEL OF LOVE

as if giving him a kiss. Chuck hesitated, looking at her long legs, covered by gauzy stockings. He had never done this before. Her pupils were wide with speed and that giggle. A shiver went down his spine as he remembered John and he pulled out of there.

'Shit, I could've made myself a bundle with that fool!' the chagrined prostitute muttered. Then Chuck went to his mother, an understanding widow and he poured out his heart.

'I wonder where Chuck and Marion are. They never missed an evening yet,' said John. It was next Wednesday evening and Charlie, Arthur, Jocelyn and many others had arrived. 'Let's just wait a while yet, maybe they will show up.'

'What I meant to ask you, John,' started Charlie, 'Do you believe in *creatio ex nihilo*, out of nothing? My difficulty with it is that out of nothing can come nothing. You probably have thought about that.'

'Yes, I have and I agree with you. The idea of a creation out of nothing is actually nonsense and contradicts Scripture. Romans eleven verse thirty-six and one Corinthians eight verse six says that all things are out of Him, not out of nothing and through Him and for Him. By the way, here you have the Trinity as well; out of God the Father, through the Holy

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Spirit and for God the Son. And on the Areopagus Paul said that we also are His kind.'

'It is a question, then, of *creatio in nihilum*, into nothing,' observed Charlie.

'Exactly, *et ex illo ipsissimo*, and out of His very self, which is really more applicable of the resurrection body and the new heaven and earth.'

'On a more serious note,' continued Charlie, 'why is it, John, that Christ--and elsewhere in Scripture--says that hell is eternal. Some sects, like the Jehovah's witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists, reason that that would be unjust, since people live only for a few decades?'

'Good question!' said Arthur.

'I think it must be because the punishment fits the crime,' answered John. 'You must realize that by nature we reject an infinitely holy God. It does not have to do with the time span, but with the nature of the sin, which is in a way as infinite, in opposition, as God is infinitely holy.'

'Are we by nature, since the Fall, infinitely evil then,' asked Charlie.

'I think so. The one is more evil than the other in practice, but in principle we all are infinitely wicked and capable of anything. That is deep down in our hearts. Our opposition there against God is irrecoverably wicked. God does not, therefore, seek

GOSPEL OF LOVE

to change us, but He seeks to have us born again,' explained John.

'But how can finite man be infinite in evil?' asked Charlie, who still was not totally convinced.

'We are finite in knowledge, ability and so on. But Proverbs three verse eleven says that God has set the world in our hearts. This can also be translated with 'eternity.' You must realize that when a person rejects God, one does that with a view on eternity. "I don't want you, God, ever!" That is what we say by nature. Is God unjust, then, to reject the sinner also forever? I don't think so.'

'This is very enlightening, John,' said Charlie. 'So, when we curse somebody, which we have done very often in our hearts--more often than not without so many words--as our hearts know very well, according to Solomon; then we actually say, "Go to hell forever!" And I suppose we say G.D., because we dare not curse God Himself more directly.'

'Exactly. But I will begin with my study now. Chuck and Marion just aren't coming.' And as he stood in front of the leather armchair, he wondered whether things were happening to him, or whether he still made them happen. He tried to convince himself that he was still the motor behind developments. But he failed to reassure himself.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'The apostle James,' started John, 'calls upon us to ask God wisdom for ourselves and he adds that we must not doubt in our hearts. For then God cannot give it, as the ways of a doubting man are unstable. Now, why do we often doubt, even experienced Christians? For instance like the disciples who asked the Lord to multiply their faith and the desperate father who besought Jesus with the words "I believe, help my unbelief!" It is because by nature our proud hearts--and I am talking about the old nature, the first and fallen Adam that as bornagains we still carry with us--do not want to receive anything from God.

'We endlessly try to lean on our own understanding. Which is a no-no, a *circulus vitiosus*, a vicious circle. For doing that, you resist the wisdom that comes from above. Before, therefore, we can receive wisdom, we must humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, so He will exalt us in the end with a wisdom of the human heart as the sand that covers the shore of the sea and with every kind of good understanding, becoming fit for every good work. These are all references to Bible verses, by the way and I can give them to you at the end of the evening, or you can look them up in a concordance.'

And here John paused, already worried about the question and answer session that had been practically taken over by Arthur. He did not know what to do with

GOSPEL OF LOVE

that man. It was a line of reasoning he had never encountered before. He was certainly not the first one to come along himself, but this Arthur was something else. He believed in training people up to independence. But what was happening here he just had to consider dangerous and alien to Christianity.

'That we should not lean on our own insights,' continued John his sermon, 'and not be wise in our own eyes, is of the utmost and crucial importance. Rich people seem to be invariably wise in their own eyes, as the Bible says. It is because they are blinded by success and the money and power goes to their heads. But the poor and understanding man, it also says, will search such a rich man out. We must draw strength and insight from God in combining Revelation and reality, under guidance of the Holy Spirit. God wrote two books, nature, or creation and the Bible. And He is writing a third book, history and we all are writers thereof. But nothing happens in history outside God's will, without Whom not even one sparrow falls to the ground. These three books are closely intertwined. Hegel said and I disagree with Hegel on most points, particularly where his pantheistic Christology is concerned, but I fully agree with his statement that history teaches us that people do not learn from history.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'As individuals we can be glad if we correct one or two major mistakes in our lives, but as a collectivity this world is headed for the climax of the beast and the antichrist that leads up to Christ's coming again on mount Olive. From their initial beginnings in the Roman empire, true Christians formed a separate group in this world. Our task is not to save this world-not to wreck it either. For Christ will do that. It is our prime task to worship God through godly lives and to witness to this world, so that through us individuals can come to the faith. Therefore it is of the uttermost importance that we draw strength from God and not try to wing it alone. As babies we were dependent on our parents.

'As we grew up other people played their respective roles in helping us. I am telling you this to drive a point home. As adults we tend to fool ourselves into believing that we must go it alone. And that is true to a certain extent, but Christ advises us to be like the little children in having confidence in God. We can bring all our sorrow, desires, needs and wants to Him. Unbelievers do not have that recourse. When they encounter serious difficulties they often have only two options, either destroy themselves, or take it out on others, or a combination of these two possibilities.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'And I know what I am talking about, as some of you have witnessed in my life. It would have been natural for me to start hating this gang infested city and either grow afraid of these gangs, or to weapon myself somehow against them, through martial arts or with guns. Most people learn to live with this city phenomenon, simply out of necessity. But I learned it through trusting God and I do not shy away from this neighborhood. I am not consumed by fear and hatred. I try to reach out to them.'

And here he halted, catching himself in referrals to himself, but then he thought that it was O.K. 'The Bible says that the strength of sin is the law. Sinners derive strength from the fact that the law forbids what they do. Of course this happens subconsciously where God's laws are concerned. They will rationalize the law away and try to back up their theories and behavior. But there is unholy glee in transgressing the law. It is not just a question of an easy way out. One can derive power from the decision to do what one wants to do. It is playing god against God. On the other side Pharisees and ascetics derive strength from overcharging the law. It is indeed easier, as a reaction to sin, to exaggerate the truth and try to live a very strict life, than to practice the true happy medium, which is open to both

GOSPEL OF LOVE

sides and holds on to the seemingly mutually exclusive principles of life.

'I've said it before. This is the inner tension of the truth. It is seen, among others, in the two sides of responsibility and election, which are often disfigured into either a cheap gospel on the one hand, or a heavy theology of predestination on the other hand. It is seen in openness for the outside world on the one hand and separation on the other. Therefore pharisaism and worse forms of asceticism are also really an easy copout, no matter how hard they may be for the adherents. For our sinful natures derive strength and pleasure from overly accentuating the truth. This is also playing god against God and against and over our fellow men.

'An ancient Greek thinker went around the market place one day, with a lamp in broad daylight in the middle of all the people. When they asked him what he was doing, he answered that he was searching for a human being. Well, my dear friends, Christians have found this human being in Christ and the Bible promises and predicts that one day we will be as Him.'

And John filled that evening with many thoughts of wisdom, producing things new and old from the treasure of his heart, like a true and faithful disciple of the kingdom of God; things he had gleaned from

GOSPEL OF LOVE

others and things God had revealed to himself personally. And after they had consumed coffee, tea, pop and tidbits, most of the students awaited, as if by instinct, the coming discussion. After some time it was Jocelyn who was the first to say something.

'As always you did not fail to impress me with your wisdom, also this evening, John.'

'Thank you!' said John simply.

'But it appears to me and I don't think I stand alone in this, that this disagreement between you and Arthur is because you two hold on to different ends of the truth. You explained yourself repeatedly and clearly that there is tension in the truth. From this tension come both perversion and aversion, because people tend to walk away with one side of the truth, go off on a tangent.'

'Yes, but Arthur got to be wrong, for he compromises the blessed Person of Christ,' responded John with visible awkwardness.

'Why then?' asked Arthur with an innocent face.

'I tried to explain that before and particularly because,' and here he wavered, 'because he implies that--I can't even bring it over my lips.'

'Because I humanize Christ,' put in Arthur. 'I do not dehumanize Him, John. That is what certain sinful and disrespectful writers have done in their two penny

GOSPEL OF LOVE

books and films. I don't have to mention the blasphemous dirt they produced.'

'No, you had better not,' said John.

'It seems to me that you tend to accentuate Christ's divinity and I His humanity. Both are sides of the truth, as you have distinctly taught us, showing us from Scripture that Christ could tell Peter to catch a fish with the money for tax in its mouth, but also that He had grown tired from a journey and that He needed sleep. As a human He does not even know the time of His return to earth, but He leaves that in the hands of the Father. As a baby He was also God the Son and Luke two says that He advanced in wisdom and stature both with God and people. He had drunk milk from His mother's breasts, had learned to speak and read the Old Testament, from which He quoted to the devil. At a very young age He surprised the teachers of His time with incredibly intelligent questions and answers and He knew already then that God Himself is His Father. No, I do not want to compromise the holy Person of Christ, John. I realize very well that where Adam failed under perfect conditions, Christ stood firm in the desert, proving that He is the real thing, pure gold in His humanity. But what I am trying to make clear to you, is that He also as a man had sexuality. He wouldn't have been human otherwise. And I believe that now also in His

GOSPEL OF LOVE

resurrection body He is that, a man, human every inch. He has been tempted by the devil on all accounts, so that He could sympathize with us, apart from sin. He could look at a woman and appreciate her beauty, without going one fraction beyond propriety, even in His thoughts, yes even in His subconscious. Now, if you would only show some willingness in exploring this, then we would all benefit from your knowledge and insights.' Arthur had spoken with patience, relaxed and almost as a good brother, or even a father.

'Yes, you yourself have tried to show us time and again that the truth is seated on a knife's edge,' put Jocelyn in. Arthur does not want to teach anything against the Bible, like heresies such as that the Lord only became the Son upon the Incarnation as if there had been three undefined Persons in the Trinity from all eternity, or that we aren't really saved through His blood that He shed on Calvary, but by His death primarily. The Bible clearly states that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission and His blood is called precious. Arthur does not want to confuse Christ's humanity and divinity with comparisons to metal alloys, as if the two blessed natures are a confusion of workmanship. You taught us all these things very well. It is not Arthur's intention to bring Christ down in any way.' At this John just

GOSPEL OF LOVE

could not keep his composure. Insecurity was written all over him. So Arthur chose to continue.

'That children will be born forever, isn't that clearly implied in Ephesians three verse twenty-one, which ends in the phrase "to all generations of the age of the ages." The word generation in the Bible refers to people being born, as in "an adulterous generation." Now, here is even spoken of generations, in the plural, as if to stress that there will be no end to child-birth in eternity. I understand your serious difficulty with this idea. But the fact that we will know no marriage, does not mean that there will be no definite rules and laws. The law as we know it now in the Bible will one day end, as Christ implied in saying that no jot or tittle will pass until all things are fulfilled. Apparently God will give us other rules in eternity.'

'Thou hast kissed the blarney stone,' interrupted John.

'I know what you mean by that,' said Arthur, wagging his index finger at John. 'You are not using that expression in the sense of cajoling, but in the connotative sense of talking cunningly.' And John hardly gave a nod, keeping his head stiff and eyes hard.

'Maybe you will also claim, then, that there will also be sex in hell?'

'Who knows?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'You see, this is totally going in the direction of craziness!'

'Unbelievers will also have an eternal and immortal resurrection body, at the last day, when even the sea will give up its dead.'

'To be thrown into the lake of fire, yes, after they have been judged before the great white throne according to their works.'

'Yes and Christ is the man in the parable of the field that was bought to possess the treasure found in it. This field is the universe with all people, angels and demons and this treasure is all believers. Unbelievers have also been bought by Him, but not bought free and due to their rejection of Him they will be purified unto all eternity through the purging and purgatorial fire of eternal hell. In which their resurrection bodies will also be male and female.'

'Which reminds me of a sinner who told me that he preferred going to hell, because the prostitutes will be there as well,' retorted John.

'To which I simply say that it is unthinkable that God will permit any sin, either by demons or humans, in hell. Hell is all about righting all the wrongs man and demon did and about retribution, both for the good sinners did in their lives and also the evil. You are right, by the way, that the deciding factor in going to heaven or hell is not the outweighing of the good

GOSPEL OF LOVE

over evil, or vice versa, but whether people believed God--or whether they rejected Him--as Job and Abraham, whose faith was imputed as righteousness.

'And indeed after the cross there is no name but Christ through which one can be saved. It seems pretty logical to me that people cannot be punished for the good things they do during their lives. They are punished because they reject God and really still crucify Christ, by implication, in that they want to earn their own righteousness. It is this evil, as well as all their vices in shortcomings and exaggerations that have eternal repercussions and implications, that entangle them forever and for which we have received deliverance. Unbelievers are like the slaves in the household of the Father of the prodigal son.'

'No, those slaves refer to the holy angels that are serving spirits,' interrupted John.

'Perhaps, but unbelievers are like slaves that work for hire. They don't want to accept God's grace for free, but want to earn their own reward.'

'But how in this world can you conceive such foolishness. Children born in hell! They wouldn't deserve that.'

'Maybe those children will not experience hell as hell,' answered Arthur, trying to defend himself.

'No, because hell, that is the lake of fire, as distinguished from Hades, which will be thrown into it

GOSPEL OF LOVE

and where unbelievers go now, is a place for lost souls, not a state of the soul.'

'Maybe the children born there will be translated into heaven.'

'And only to miss their parents and they them.'

'Well, maybe there will be no sex in hell. Who cares? But certainly there will be children born in heaven and most certainly on the new and eternal earth. What I am trying also to make clear to you, is that your view on Christ's humanity is also really an exaggeration. You seem to think that He never for one second thought about sex. But He that invented sex, would He have ignored it in His humanity? And also now, seated at the right hand of God, He is a male.'

'Now, there you have it, finally,' interrupted John. 'This is nothing but blasphemy! I could have accepted it if you had maintained that Satan tested Christ on His feelings for women, because it says that He was tested on all points.'

'He was not only tested on His feelings for women, like any healthy man He is not without the possibility of producing offspring. But of course He has the gift of abstinence if ever anybody had it. He does not go sick with longing for a woman.'

'In His resurrection body it is unthinkable that He has longings in that direction. Possibly before that He

GOSPEL OF LOVE

had male sexuality, but not after, for it is written that we will be like the angels and like Him.'

'Listen, John,' said Arthur patiently, 'After His resurrection, now, Christ is also every inch human. I say that respectfully. It must be maintained that now also He is a male.'

'Man, don't you understand that all the women would want children from Him and that the result would be contaminations?'

'No, but I understand now that Christ could not have had children here on earth. It would have been a mingling of a perfect race, a holy race, with a fallen one and that indeed would have produced contaminations. But in heaven the believing women will also be holy and His divinity will not be passed on through His human sexuality, which is a theological impossibility; since God is absolutely unique. It is the character of God that He is One and will be so forever.'

'And that is where your blasphemy comes in. You separate the two natures of Christ's One and unique Person. In fact, you tear them apart and bring His humanity down to our level. In this tearing apart you are like the Nestorians.'

'Why then does it say in first John that we will be like Him, which clearly refers to His humanity and not His divinity?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Here essential knowledge of the Greek is necessary. In first John three, which you are referring to, it does not say *homos*, but *homoios*, that is not exactly like Him, but similar to Him, resembling Him. Christ's One and absolutely unique Person, consisting of both humanity and divinity, is certainly after His resurrection holy, holy, holy and the seraphim cover both their faces and feet from Him; to remind you of your own words. Him has been given all power in heaven and upon earth.'

'So without realizing it, then, I fell into a heresy, similar to those Nestorians you mentioned?'

'Yes.'

'May God forgive me!'

'Indeed.' And at this it was quiet for some time and John thanked God.

'But then I do not understand Christ's humanity anymore. You agree with me that Satan tested Him on sexuality, for it says that He was tempted in all things and that He learned obedience as a human through the things He suffered.'

'It says in Hebrews four that He has been tested in all things similarly, or according to resemblance, again not exactly like, and without sin. That is, it did not produce the result Satan intended. You seem to think that Christ's humanity is exactly like yours and of course without sin. But your humanity is fallen and

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Christ's humanity is called holy, whereas Adam's was simply innocent. Now, there is such a thing as innocent sex, intended before the Fall and undefiled sex by fallen humans after the Fall, both by believers and unbelievers. But, my friend, there is no such thing as holy sex. God is indeed called Male and I agree with you that at the same time He transcends sexuality in the human sense. It is a heresy to claim that Christ in His humanity was exactly like us as to our sexuality. For our sexuality is subject to the Fall. He was similar to us and the Bible is silent about what that means exactly. I suggest to you that you wait and ask Him about it in heaven.'

'So I goofed, but,'

'You suggested blasphemy, which is injury to the divinity.'

'I retract it. *Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*. But that does not mean that I was wrong on the other points.'

'I think it does. Marriage was instituted before the Fall, not after, so that it is clearly temporary and not meant for eternity.'

'Yes, but take notice that sex was created by God before the Fall as something to last forever and so He will restore it in our resurrection, not Christ's then, to an even greater glory.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'It was meant forever. I can go along with that, but it will end and be replaced by something of greater glory.'

'I simply refuse to accept that and I stand by the Scriptures I quoted before. I admit that I involved the holy Person of Christ in this discussion and that I compromised my Creator, claiming that He is like me, whereas He is infinitely above me. And I see now that one cannot be careful enough and that the fallen heart indeed wants to be like God, which is the original sin that we inherited and that lies at the basis of all sins and sinfulness. Fallen humans either seek to lift themselves up to the divinity, or they drag the divinity down to their level. But that does not have to mean that I am wrong on the other points. I moved too far to the left, but you move too far to the right. Whereas I dragged Christ down, you lift us up too much. Solomon said that like iron sharpens iron, so a man a man. Let me remind you, John, of that famous text in Romans eight, which you have sometimes used to point our hope to heaven. I quote: If God then has not spared His own Son, but has delivered Him over for us all, how will He not give us with Him all things, unquote. Now, according to certain exaggerated Christians this means exactly the opposite of what it says. No sex in heaven, no children, no recognition and so on. But it means that

GOSPEL OF LOVE

we will be blessed with any good thing imaginable! I have heard one ignorant Christian claim that there is no language in heaven, because it says that languages will stop.'

'What is your interpretation then of one Corinthians thirteen, for that is what you are referring to, isn't it?' asked Charlie.

'Yes. First Corinthians thirteen verse eight. Of course it means that languages like English, Spanish and French will end, but only to be replaced with celestial languages. If one cannot envision that, there is no discussion possible. Christ Himself is called the Word, or Logos. Language does not just seem to be an integral part of our hearts, but of God's. Perhaps, by the way, Hebrew will not end.' And he looked around for a reaction, to which Jocelyn responded.

'Why?'

'Because in all likelihood Hebrew is the antediluvian language. For the genealogical accounts in Genesis four and five are in Hebrew. It is very unlikely that Moses translated these names.'

'Now, that is an interesting statement. Maybe I can learn something from you after all,' said John, trying his best to deal with Arthur.

'I think so,' answered Arthur. 'So I think that the constituents of our being, namely the body, mind, soul, spirit, conscience and will, are now like the

GOSPEL OF LOVE

addends in a sum and they are headed up in our hearts. But in the resurrection body they will be so many factors in a continued product and our hearts will be so much more expanded. To use an arithmetical allegory. Hardened sinners have a motto, "In heaven there is no beer, therefore we drink it here!" But I tell you, according to Judges nine verse thirteen even God drinks wine.' To which John did not react, but looked as if he wavered between surprise and frustration.

'As long as you do not forget about the other Scriptures that warn against liquor,' cautioned Charlie.

'Indeed. That is the fine art of living, being careful on the one hand, spiritually filled with the Holy Spirit and on the other hand availing oneself of the pleasures God grants us.'

'But it is time for you folks to skedaddle, it has become later than ever,' said John. At which they all started to leave. At the door John cautioned Arthur.

'Ponder what I told you.'

'O, yes. But you can also learn from me, John.' And at the door Arthur said to Jocelyn.

'Watch out for mortar mice, Jocelyn!'

'Mortar mice?' asked John with an inquisitive look.

'Yes, it is a joke,' answered Jocelyn. 'Arthur had a little article published in the community bulletin about supposed mortar mice that eat away at the foundation

GOSPEL OF LOVE

of your house, mainly the mortar between the blocks and he had all kinds of house wives worried sick. He had advised them to have their basements replaced by walls of solid, reinforced concrete. But the plague of mortar mice is a figment of the imagination!' This drew a healthy laughter from John.

'Actually our vices in our shortcomings and exaggerations are like mortar mice. They eat away at the foundation of our personality,' commented Arthur.

'Quite so, quite so,' responded John.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

CHAPTER VIII

EXCOMMUNICATION

It was Saturday afternoon and Chuck was walking down the street and his conscience was bothering him awfully. He had read in the Bible that fornicators cannot inherit the kingdom of God and that such people are outside, which had reminded him of the uttermost darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. He had been shocked back to his senses. But not whole-heartedly. It was in this frame of mind that he chanced upon John, who was doing his routine of knocking on doors.

'Hi Chuck, you are looking a bit sullen, what's up?' asked John. And he started out complaining about his destiny with a paralyzed wife. Also he complained about Arthur.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'I had become a lot more open and relaxed about sex through Arthur and when I visited pretty Marion I almost molested her. She doesn't take things so seriously either, you know. I kept hearing her say as it were: "Come to mama! Yes, let go of yourself and all that tension." Which is something I heard her say once, but not in a sexual context.' And he recounted what had happened. Also that he had almost made use of a public woman. And he shifted the blame partially on Arthur. This chagrined John to no end and he started looking for Arthur to give him a piece of his mind. Finally he found him at Mrs. Weber's.

'Hello John,' said Arthur cheerfully and then he noticed the thunder cloud face and his own expression sobered up and he became guarded, realizing more than ever that his relation with John had become strained. John ordered a coffee and Mrs. Weber brought it to him. There was a silence between the two friends that one could cut as it were. Then John started out.

'I resent these developments with a holy anger.'

'What developments?' asked Arthur after some time with all the innocence in the world. 'I cannot see that in eternity we will be sexless, so help me God!'

'Please, please, stop your peep show on heaven. I'm getting sick of it!'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'As I tried to explain to you,' continued Arthur, 'Christ Himself is still a male. That is a sexual statement. Everything in this universe seems to be intensely sexual. Even the sun has the moon.'

'We will be as the angels, neither marrying, nor giving into marriage. When will that sink into your greasy head? Your mind and heart are totally befuddled!'

'I know that and accept that. But that does not take away the fact that angels are sexual beings as well. Sex won't be considered evil in heaven. Every time you think of heaven, you return to the notion that sex is evil. At least in your subconscious. This is mediaeval. You make it a dirty word.'

'Do you think, then, that in heaven we will be promiscuous?'

'No, definitely not. There will be rules of conduct, just as here below. And everybody that abides already here by those rules, reaps their benefits. In heaven women will probably be virgins as well, the significance of which is that they are meant for one man, just as here.'

'Sex outside of marriage is promiscuity. You talk like a Moslem or Mormon, man. This isn't a Christian notion that you entertain.' And in response and out of deference to John's great wisdom, Arthur started speculating.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'John, you do not realize what God is capable of. Maybe,' and here he groped for ideas, 'maybe we will be androgynous, or something. Or, yes, maybe the same thing will happen to us as to Adam. Every man will suddenly have a woman out of himself and vice versa. Yes, maybe angels are so strongly masculine and feminine that in fact they are double.'

'You are out of it! I told you before. In Christ there is no male or female.'

'I am in my right mind. The whole problem is that you suppress sex as something evil every time you think of heaven. And as to the fact that there is no male or female in Christ, that does not mean that we will be sexless 'its.' It means that as to matters of faith and salvation men and women are completely equal.'

'They are equal now, but different. Now the woman is the glory of the man as the Church is the glory of Christ. But not then.'

'Both will be true also then and in this they are not equal, but is the man supposed to be the leader. John, you carry a New Testament in the original Greek with you at all times. You have already at this age read the Bible tens of times in the original languages and you fail to see that texts like Ephesians three verse twenty-one clearly imply children being born in eternity.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'You discovered this text after you had made up your mind already. Naturally I doubt your interpretation of it.'

'I can only conclude that you are mistaken and blinded by prejudice.'

'O.K. you leave me no other alternative. I forbid you to attend my Bible studies from now on.'

'You can't just shut me out like that! I love these people and I still have a lot to learn from you. And I also love the Lord, just as much as you do.' And Arthur was taken aback.

'O yes, I can! It is my house.'

'You ignorant little preacher!' burst out Arthur. 'How can you conceive that language was given to Adam and to the angels before him? How can you understand that language comes directly from God, Who is infinite in understanding and that angels have a hierarchy of perfect and celestial speech, where a word becomes deeper in meaning as you progress in the hierarchy? Christ is indeed called the Word and Paul refers to tongues of angels. How could you possibly conceive that both reason, ratio and ratiocination derive from God's infinite Mind, as well as Revelation? You have not learned sufficiently to develop your mind, while being illuminated by Revelation under guidance of the Holy Spirit! You are a little parrot! I wish you would repeat Scripture only.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

But you also prattle the nonsense of narrowminded tradition.' Arthur drew his breath and it was John's turn to be taken aback a little. Then the latter asked:

'Where do you get all this from? Are you having visions?'

'Pure intellect, man, pure intellect guided by Revelation.'

'Sci-fi all you want, as long as you do not contradict the Holy Bible.'

'I'm trying to show you that my line of thinking does not necessarily have to be a contradiction. In fact you have spoken the delivering word, John, without realizing it.'

'What's that?' One of your trick reasons again?'

'You have rightly concluded from first John that we will be similar to Christ, not exactly like Him, *homoios* and not *homos*. Christ is Holy and indeed He was called "this holy thing." We will never be like Him in this holiness. It is your high expectations of us that makes you to wish in your heart too much to be like Him. Christ will never bear children. You have explained very well that that would mean that His humanity is torn from His divinity. I indeed erred similarly to the Nestorians in this. But you and I and all the believers will engender offspring forever. I see now again that also in you there is pride, the main sin of us all. Therefore you know things too well, or

GOSPEL OF LOVE

rather you think you do. This causes you to fail in differentiating between yourself and others. Actually you still tend to see people and to a lesser extent God, as an extension of yourself. And if you cannot find yourself in others, you hurt like a little cry baby.'

'O, I realize, Arthur, that I am a fallible human, a failing human, just like the pope and anybody else for that matter. I do not just sin continually, or intermittently, but sin in us is continuously present, every split second, in the subconscious of our rebellious hearts. That is why it says in Jeremiah seventeen verse nine that the heart is crooked and desperately, or mortally wicked. And Paul said that he knew that in him, that is in his flesh--his fallen nature--there dwells no good. In that respect Genesis six verse five is true for all of us at all times. The Bible refers in these verses to the evil motivation behind our noblest deeds.'

'If you know that so well and I do not doubt it, for you are a better depth psychologist than I am--because of your great love for the truth. Then why are you so judgmental about me? Don't you realize that Christ said that we will be judged with the measure we have applied to others? Don't you see that before God's countenance there is also place for me?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Yes, but that does not mean that we must allow anything. A very perverted person could use that argument to hide behind his own shortcomings.'

'What I am maintaining is not just anything. Just as certain animals are monogamous in behavior, maybe so the angels.'

'Are you suggesting that angels are like animals?'

'In certain respects, yes. For instance in the fact that they are meant to serve humans. Man's position between animal and angel is unique. It is not simply a question of a hierarchy from rock, vegetation, animal, man, angel to God. Man is indeed the crowning work of creation. Christ became a man, not an angel. And so marriage is unique and restricted to the temporary history of earth, as a picture of Christ and the Church. In heaven we will be with Christ and do not anymore act this out directly. So I like to imagine myself in heaven like a lion with a pride of lionesses around me, forever mine, or like an eagle soaring with his eagless towards God as the Sun of Light, Life and Love, being carried by the thermal updrafts of His Spirit. Or like a whale with his companion diving to the bottomless depths of mystery.' While Arthur was going on John kept shaking his head, partly out of disbelief and partly out of surprise. Then he said with great frustration:

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'More like an orang-outang enjoying a bit of unnatural solipsism!' And then immediately, 'I'm sorry, I take that back!' But Arthur was not to be disturbed in his flights and hardly noticed the insult, till it dawned upon him and he answered.

'Good grief, you are turning on me!'

'I'm sorry, Arthur, but I will not allow this to continue. From now on you are barred from participating in my Bible studies.'

'This sounds like an excommunication.'

'Whatever.'

'You bloody Pharisee!' exploded Arthur. 'Good-bye then and he got up and started walking out. After a few steps he turned around and raising his voice he almost shouted: 'Do the locomotion with me, baby!' And he said this twisting his body as if he were on a dance floor.

'I have some disturbing news, Charlie.' It was John on the phone with Charlie the Monday evening after.

'What's wrong, John?' asked Charlie.

'My father suffered a heart attack and I am leaving for Memphis at once.'

'O my! How is he doing? He didn't pass away did he?'

'His condition is somewhat stabilized. But he is in intensive care. I heard you were looking for an

GOSPEL OF LOVE

apartment. Are you interested to take mine? I am stuck to the contract for another half year.'

'What's this, John, aren't you coming back?'

'No, I'm not. Perhaps you can come over and discuss these things with me. The elders of my home congregation are calling me back, over what happened with Marion and Chuck and because of Arthur's increasing influence.'

'But Arthur cannot be blamed for that!'

'I'm leaving this godforsaken city of demons! It is not a city of angels at all.'

'I can think of one little angel that saved me. I'll come over at once.' A long conversation followed, but John was not to be dissuaded despite Charlie's efforts and finally, as usually, a religious discussion developed.

'I think,' said John, 'that the ancient dogmatic formulary of "truly, perfectly, indivisibly, unconfusedly," is also applicable to the human and divine side of the Bible, just as to the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures. This has great theological significance. Because it means that we, fallible humans, can be inspired by God.'

'What are your thoughts, John,' asked Charlie, 'about the idea by higher critics that the Gilgamesh epic was used by the author of the account of Noah's flood?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Nonsense! In the Gilgamesh epic the ark is a cube, which is a nautical fiasco. But this epic goes back to the same event and is a tradition corrupted by time. The measurements of Noah's ark in the Bible are very modern in their sea-worthiness, so much so that I know of one ship magnate who used them for his oil tanker, after his ship builders failed to come up with a plan after months of deliberation. Be watchful, my friend, not to be influenced by so-called higher critics and modern theology in general, which is by and large just a phase Western society is going through. There is only one highest critic and that is God and we do good to subject ourselves to Him. And ultimately He is His own theologian. These critics have presumed to analyze the Holy Bible, but they leave no piece intact in the end. They begin to deny the historical existence of Adam and Eve and they end up destroying the historicity of Christ's work on the cross. If Adam never existed, then God is indeed the author of sin and death. That makes Him worse than the devil. But what does the Bible say? "Through one man sin came into this world" and so death. The Bible also says of these theologians that they have gone the way of Balaam and of their female followers it is said that they always teach, but never come to the truth. These bastards have been spawned by the devil and his imps to lead unknowing

GOSPEL OF LOVE

souls further astray. At best they profess a measure of godliness, but they deny the power of it. They are rapers of truth and are guilty of hollowing out Christianity. They feed their followers with myths, while claiming that they take the myths out of the Bible and so present the truth. They keep their audiences busy with social and political talk, but so doing they break down what little Christianity is left. These people also claim that the beloved apostle Paul was a woman hater. But Paul exhorted men to love their women like Christ loved the Church, giving Himself over to death. Learn from them what you can, but know that you are taking asps into your bosom. But perhaps you are capable of handling snakes. But to what knowledge you may attain, remember Paul's words that if anyone considers himself wise in this age, let him become foolish, so that he may be wise. You are a very intelligent young man, Charles and you have it in you one day to go places. But never forget Paul's caution along with Solomon's advice never to be wise in one's own eyes and not to lean on your own understanding. Selfconceit is the surest way to foolishness and pride goes before falling. You must always remain open to God's guidance. By the way, you are a very good listener!

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'It is because I respect you and want to learn from you. But you do not think that theology and philosophy are evil in themselves, I hope?'

'Of course not. Only the Bible warns us that we could be made spoil by the contemporary *Zeitgeist*. Much, if not most theology--which is philosophy about God--comes into this world, because the person of Christ is not appetizing to our hearts. And so, just as the Israelites became disgusted with the manna, we try to make Christ appealing to ourselves. Now, Christ is our manna and the world is a desert and we try to pound, bake and work this manna, also just like the Israelites. Until they started longing for quails. And so we can fall into perversion.

'However some go beyond the right proportion and fall into aversion. Just as it was essential for the Israelites to simply eat the manna and live, so we must simply love Christ and His Father, through the Holy Spirit, to reach--and grow till--the end of our journey.'

'I have noticed that you have never tried to prove the existence of God, other than your inverted proof of evil.'

'It is a matter of faith. God is altogether too high to be proven. He is not a laboratory subject. However the Bible does maintain that there is sufficient evidence in creation, if only we open up our hearts.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Sceptics say that there can be no God because of horrible evils such as volcanoes and cancer. Superstitious people claim that these evils are the other side of the same coin. But the Bible teaches that everything is a result of our choice and that of our first parents. If one rejects that in any shape or form, one does not believe God. And how necessary is it in these things to take refuge behind Christ's blood. All religions and philosophies teach that we must save ourselves, but Christianity teaches that only Christ can save us from ourselves.

'In ancient times Christ was indeed hidden behind sacrifices and ceremonies, but now we must openly accept Him. To reject Christ, is to disbelieve God and to spurn His love and wisdom. The God of the Bible must be right and Christ must truly be the only Savior, just because all the evil is so stark in its overwhelming horror. Both sceptics and superstitious people totally fool themselves in trying to go it alone. And indeed it is really because they refuse to be saved. They come with an endless list of objections, because they love themselves more than the truth. They stay away from the light, just because they love the darkness of their own hearts. And deep in their hearts they want to justify themselves over against God. Our proud hearts do not want Him; we only want ourselves.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'I gather from your teachings, John, that God is not good in the simple human sense.'

'Certainly not. A human judge, or policeman, is supposed to prevent murder, when they hear about it. But God may have ordered demons to incite the whole affair, because of some higher reason that we have no clue about. His ways are higher than ours as much as the heavens are higher than the earth.' And teacher and pupil conversed till late into the night.

It was the next day and Charlie had brought John to the airport. John had given the keys of his apartment to Charlie as well as the furniture, which was second hand anyway. His books Charlie would send later. They were early and as always they started talking.

'I would like to come briefly back to your idea of a creation into nothing,' observed John. 'To say that nothing existed from all eternity besides God, is a *contradictio in terminis* and a similar mistake as the ancient Greek idea that matter is eternal. Human language and understanding fails here. It would be more correct to state that God created the universe out of Himself, as Scripture says and into the nothingness that came into existence also with that powerful act. Moreover, who is to deny that the nothingness of space is not full of spiritual reality?

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Ultimately creation is nothing in itself. Even angels are nothing in themselves. We live by the grace of God, Who according to Hebrews one verse three upholds all things through the word of His power.

'I do not want to enter a fruitless debate whether, or in how far, things are what they are. The truth must be sought in a correct balance of dynamism and static *Ding an sich*, I suppose. It would be pantheism, however, to suppose that creation exists only in God, rather than by Him, or that the eternal 'ideas' are one with God. Creation is God's thought, but that does not make its principles one with Him. That God knew from all eternity what He once would make, does not make us one with, or part of Him. He gave us real existence and the responsibility that goes with it. Therefore all philosophical theories, all acts, emotions, any thought and whatever we could imagine: if it does not depend on God, nor is motivated by earnest desire to seek His infinite love and justice; is vanity, pride, yes evil against His majesty.

'Evil is not simply nothing, a *privatio boni*. Evil is rebellion against God, according to everything He created in us. Evil is the stark bastardization, the total abuse of our freedom. Theologians tend to either diminish God's infinite power, His infinite love and justice, or the stark reality of evil. Evil is real. In its

GOSPEL OF LOVE

horror by us, or in its horror brought over us by Satan, who is the murderer and liar from the beginning. Evil is not simply the absence of good, but the wilful opposite of good, deliberately meant to strike back against God.'

'I suppose you would agree that most people are not conscious of this rebellion and that it exists subconsciously then.'

'Most certainly, but God can bring it to light in a person and convict his or her conscience. If people would be aware of what they are doing, they would all repent. But they wilfully keep it out of their consciences. But no matter how horrible evil is, either by humans or demons, God is greater and He will judge it, sorting it all out.'

'What about the mocking trick question whether God is able to make a star so heavy that He cannot lift it anymore Himself?' At which John thought for a few seconds, realizing that Charlie put that question to him not to be a nuisance.

'This question supposes that God's abilities aren't all equal in their infinitude. And it is meant to make us think that even God has His limits. No matter how heavy the star would be, He would always be able to move it, because none of His abilities are limited. God cannot be limited in any way. That is why He is God and all creation a speck on His scale. Yes, He

GOSPEL OF LOVE

could fill the entire universe with solid matter, so much so that movement does not even exist anymore. But would that crowd out His infinitude? If He had created an infinite universe, with infinitely solid matter, without any subatoms and sub-subatoms—which theory shows by the way that ultimately we exist by His power, for there is no such thing as infinitesimality, there must be a smallest most basic particle, neither such a thing as infinitely great in creation, in either number or greatness; because everything in creation is relative to His absoluteness: which shows that the smallest particle is the real atom, the uncuttable one, being directly dependent on God—then humanly speaking not even God could move this, but it would have been by His own will and only goes to show that movement is simply a creational aspect.

‘And yet this kind of useless and imaginative creation would be nothing in itself. For matter is just matter and God is Spirit. Indeed He would not be able to move it materially, but spiritually He could still kick it around like a kid a ball. We reach here the limits of science, philosophy and theology. Movement is used in the trick question to attack God. Movement is part of creation, therefore it is theologically illogical to suppose that movement could become impossible for God in matter crowding out its possibility. If you think about it, then this question tries to inflate

GOSPEL OF LOVE

creation to the detriment of the creator and the evil in it is that the one who invented this question wants to put himself on an equal footing with God.

'But the good that can come out of this question, to anyone that is willing to see it, is that, yes, God has His limits. First of all, He will not put up with evil forever, without judging it appropriately. God is not some kind of Saint Nick that can only bless, or some kind of terribly naive do-gooder. God is also just, but He is no bogeyman either. He gives us a choice. And He puts up with us as long as it takes.

'The problem with the evil in our hearts and that of demons, is that we cannot accept that God thrones infinitely and absolutely above us. Our relatively infinite pride makes us jealous of His absolutely infinite greatness. Creation is indeed infinite and so are we, but our infinitude is relative to creation's and that again to God's. One infinitude can indeed be greater than another. Secondly, God cannot sin. He is also absolute in His goodness and rectitude. And this reminds me of the prophet Micah, who saw all the spirits, both angels and demons, standing before God. Arthur and all those Pentecostals and mystics that dabble in the spirit world, going into things that they have no clue about and losing their prize in the process through their vainglorious curiosity, should think better about this revelation to Micah.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'They think they are so illuminated, but they are not. Those evil and lying spirits could only act because of the evil of humans. Adam chose evil and so we do choose it. The more evil a deed, the more the damage and so one can land in a vicious circle that pulls us down like a spiraling vortex. We are blinded to the degree that we are involved in evil and sanctification through the Bible under the direction of the Holy Spirit, will illuminate us more and more in a benefacious upwards spiraling circle.

'Also, those spirits were not only acting because of their own evil, but as a job from God. They cannot act without God allowing it, or even ordering it.

'Which brings me to the next point. The Bible says in Deuteronomy that the hidden things belong to God. But both sceptics and superstitious people cannot accept that. The former deny God and various things that have to do with Him, the latter go too far and become entangled in dabbling in occult things. The former build sceptic philosophies around themselves and the latter superstitious ones. Both tend to relativize evil. The former by being too intellectual about it, the latter by being too mystical about it. Both are blinded by evil pride. The former by turning too much to the external side of creation, the latter by turning too much inwards. And some people are torn apart into both directions.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Which goes to show again, what I have been saying all the time, that one must guard one's heart more than anything that is to be guarded and keep everything in balance. Else one will become lopsided and either grow one way or the other, or be torn apart by both sides. Which brings me back to the problem of evil, which is great indeed. We cannot blame God, or Satan for that matter, for our evil. We choose it ourselves. Satan only triggers it. He does not cause it in us. He caused it in himself and we caused it in ourselves in Adam. In the end, when everything has been said and done, one must bow down before God. Both sceptics and superstitious people are ignorant and gullible. The former insult Him, the latter cloud Him up. It is God's greatness that puts up with evil in humans and demons. God isn't struggling. Proud humans and demons struggle with Him. Evil is not a necessary by-product of creation. Creatures willingly choose it. I will always believe that God only willed the possibility of evil, to see how we react. We are not puppets. And yet Christ says that He has elected people. Election does not depend on my choice for good, yet it is also my own choice. Also this is a mystery that is unfathomable.'

'I would say that there is another thing God cannot or will not do, because He has committed Himself.'

'And that is?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'To turn back time. There is something absolute about history. This does not mean that God is not almighty. He could have made a universe where time is so relative that even the simplest creatures could time travel. But He has given us responsibility and we have to live with our choices and actions. One day He will wipe off the tears of all those that love Him. But the idea that time is relative to the degree that it can be turned back, is a theological and philosophical mistake.'

'I fully agree.' And the two friends talked on till John's flight was announced over the intercom. They promised they would keep in touch.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

CHAPTER IX

GOD'S INFINITE GREATNESS

The next Wednesday evening Charlie was breaking the news to John's students. They had all turned up expecting John there, but instead they found out that Charlie lived there now.

'My dear friends and fellow students, there is nobody among us that can take John's place. Christ said that anyone that is a student of the kingdom, produces things new and old from his treasure. Well, John did that. He said things only he could have thought of and also he repeated age old truths in such a way as to convince even me that the Bible is indeed for all times,' said Charlie.

'What about Arthur, maybe he can take over?' somebody suggested. And all eyes turned to Arthur.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'I do not think that that is such a good idea. I do like to think a lot about various things, but I am no match for John. I could not educate you. We are on our own again,' reacted Arthur.

'I agree,' said Charlie.

'I really resent this abrupt development, Arthur. You are to blame for this,' said Jocelyn.

'John would say with the Bible that one must learn not to build one's trust on princes and that the man who makes man his support, is accursed,' he answered her.

'I know that. But John is an evangelist, shepherd and teacher all in one and I had wanted to learn a lot more from him,' she complained.

'Well, if I am really to blame, then I am sorry and I apologize. But I surmise that it is not as simple as that. Don't make me the scapegoat. I see now that I was developing what you might call a bit of monomania. In comparison with John I am but a one-track mind.'

'Indeed,' observed Charlie. 'I was growing a bit tired of you, Arthur. We thank it to you that a man of John's stature has left us. I advise you to get married.'

'According to John's theory, that I have also come to believe in, John reacted into aversion due to my perversion. And both of us failed to be transformed

GOSPEL OF LOVE

and grow on in Christ in this respect,' answered Arthur.

'John would say,' set out Charlie, 'that there is a flagrant contradiction in you, namely that on the one hand you are too intellectual and on the other hand too mystical. He would argue that you haven't learned rightly to balance faith and reason. Paul warns us in Colossians two not to be made prey by philosophy, nor to lose the prize because of mysticism.

'What John has been trying to explain to us, without becoming too technical, is to point out that human reason, emotion, religion and behavior can be analyzed by a universal theory of wisdom. The variables are practically all the aspects of our lives, but he has highlighted a few by the assumption--very true I think--that there are two main aspects, or sides, to anything; such as sexual pleasure and abstinence, work and leisure and by the hypothesis that people tend to run away with one side through which one falls either in perversion or aversion, scepticism or superstition, shortcoming or exaggeration. He has tried to expound that the Bible upholds the true happy medium and that as such it holds out to us for all times a kind of manual for our lives. He has also pointed out that the Bible is full of predictions that corroborate this theory. Simplified the theory says

GOSPEL OF LOVE

that one must draw near to God and His Son Jesus Christ, but one must not become too idealistic in this. People who do that, or people who fall away from Him, will run into a host of problems, as they will transgress vital givens of human nature and thus violate themselves.

'Now, in the course of John's ministry, Arthur here,' and he pointed to Arthur, 'started thinking a lot about heaven--something a man as John seems to be too sober for--and particularly started to wonder whether there will be sex in heaven and children born as its fruit. Let us for now lay this problem to rest by the conclusion that, while keeping all options open, if there is sex in heaven, then it will be pure and if there is no sex in heaven, then we will not miss it.

'John is a man full of wisdom and knowledge and motivated by great love for God and his fellows and none of us can take his place to continue these studies. We are on our own now and must learn to look for answers in the Bible ourselves. Let me conclude as follows. God is infinite in infinitudes. Anselm said that He than Whom nothing greater can be thought of, must exist, for in the mind one can always think of a greater something. And even that is speaking too little of God. For our idea of the infinite is limited by the idea of infinite space. Infinite means without end and comes from the Latin *in* and *finis*, or

GOSPEL OF LOVE

without end. Now, one line from point A can be infinite. But a line through point A is double in length, so twice as infinite. Which in turn is infinitesimal in comparison with a plane through A and that plane again is infinitesimal with a globe surrounding A. If I am that point A, then God encompasses me all around infinitely. But not just my body. My mind also, which is far greater than a point in time and space and my soul, which is so far different in its pure emotions than the cold calculations of reason. And my spirit, which in turn is infinitely more valuable than my feelings. God is not just a SuperBrain, which would be a ludicrous representation. His soul and His spirit are also infinitely around me, yes, infinite with an infinitude of exponents; to represent that mathematically you take the symbol for infinite and give that an infinite array of itself as exponents. And that is only a mathematical figure of speech. His name be blessed for ever and ever.

After the meeting had been broken up, to the disappointment of most students, a few of them remained talking with Charlie.

'Throughout the history of Christianity,' said Charlie, 'an endless array of heresies has tried to taint the person of Christ, monophysitism, docetism, Arianism and so on and so forth. The one claimed

GOSPEL OF LOVE

that Christ had only the divine nature, the other that He was the first created angel. The one that He had only the divine will and the other that He was more human than divine. Contemporary sinners have tried to depict Him as a weak and vulnerable man in His sexuality. In the early Latin West theologians tried to understand how God could be also man and in the Greek East they tried to understand how a man could also be God. On both sides heresies developed due to these approaches. These two mysterious sides cannot be harmonized by human reason. They can only be held in our hearts by childlike faith.

'This is the tension of the two sides of the truth that also in the matter of Christ's humanity and divinity deteriorated into respectively perversion and aversion. John pointed out books to me by a certain William Kelly that convinced me that this faithful Bible commentator, unknown to most theologians--just as the creationists are really unknown to contemporary scientists--had a deeper insight in Christ's Person than Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin lumped together. Why? Because he had been enlightened more carefully by the Scriptures. He was not at all a great theologian of the intellect, but of the heart!

'John, our faithful teacher and ardent student of great teachers such as the one mentioned, has taught me in a private conversation that the great divisions

GOSPEL OF LOVE

between the Latin West and Greek East, which became bogged down in the idea of the procession of the Trinity with the fight over the well-known *filioque* clause, are best ignored by prudent Christians. It is ultimately nonsense and just a simpleton's attempt to explain the mystery of the Trinity. Just as it would be nonsense to claim that the dimension of breadth comes forth from the dimension of length and height out of both in the supposedly mathematical instant, or logical moment of creation. It harms rather than explains anything about the Trinity, to claim that the persons in the Trinity are subject to logical and indivisible moments. When Christ said that His Father is greater than He, He says this as a human, not as God the Son.

'Why am I mentioning all this? Because it all has to do with what John has taught us, namely that the truth is seated on a knife's edge and that human thinkers have always been busy to pull the two sides out of each other, thus developing perversion and aversion; causing confusion in the process and destroying each other's reputation to boot.

'In our time sex is preached by many as the salvation of humankind. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that we understand Christ's human nature in this regard as faithfully as possible. For He is our light and we will be as Him. We mustn't go one

GOSPEL OF LOVE

fraction too far either to the left or the right. In both cases we would not only do injustice to the truth, but we would end up harming ourselves. Satan is called the god of this age in the Bible and as such he has always tried to blind the theologians, scientists, kings, presidents and almost all leaders of this world. And so he now also attempts to dazzle the man in the street with pictures of beautiful women, as if that is what life is all about.

'Christ is holy both before and after the resurrection. We will not be that. We will be 'unsinnable' so to speak--whereas Adam and Eve were simply sinless and innocent--in our glorified bodies and also conscious of what is right and wrong. But John must be right that there is no such thing as holy sex. Christ is holy, which is evidently more than we will be.'

'Why then,' asked Arthur, 'does it say that we will know as we have been known?'

'I do not know what that means. But that is the point. Now we see obscurely into an enigma. Then we will see it clearly. But it cannot mean that we will know God as He knows us. That would make us equal to Him. You must be right that also now Christ is a man. He wouldn't be human otherwise. He certainly isn't, nor was, an 'it.' But you went too far in suggesting that that means that Christ will use His

GOSPEL OF LOVE

humanity to produce progeny. That would taint His unique character. And, I agree, you are right that the evidence points to us being men and women in eternity. Christ is still a man and so we will be. With this distinction that He will be holy and we not.

'I think it is better to abstain from further prying into Christ's sexuality. It is sufficient to realize that adulterers and gays fancy Him as themselves and idealists picture His piety with the implication of sexlessness. Both are wrong. Personally I am comforted by the promise in Revelation that the faithful once will be given the hidden manna and what is that else than that we will reflect on the secrets of His blessed and holy personality, also in this regard?

'I do not think that the dear holy Lord Jesus Christ ever had an ejaculation, since His seed would have been lost then.'

'But then,' said Arthur, 'even a nocturnal emission is sinful. We would have to employ mediaeval prick rings then, to avoid erections during our sleep.'

'The Lord did not marry either. Yet Paul says that the marriage bed can be and must be undefiled. Who says that we must strive to be just as holy as the Lord in every single point? Yes, the fantasies concomitant with masturbation and wet dreams can be sinful indeed. But it is one thing to confess our dirt and another thing to try to mutilate yourself to prevent

GOSPEL OF LOVE

something that is altogether too strong for you. If one cannot contain oneself, it is less evil to masturbate than to commit fornication. I am convinced in such a case that it is alright to choose the lesser evil. The attempt at holiness would be a greater evil, since one would become almost totally obsessed, which would be a tragic loss of energy and indeed a dishonor to one's Lord as well. The gift of abstinence is given only to very few people.'

'Do you agree that the account of Onan has nothing to do with masturbation?' asked Jocelyn.

'Of course not. Onan was not convicted by God and even put to death, because he masturbated. Moreover it was not even masturbation, but coitus interruptus. But God was angry with him, because he refused to continue the line of seed that would lead up to the Messiah. But I am afraid that this entire conversation could come about, because we are too obsessed by sexual matters in these days. However I hope something good will come out of it.'

'Sex is an important part of us, so it is O.K. to discuss it,' said Arthur.

'That is true. Ideally a man and a woman please each other sexually in marriage. But almost all men have so much testosterone that they would do well to choose masturbation rather than go to prostitutes. Even the law in the Old Testament did not forbid that.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

I think one turns too far to the right when one speaks out against masturbation and too far to the left when one speaks for it. The Bible does neither and it would have made serious people psychotic if it had forbidden it. Also here the truth is razor sharp. With all its lucid simplicity it is also in this case seated right in the middle. The Bible is also in this case full of understanding love and wisdom. It is indeed a two-edged sword that cuts right through our ignorance and fanaticism, perversion and aversion, lawlessness and legalism. It cuts down in on us to teach us in all things and comes right up again, when things grow unnaturally entangled again.

'And so I am convinced, after witnessing this conversation between John and Arthur all these months, that one moves too far to the right if one speaks out against the possibility of sex in eternity. But I am afraid that you, Arthur, have moved too far to the left in your fantasies. Other than that I haven't made up my mind about it.' After this the 'hard core' of John's students talked on till late into the evening.

Next Saturday afternoon Charlie met Arthur at Mrs. Weber's and the following conversation took place.

'I have read,' said Arthur, 'in the Bible this morning, Leviticus fifteen to be precise and I was flabbergasted

GOSPEL OF LOVE

to see that according to the law our entire sexuality is defiled. From the Fall of course.'

'Of course from the Fall,' answered Charlie.

'To such a degree that not only masturbation defiles us, but even a nocturnal emission, yes, even going to bed with one's own wife, so that you both have to bathe afterwards and be unclean to the evening and anything that has been touched by the semen has to be washed. Man, man!'

'Yes and orthodox Jews still try to practice this and keep the law.'

'It would drive me insane!' said Arthur.

'This reminds me of the New Testament scripture that to the unclean everything is unclean and yet that every created thing is pure for the believer and is hallowed by thanksgiving. Therefore Paul has explained that we are pure and righteous in Christ--that is to say, if we are truly born again in Him in our hearts--and that the marriage bed is to be undefiled, thus expressing the fact that our sexuality can be clean now.'

'Thanks be to God!'

'The law is hard, because it knows of no mercy for us, as we are totally conceived in sin.'

'But Jesus Christ is our grace and truth and has justified us,' chimed Arthur.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'It even says that He has become our justice. Imagine, God sees us through Christ and has clothed us with His justice!'

'Therefore anybody that rejects Christ, will pay for it eternally.'

'Yes. But in Christ our sexuality is sanctified. A lot of traditional Christians consider sex so tender, if not holy, that they confine it to the bedroom. Everything else is hush-hush.'

'And that causes all kinds of trouble in their youngsters and also ignorance among themselves. They would do well to listen to some kind of Christian sexologist. But the Bible is not hush-hush about it. It calls incest by its name, for instance and glorifies the female body in the Song of songs. I cannot think of anything more beautiful than the female body. What would heaven be without it?' said Arthur.

'Heh, listen! Now I know what this conflict is all about. John, despite all his wisdom, still is a victim of the old, traditionalist hush up culture, in which sex is a taboo outside the bedroom. He dares not follow Solomon's example in talking or writing about the beauty of sex. But you, my dear Arthur, are a victim of the sex culture. For you sex is an idol. And I warn you. If you do not keep yourself in check, you will find yourself among the idolaters of soft porn. Sex is a natural given, but you go too far to the left in claiming

GOSPEL OF LOVE

that there is nothing more beautiful. The crux of this whole matter is that you ran into an evangelist like John, who was incapable of handling this and who failed to diffuse the situation. Both of you need to come to the happy medium of the Bible, where sexuality is neither exaggerated as an idol, nor hushed into silence. Women aren't goddesses, but neither are they to be locked out of conversation. Sex is indeed beautiful and a Godgiven pleasure, but it is not divine, nor is it dirty. Too bad this conflict got out of hand.' And Arthur was silent for a change. After a while the latter observed:

'In certain prisons there is a restraint against masturbation. Also very strict parents do not realize that their children are very vulnerable in the prurient teenager stage as to their sexuality. It can and does harm them when one forbids masturbation as a terrible evil, in that it will make them very insecure. For, often unconsciously, they will say to themselves and wonder why something so powerful and totally part of them can be evil. The Bible says nowhere that masturbation is evil in itself. It does imply in Leviticus fifteen that it defiles and indeed the concomitant fantasies are often lewd, but that is because of our sinful natures, which defile, not because masturbation is necessarily so evil in itself. It may have also been very much part of us, if the Fall had never taken

GOSPEL OF LOVE

place. For in Leviticus conjugal sex is also said to defile, but not so anymore in the New Testament, the time of grace after Christ's work.'

'If masturbation were a form of fornication, which is mentioned in Acts fifteen among the things the gentiles must abstain from, then it would be a ground for divorce and it obviously is not,' observed Charlie.

'But Christ says that to look at a woman to desire her, is already committing adultery in one's heart.'

'That's true. But he adds that it is in one's heart. It shows that it is there where all the trouble begins.'

'John is definitely right that anal sex is sex slavery. But I personally believe that if a married couple does not consider cunnilingus and fellatio evil, they should be left to themselves in all liberty.'

'I agree. In this matter the Bible verse is true that everybody must be fully assured in his own conscience and blessed is the person that does not condemn himself in what he does. Since one Corinthians ten verse thirteen says that God will not allow us to be tempted above our strength and since the greatest saints were not capable to fight off masturbation, I tend to conclude that masturbation is not evil in itself. Yet I will not promote it for two reasons. First of all the concomitant fantasies defile. Secondly, it is better to marry than to burn with desire. But if somebody can masturbate without committing

GOSPEL OF LOVE

fornication in his or her heart, then I personally can see nothing wrong with it.'

'That's nearly impossible!'

'I agree.'

'John never mentioned Leviticus fifteen verse three.'

'He must have known about it, but perhaps he was ashamed to talk about it.'

'You're sure it cannot refer to the clap?'

'No, it clearly refers to emissions due to masturbation, including wet dreams.'

'Do you think Christ ever masturbated or had a wet dream?'

'I think not. I told you before. Moreover He came to fulfil the law. If you consider that and read Leviticus fifteen, it should be clear He never did. For He was never defiled, or ceremonially unclean; it must be. But you seem to think that sexuality is the defining factor of human personality. But it isn't, certainly not in Christ's case. In the Western World the notion has been that reason is the criterion of humanity. And in the East and ancient cultures they thought that spiritual dependence on the gods, or pureness of the pantheistic soul was what defines us. Today many men think that if they could only have a beautiful woman, then they would feel whole.'

'What is it all about then according to you?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Funny that you should ask that. John has tried to explain that eloquently. In the first place it is all about a personal relation with the Lord Jesus in being sanctified increasingly and being led to true worship of the Father and the Son. In the second part it is all about all or most aspects of human personality, headed up in the heart. You mentioned that yourself. It is all about balancing all these aspects and extending both love and justice to all of them. We tend to idolize any aspect and play god with it at the detriment of other aspects of our lives. The Bible teaches that the most important thing is Love—with a capital, not sex—for God and one's fellow men. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy power and all thy understanding and thy neighbor as thyself." Of course that is what it is all about.

'All things, also sex, are to be fulfilled in true love. In fact what you and a lot of your listeners have been doing, is to idolize sex and so create a new kind of perversion.'

'I'm afraid you are right. Nietzsche thought that life was all about willpower. The existentialists thought that we must find ourselves in making a life choice, or decision. I'm afraid I have been going off on a tangent. But that does not take away from the fact that most of the things I said are true.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'Yes, but porno writers are also right and true in saying that women are beautiful. But any right hearted Christian would avoid them.'

'But where they go wrong is in that they turn women into sex objects.'

'And isn't that what you have been doing subconsciously in keeping hammering away at claiming that sex must be forever?'

'Don't become too skeptical, Charlie,' answered Arthur. 'What I am also trying to do is to understand the sexual force that drives men and women to each other, of which Paul says that it is a great mystery, a picture of Christ and the Church. And I am not just referring to bodily affection. If one opts for John's opinion one is forced to see sex as a temporary, biological force, an expediency that engenders children for heaven at best and that might give one a little bit of pleasure. If one sees and understands that sex is an eternal part of creation, one respects it more and one can begin to work with it. Idealists see sex as a tool and sinners see it as an end in itself. The latter deify it, the former make it out to be a necessary evil, or a temporary tool at best.'

'We can really learn from you, then it seems,' responded Charlie.

'I think so,' said Arthur, 'but I have really learned this from John, how paradoxical that may sound. He

GOSPEL OF LOVE

taught me love and respect for God and His Word and love and respect for all of creation and all aspects of life. Actually religious idealists and sinners are both sinning in a similar way. The former by being too detached from creation, the latter by losing themselves in it, or some aspect of it and by abusing it to the full. Both treat life as something temporary, the former by pursuing exaggerated holiness, the latter by deifying anything in creation. That is an example of the paradoxical identity of mutually opposite life styles. And that I learned also from John.'

'You use indeed one of the technical terms of his moral theology.'

'Early on I was initiated in the technical side of his theory.'

'What does Scripture mean, then, when it says that the schema of this world will pass by?' asked Charlie.

'Of course that the sinful aspect of life is temporary and the rule of evil. True life is a meaningful relation with God and one's fellow men in creation. Idealists stress the former aspect and worldlings the latter. My preoccupation with whether there is sex in eternity is simply a detail of the grand discussion that John has set in motion.

'O man, sinners and most Christians don't seem to get anywhere! The Bible teaches that anger, or

GOSPEL OF LOVE

irritation rests in the hearts of fools and that the anger of a man does not work the righteousness of God. After my falling out with John I was very much spoken to by those texts. But I will always honor his name. Unbelieving thinkers fail to read creation, unlike John. So unbelievers seem to be totally unaware why it is that women suffer far less from baldness.'

'Why is that then?'

'Of course to ensure that they continue to be attractive for the men. But a lot of women cut off their hair and fail to work actively at their quiet feminine dignity in this crazy men's world. Some of them even end up imitating the men.' And the two friends went on talking for some time yet.

The next week Arthur was again struggling with himself, desiring to obtain from God the gift of abstinence and praying that somehow God would use him in His kingdom. It was in this frame of mind that he wandered into a local tavern. Sitting down at the bar he orders a cola, avoiding drinking beer, although he very much wants just that. But he knows he cannot handle liquor. A woman at the bar sees him and asks:

'Why do you look so down? Did you get jolted by your lover?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

'No. I do not seem to understand what the real happy medium is in sexual matters.'

'O, babe, just get laid and don't worry about it!'

'How can you say that? Do you want to be used as a sex object?'

'O man, I've stopped worrying about that a long time ago.'

'You shouldn't have.' And she shrugs her shoulders.

'Sex is important and not to be taken too lightly. In the middle ages people thought that sex is only good for procreation. If that is so, we should abolish it and have children born in a petri dish.'

'What?'

'In vitro, in a test tube. These people thought they had found the happy medium between sex is from the devil and sex is allowed for pleasure.'

'You're some kind of priest?'

'No, not really. I just want to know what is what. It seems the truth is to be fought out on a razor sharp edge.'

'Of course sex is for pleasure. Solomon himself had a thousand wives to satisfy his every whim. Even I know that and I wonder what the guy was eating!'

'I agree sex is for pleasure, but there are greater things involved. But how can you know that the man-

GOSPEL OF LOVE

woman relation is an analogy of Christ and the Church?' And she shrugs her shoulders again.

'Maybe I am too simple, but you are way out of it. What does sex have to do with God and faith? Sex is something you do, like eating and drinking. Involving God in it does not make it any more fun.'

'That is too simple indeed. Even food and wine are pictures of higher truths that God grants us, like wisdom and spiritual joy. But you reject even the breast milk that is to be found in the Bible.'

'You're a mystic then?'

'No, I'm not. Darn it! I just want to know whether I am allowed to masturbate.' And the woman laughs her head off.

'O, honey, I knew you were out of it! If you go with me I'll help you!' And Arthur got out of there in a hurry, leaving the woman giggling for a long time. Back at his apartment Arthur threw himself on the floor, full of emotion.

'God, I cannot go on like this! I want to be holy, but you do not grant it. It is an impossibility. Charlie got to be right and I have been driven crazy by an old book that is in fact religious sado-masochism. This writer was a fanatic that went beyond your word and probably he was a hypocrite as well.' And then he relieved himself, finally, in, what was for him personally, a much needed and overdue explosion.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Smoking a cigarette afterwards he muttered to himself.

'Charlie got to be right! It is simply too dangerous to go dry for too long. O God, grant me a prudent wife, one I can build on, one that will never deceive me and one that I will always love and cherish!' Then he read Pascal again, about the human dilemma that man either becomes like an animal, or tries to be like an angel. And he could not prevent himself from thinking:

'Or try to be like what we imagine angels to be. Perhaps even angels masturbate.' And as he extinguished the butt of his cigarette in the ashtray, he grumbled a final thought:

'I'll just be practical about it. Given the fact that I cannot contain myself, I'll give in once in a while and confess the problem of using women as sex objects in my mind afterwards.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

CHAPTER X

QUO VADIS, DOMINE?

Some time after Charlie wrote a long letter to John. It ran as follows.

Dear John,

I am terribly sorry for you that things went the way they did. I hope you may somehow find strength through this adversity. Marion joined a group of women that believe that God is female, transcending race and that Christ is some kind of docetic emanation from the universal and pantheistic mother spirit. Chuck fortunately has repented and made up with his paralyzed wife. But I am afraid it is not going

GOSPEL OF LOVE

to be easy for him. Victor continues strong in the faith and found a steady job. Most of your students are doing well. Arthur inherited a little bit of money and set up his own shop. He goes from church to church and cannot seem to settle down in that regard. He found friendship with a lady and wrote a nice little poem, too enthusiastic I think so early in the relation, but I give it to you anyway, as it is a good poem.

ROMANCE

Burning candles in the night.
So romantic is the sight:
Feelings running high,
Love is in the air;
Lifted up on high,
Climax of a pair.

Love the motor tackling life,
Pairing up in man and wife:
Joy that knows no end,
Power one's self to free;
Strength the odds to rend,
Love-drunk high at sea.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Nothing spoils this soulful bliss,
Loudest sound is but a kiss;
God be thanks for all.
May we both grow old,
Till the Lord us call;
Living ever bold.

As to myself, I hope, God willing, to start my Masters in psychology. Maybe God will help me to become a Christian counselor, or even a psychiatrist. Who knows. John, the Bible says that a wise man wins hearts over. You have won a few people here. So all was not in vain. God bless you ever so much!

Yours Truly,
Charles Abbanius.

P.S.

Arthur lets you know that he confesses to you that he has been too obsessed about his theories. But on the other hand he does not see any need to retract them. So basically he still considers most of what he said possible. He says now that he realizes that—since it is written that what no eye has seen and no ear has heard and what no heart has imagined, that has God prepared for those that love Him—he got

GOSPEL OF LOVE

embroiled too much with you over the question whether or not there will be sex in heaven. It will all be infinitely greater than the best sex imaginable. But since on this particular point either you or he must be right, he concludes that it must be he and therefore he sees no need to take back the general tenor of his thoughts. He reminds you of the fact that the Bible not only teaches the highest *agape* love—transcending intelligence, feeling, faith and even going beyond the will, being seated in our very hearts—family love and friendship, but also *eros* love in the Song of songs and that God's Word, the Bible, is eternal and so also the bodily love as praised in that song.

And although expert love making as presented in the Indian *Kama Sutra* is reserved for only a few couples devoted to each other on this terrain, he points out to you that at least the peoples that proceed from the millennium to the eternal state, will engender children. And so why not all of us? He reminds you also of one of your cherished Scripture verses, namely Psalm thirty-seven verse four—Delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart—and that something went wrong in your desire to come here to evangelize and teach and that you cannot just blame him for that. So search yourself.

Also he warns you not to be too pharisaic and too bent on holiness and not to condemn the natural

GOSPEL OF LOVE

longing for sex, or the longing for us to continue it in heaven. He says that he hopes to engender a trillion children in eternity and that that is a natural longing not to be condemned. No matter how he respects you still after what you did to him, he advises you to come off what is in fact unnatural in you. Also he says that he will for ever be thankful for your pointing out to him already before his conversion, that those couples that abide by God's rules enjoy far more sex and better sex than most of those foolish perverts that refuse to be faithful to each other and go from partner to partner and that they are in fact slaves.

He also told me that he had been startled very much by his falling into heresy, tainting the holy Person of Christ. When he read in Ecclesiastes that a wise man carries his heart on the right and a fool on the left, it occurred to him that it is less evil, evil nonetheless, to go too far to the right than too far to the left. And so he imagined that it would be better to be stuck on a deserted island with an exaggerated priest than with some foolish adulterer. He wants you to be aware that the Bible does not specifically deny that there will be sex in heaven. There is evidence that affirms it whereas you say that there is evidence that denies it.

As to myself, John, I have not yet made up my mind about this issue. I think that you have been too

GOSPEL OF LOVE

hard on him. Through your attitude you only drove him further into the direction he was going. Personally I refuse to humor either the Arthurs or the MacNutts in this world. I would rather want to reconcile them. Traditionalists and revolutionaries all have something good. The problem comes in when they go off on a tangent, or remain in a fossilized state. In mutual dependence and respect the two sides can be fused by combining their respective goods and by rejecting their isolated independence and wrongs.

It is a question of the true golden mean, the *aurea mediocritas*, which is not a false happy medium, or deceitful compromise. Once one sees that, one stands firm. On the one hand it enables you to embrace the good of both sides at once and on the other hand it makes you independent from the wrongs of both sides, thus avoiding a useless gridlock and endless war between two mutually opposing views. You taught me this, John! You know better than I that this renders one capable both to be on edge and at the same time open to all possibilities.

And do not argue now that some people have slid off too far either to the right or the left. I remind you of your own moral theology that you are working on and one of its technical terms, namely the paradoxical identity of mutually opposite sides. God can call and

GOSPEL OF LOVE

does call back certain people after they have run the course of their foolishness to the absurd bottom, so that it comes out of their nose and ears. Once that has happened they become very wise and devoted people.

So there are people that have gone so far into spirituality that they literally mutilate their physical bodies, for instance in flagellation. And also there are people that go so far into the physical aspect of humanity that they also mutilate their bodies, for instance in transsexuals. Now what can be learned from these two mutually opposite extremes? That there can be circumstances God can bring a Christian in that forces one to go even further. Christians that are tortured for their faith have to learn quickly to go far beyond the spirituality of the flagellants. The martyrs for Christianity teach that God can give a person superhuman strength, when necessary. And so their blood becomes the seed of the gospel. Such people make the Scripture verse--you have not yet resisted sin to the very blood--literally true and such people encompass both the extraordinary spirituality and physicality at once that leads them full circle both into the right and the left side of human possibilities.

Also in this respect they make Christ's words true that "ye will do greater works than I." Of course Christ's suffering on the cross was infinite and divine,

GOSPEL OF LOVE

but for instance His bones were not even broken. How pitiful and empty, then, is the sensation seen in many unrealistic films that enslave audiences of millions of people, whereas in the accounts of the martyrs we have real people that go far beyond the imagined possibilities of the silver screen!

In films audiences are often captivated by either murder or suicide, or murder-suicide, or violent death. But martyrs that are killed, or martyrs that willingly go into death, go far beyond the deaths created by either murder or suicide. Murder is criminal and suicide is desperate, but martyrdom, if indeed necessary, is glorious and goes far deeper into the extremes of human possibilities that you are fond of to explore.

You give the impression to your students that the truth is seated somewhere in the middle of the two extremes of both the right and the left sides. And indeed the Bible supports this idea when it says that one must not be righteous too much, nor sinful too much. The Pharisees of this world go too far to the right and the sinners too far to the left. And you are right that between murder and suicide is the range of all human interaction. And indeed there is a very thin line between extremes in that they meet each other at the bottom of the circle. Yet I want you to be aware that martyrs, just because the truth interacts with the lie, show that your theory, no matter how helpful, is

GOSPEL OF LOVE

still too much that--theory. With mathematical precision you are able to point out that the truth is seated on a razor sharp edge. But what about a child that becomes a victim of incest? Or what about the man that tries to defend his daughter from being raped? These are also martyrs of circumstances. And in the split second that they are overwhelmed your theory is not going to help them. Granted, your theory can show the hindsight wisdom of where one is too passive or too aggressive.

But I want you to remember Solomon's words that if there is a wise man that claims that he has found out God's work, he still has not done that. And indeed you would be the first to admit that it will take all eternity to find out what God is doing. In other words, we will be learning for ever. And indeed you have personally taught us some of the most basic things. Why am I saying all this? To relativize your insights and to make you more receptive to Arthur, who indeed cannot be blamed for the incident at Marion's. Arthur has come into your direction, now you should meet him halfway.

P.S.2 (This is what Arthur wants to tell you himself).

Personally I now say that, since we will be male and female in heaven, there will be sex and it will be

GOSPEL OF LOVE

pure. I do not desire to teach this as a very important truth, nor state it categorically and dogmatically, but I feel sure about it for ninety-nine percent. I do not want to get too excited about it anymore. For heaven will go infinitely beyond anything that we could possibly imagine. The Lord God Jesus Christ is there and Abba Father. They and Their wisdom and knowledge, grace and love will be our main focus.

That angels must be male and female can also be concluded from secular history. What is denoted by proud and ignorant atheists with the term mythology, is in fact the revelation of the pandemonium, the fallen angelic world that exercised its influence on the ancient world. So it can very well be inferred that Satan's dearest minion stands behind ancient cults such as that of Astarte, Aphrodite, Venus and by whatever name she goes. In Christendom she has gone over into the cult of mariolatry, with the nonsensical idea of the eternal virgin. (The fact that people tend to make jokes about Mary, the pope and a former president shows the utter depth of our sexuality. Jokes like these, for anybody that is astute enough to perceive it, not only demonstrate that mariolatry is preposterous, but also that it is a subconscious and far out sublimized sexual idolatry. Instead of directing our attention to a 'Mary' we should direct our attention to the heavenly Jerusalem, which

GOSPEL OF LOVE

in Galatians 4.26 is called 'our mother'!). And the uppergods like Baal, Bel, Moloch, Zeus, Jupiter, etc. are direct reflections of Satan himself as lord of the pandemonium.

In the forty-fourth chapter of Jeremiah four times mention is made of the 'queen of heaven.' I take this to be evidence that fallen angels are also female (male demons figure in Genesis 6, as I tried to explain to you). That everywhere else in the scriptures angels are male, must be because God's unfallen female angels take a low profile. So, if angels are also male and female; so will we be in eternity, John!

As to male and female demons; they are the so-called spirit guides for occult people. A Wicca priest is guided by a female demon and a priestess by a male demon. This is true all over the world. It happens to the Shamans also. I read about one Shaman who was taught the secrets of plants and their roots by his female spirit guide and she was so jealous that she only on occasion allowed him to have sex with his own wife. Even in transcendental meditation the initiate is given the name of a male or female demon, depending on his or her sex. The mantra is that name, unbeknownst to them! Transsexuals are plagued by the demons of the opposite sex. Yes, gays and lesbians are the victims of these demons, often from birth; but usually later. If

GOSPEL OF LOVE

one goes far enough into the Jungian philosophy of the animus and anima, then one will end up being dominated by the spirit guide of the opposite sex. Yes, these male and female demons even manifest themselves to Pentecostals that go deep into spirituality! This happens usually in their dreams. But I know of cases where they have appeared to them in broad daylight!

I studied all this to expose it and partly to shore up my own theory. But you condemned me for dabbling in the occult. But God is my witness that I personally did not get involved. Yes, I know that at birth a male or female demon is assigned to everybody. Perhaps even before that. But everybody also has an angel from God. Christ says that the angels of children see the face of their heavenly Father at all times. The old Christian belief that you have a demon on your left side and an angel on your right; is, altogether true. But anybody that goes too far will be delivered into the power of his or her spirit guide. Even though in the Western world most people do not know that. Only a radical conversion to Christ, by the power of His precious blood, can set one free. This is also true, as it holds for anybody, for Catholics that pay too much attention to the so-called saints that can also function as male and female spirit guides. Yes, Mary is called the queen of heaven. This is already her name in the

GOSPEL OF LOVE

O.T. hailing down from Babylonian times, when the then world conspired against God. And He scattered them all over the face of the earth. But they took their gods and goddesses (read male and female demons) with them. Yes, the Catholic saints have the very same functions as the ancient gods and goddesses! In christening the ancient world these gods and goddesses were simply named after biblical persons and the martyrs. This is well known to insiders. In the Philippines, South America and elsewhere, the so-called saints continue the ancient cults.

That angels and so humans in heaven, since Christ says that we will be as the angels, are sexual beings, I have attempted to demonstrate from the Bible with great acumen. Even God is referred to as male in the Scriptures. You are too cautious in believing that the very idea of sex in heaven is evil, as I have been too reckless. That there is no male or female in Christ refers to our being equal in salvation, not to our sexuality. It is the right-hand extreme. On the other hand it is equally wrong to believe that we will be like animals in this matter. As the Greeks and Romans tended to think. Angels are spirits and do not behave instinctually. This is the left sided extreme. A compromise on the right-handed side, but not the true medium, is to conclude in Freudian terms that angels sublimize their sexual energy. This must be a false

GOSPEL OF LOVE

compromise, because this would leave their respective sexualities largely untouched. To say that our sexual energy in heaven is sublimized, leaves out the fact that men will have penises and testicles with semen and women uteri and vaginas.

On the other side the left-handed compromise between the true golden mean in this matter and the debauched idea of promiscuity in heaven, is the Islamic idea of virgins that will be there to serve the men sexually. This is a male fantasy. There even seem to be Moslems that fancy a paradise full of boys and girls and they entertain the idea that in paradise the blessed will be allowed to do anything that is now forbidden.

A compromise on the right side, still closer to the true happy medium, is the idea of marriage in heaven, which the Sadducees attempted to use to confuse Christ in the matter of the woman that had married seven brothers in succession in accordance with the law of levirate. But it serves to counter the Mormon idea of eternal marriages, already now enacted.

The true happy medium in this matter is none of the above. That we have difficulty to envision it, is because we tend to equate non-marriage with fornication. But if God makes it the rule in heaven that a man and a woman are allowed to live together eternally without a public sanctioning, then that will be

GOSPEL OF LOVE

the rule, period. Now it is living in sin and not exactly fornication. It is a concubinage and the Bible makes clear adequately that that is taking things too lightly. Even Adam and Eve were married 'publicly' by God as both the Father and Minister in the presence of all the angels and all of creation. It becomes fornication when they go on to other partners.

What Christ seems to be implying to the Sadducees is not necessarily that there is no sex in heaven, but that the woman is not bound to any of the seven brothers. In heaven she is as free as a bird to choose anybody she likes. He is not saying either that she is free to copulate with all seven, which is what you seem to think that my theory leads to.

The idea of sex in heaven has allusions and allegories to all four main wrong positions; without subsiding in any of them and in fact embracing all four of them. 1) There is no male or female in Christ; 2) celestial sex is free like animal sex—but not homosexual, even though relations will also be very homophilic like David's love for Jonathan and so men's love for Christ, like that of the beloved apostle John; homosexuality is a human sin; 3) It is sublimized in interpersonal relations as well as in our love for God; 4) It remains like marriage in this sense that it will forever be a picture of Christ and the Church.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

To me this shows that the wrong positions are isolated bits of truth, each with a kernel of light, just as materialistic atheism is a result of believing only in matter, rationalistic deism of believing largely in the mind, pantheism of believing mainly in the mystic powers of the soul, and polytheism of preferring the magic of the spirit. Somehow we will transcend all these things and yet combine them. We will be free like angels, free spirits soaring up on high. Free from all the lovelessness, irritation and frustration of relations here.

It is indeed unthinkable and a crime against creation to suggest that God will discard babies from eternity. Heaven will be perfect, going beyond any utopian dream. The Bible says that between God and humans there is but one mediator, namely the human Christ Jesus. It is not normal to conclude that we will not be human in this matter also. Come off it! To me this seems the only proper and logical stance. I have tried to explain my position to you with the instruments of your own theory. Again, this is the result of your own teaching, John! The Bible calls God the God of order. You do not at all have to be afraid that this new theory implies that there will be sin in heaven. There will be no orgies, or any degree of promiscuity. I have tried to show you that there being no marriage in heaven, does not necessarily preclude

GOSPEL OF LOVE

sex, if indeed I am right. Do not judge me, John! We will all meet there before God's countenance and we will all then be reconciled as He will decide what will be going on there.

What is of the utmost importance is that Christ is there, forever Priest after the order of Melchisedek. As Such He will declare Abba Father unto all eternity! At least we agree on that. We will have possessions in the Father house, in the heavenly Jerusalem, in paradise in the third heaven and upon the new earth. Ephesians three verse twenty-one not only implies that generations of children will be born for ever and ever, but also that there will be an infinite array of aeons, each with its own glory for God, angel, man and creation. For the original Greek refers to eternity as successive aeons. As you can check out for yourself. Apparently Christ, in Whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, will give each aeon its own character!

P.S.3

I was ready to send off this letter to you, but I reopened it as various thoughts started to coagulate in my mind and heart. After I opened it I still took two weeks to draw my final conclusions. First of all, Chuck and Marion used Arthur's theory as an excuse. Arthur never meant this to happen. You yourself say

GOSPEL OF LOVE

that the truth consists of two sides that are, at least as experienced by sinners such as we all are, in tension and yet in harmony with each other. Arthur stresses the one side and you the other. The Bible states that the visible things are temporary and the invisible things eternal. And you, John, are an expert in these invisible things. But everything has not been said with that. Arthur has pointed out that the resurrection of Christ shows that many of the visible things we see now, will be similar to the eternal things, when the new heaven and earth will be there. Christ after the resurrection had also ten fingers and ten toes. And so we will use our fingers and toes eternally with eternal things. And he has adequately explained that this is a lesson for us not to be too distracted from life, nor to lose ourselves in the involvement in this temporary scene either.

The problem in our group and its surroundings, for both you and Arthur built up quite a following, is that Arthur unchained a little revolution in making us think about the possibility of sex in heaven. But you kept the traditionalist stance, proposed already by Augustine in early Christianity, that the immaterial part of us is sexless. This must be wrong. My parents, who are now departed, must recognize each other as male and female in paradise, not all of a sudden as sexless 'its.'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

The aspects of our beings you kept quoting are all true in themselves, but absolutized they become aversions. So the aspects Arthur kept hammering away at, if absolutized, become perversions. I have now come to the conclusion that you go too far to the right and tend to aversion in stating adamantly that there can be no sex in heaven. Arthur seems to lean over to perversion, however, in getting too excited about the prospect of making love forever. The more cautious attitude is to say that if there will be sex in heaven, it must be pure and if not, we will not miss it.

If you stare yourself blind on Christ's words that there will be no marriage in heaven, then one can easily fall into the following line of reasoning. No marriage must mean no sex. That in turn must mean that we will have no sexual feelings and again in turn it means that we will not be male and female. This train of thought can be reduced *ad absurdum* and it shows that you are wrong. It seems to me that you moved too far to the right in the matter of Christ's sexuality. And Arthur too much to the left in believing that Christ will have offspring in heaven. Or, he tended to that view at least, but you saved him from it. This shows how much we need each other and that we should at least keep praying for each other. Personally I think that Arthur studied the occult indeed to expose it and perhaps to counsel people. But I am

GOSPEL OF LOVE

afraid he did not do it prayerfully enough. And now he has been influenced himself by the demon of his opposite sex, that he would want to warn occult people about. And who knows what would have become of him, if you had not prevented him from going headlong into heresy. I shudder to think of it.

Because Christ is also human, both before and after His resurrection, it must be maintained that theoretically He could have engendered children, but that He chose not to do so, because He is also God. Arthur separated the divine and human natures too much, but you make Christ and us out to be like 'its.'

I know from you personally that you think that God is neither totally above the moral law, nor under it. I tend to agree. Else He would be either a whimsical bogeyman, or a Saint Nick. But Scripture says that 'as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than yours.' The moral law derives from God's unchangeableness. God is the same, yesterday, today and forever. So He is neither suprarational, nor irrational. Human emotions can become irrational when they do not correspond anymore with reality. Emotions are in themselves a-rational. But God cannot be called a-rational, or a-moral, let alone immoral. Nor supramoral. God IS Love.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

God transcends human rationality in His own infinite rationality. To put it simplistically, God's IQ is infinite, but that does not make Him suprarational, as if He were not somehow completely logical, but rather mystical. God is not unemotional either. With Him all things are in perfect harmony. And though He is supratemporal in His divinity, inhabiting eternity, in His actions He is involved with creation on a continuous basis. Yes, Hebrews 1.3 says that He upholds the universe by His power. By the way, if humans had IQ's of say six hundred million, their instrumentarium to deal with reality would still be very limited and indeed would still require hope and faith, and certainly love, to continue to live in creation.

To come back to the moral law. You agree with Calvin's *Deus non exlex, legibus solutus est*. "God is not immoral, He is free from laws." And I add that He is not supramoral either. That is, He is not absolutely above His own law, nor of course under it. Somehow moral laws, also in eternity, will be the reflection of His will and personality. And so we have seen that He allowed brothers and sisters to marry in ancient times, but never parents and children. Abraham married his half sister. Obviously, then, God can change laws.

Now I suggest—and understand me well, I do not want to be dogmatic—that Arthur is right that Adam was created a sexual being before God had instituted

GOSPEL OF LOVE

marriage. Sexuality and gender precede that institute, but God has confided sex to marriage. This being so, is it not obtuse to keep affirming that there being no marriage in heaven absolutely precludes there being sex?

You accuse Arthur of falling into philosophy, something Colossians 2 warns us against. But it is clear to me that in trying to counter him, you developed your own little philosophy!

One must at all times avoid making statements in independence from Scripture. To avoid that, the word of God must live in our hearts richly. Arthur, indeed, has developed a philosophy based upon hasty conclusions. But you do the same, to a lesser extent. If Scripture is silent, we should be silent.

Arthur tried to use your theory to defend his stance. But he came to a false happy medium and I will try to explain that to him. In fact he is adding something to the bible. And Revelation warns us against that. Also Christ warns us that he that both preaches and practices His will, will be called great in the kingdom of heaven; but he that but looses the least of His commandments, will be the smallest.

But you, in trying to unnerve him, are also adding to the bible! You deny something Scripture does not specifically deny and Arthur affirms something Scripture does not affirm. Both is wrong.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Most of the things he is saying are probably true (I am convinced they are) and the rest *might* be true. But we cannot know that. Arthur tries to corroborate his theory by referring to the word ‘generations’ in Eph. 3.21. The rest of his theory is based on hasty conclusions and plausible implications.

If there had been another verse in the N.T. using the same expression as Eph. 3.21, I myself might have been swayed to believe him. For by the mouth of two or three witnesses a matter stands, according to the bible. The bible itself lays down the important hermeneutical law that no scripture is of its own explanation. Arthur therefore tried to apply the verse, in which it says “every name in the coming age,” to his theory. But it must refer to people that will be born in the Millennium.

I hope and pray something good will come out of this. At least it serves to show that it is very easy to let the Scriptures ventriloquize! And even you, John, are guilty of that!

As to his idea that a concubinage is living in sin, but not fornication. That is also taking things too lightly, it seems to me. According to the bible all sex outside of marriage is fornication. Yes, even certain marriages—such as between a woman and the brother of her late husband—are forms of fornication.

GOSPEL OF LOVE

Leviticus 18 mentions all kinds of such forbidden marriages.

To resumé the main point Arthur convinced me of. That angels are male and female, must be true. That fallen angels have sex with each other and, in dreams and other forms of manifestations, with humans as well; that he has convinced me of as well. But as to the holy angels we know nothing in this regard. In the bible holy angels are always males and one can therefore safely conclude from that that they must have female counterparts. For it would be preposterous to think that all christian women in the resurrection would all of a sudden be all males! But other than that the Scriptures are silent. And so we should not add to the bible in denying anything the bible does not specifically deny, neither affirm what it does not specifically affirm. It must remain an open ended question.

Yours Truly (again),

Charles Abbanius.

When John had read this letter, his first reaction was to shrug his shoulders. Then he sat musing it over. He reread the part where it said that a

GOSPEL OF LOVE

wise man wins souls and then he looked up to heaven, as if trying to see God and he lifted both his hands, expressing helplessness. Suddenly he started sobbing, which became weeping. Tremors went down his spine and it was as if he wept out of his system all the harsh reality of failure and of painful vicissitudes. He did not hear the soft foot steps. But a hand was put on his right shoulder with loving care and when he looked up, he gazed into Maria's eyes, which bespoke concern, sympathy and even a measure of understanding. After a while he stammered:

'You have become quite a lady, Maria! Some day I should teach you horse riding on my uncle's farm. Would you like to?'

GOSPEL OF LOVE

EPILOGUE

I hope the reader has been as intrigued as I have been in following these people this far. To my disappointment it all seems to have ended in disaster. And this causes me to pray for them more than ever before, beseeching the Lord that He would grant them a reconciliation and me, the more or less observing and silent acquaintance, a sequel that will be more uplifting and promising.

I have become almost totally involved by now. And I can witness that all these dear people have something appealing to me personally. John appeals to my conscience. I grant you, he can be an overweening bible basher—to some he may appear to be a throw-back to another century even. But do not judge him too readily. Here is a man that goes into a slum and with untiring energy he keeps driving his points home. Beneath is a loving and sensitive

GOSPEL OF LOVE

character. Arthur appeals to the child in me. At times naive, rebellious, obedient and so on. And Charlie clearly appeals to reason. Here is somebody that strives to be objective at all times. He also is a bit of a diplomat, a peacemaker even. I hope everything will end well!

