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Justice in Love (Book Review)

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he was the steward of all creation, serving the only true and all-powerful God.

Under Walton's reading of Genesis 3, we, as fallen creatures, have not only failed in our task of taking non-order and bringing it to a state of order, but we have instead allowed disorder to proliferate. We do worse than failing to fulfill our creational obligations; we have damaged the creation by bringing disorder, a disastrous problem that can only be overcome by a redeemer. For Walton, in Adam "we did not lose paradise as much as we forfeited sacred space and the relationship it offered, thereby damaging our ability to be in relationship with God and marring his creation with our own underdeveloped ability to bring order on our own in our own wisdom" (145). It is only through Christ our redeemer that paradise can be attained—not a paradise restored, then, but a paradise newly gained.

Throughout the book, Walton puts forth many apparently new interpretations of familiar, key

verses in Christian theology. Walton's propositions are effectively theological hypotheses that must be tested by theologians over the next decade. If his interpretive framework, including his description of the cultural context of the ANE, is sound, it seems likely that many of his propositions will find additional Biblical support as they are explored further. If the conclusions that he has reached do not find further exegetical support, his primary thesis will, of course, need to be reassessed. What we have been given in this book, though, is a series of thought-provoking, at times challenging, propositions that should be discussed and debated in Reformed and evangelical communities for years to come.

Where will Walton turn his attention next? I assume that he will test his interpretive framework and use his knowledge of the ANE to see what new insights it may bring to the Lost World of Noah. At least we should hope he does.

Justice in Love. Wolterstorff, Nicholas. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015. (Paperback with New Preface). 306pp. ISBN: 978-0802872944. Reviewed by Ben Gibson, Candidate for Masters of Religion in Ethics, Yale Divinity School.

Discussions about the relationship between justice and love have become a regular part of Christian philosophy and ethics over the past decade.¹ Is Christ's call to love in concert or conflict with liberalism's call to justice? Can Scripture's love-command serve as a consistent ethic? Nicholas Wolterstorff seeks to answer such questions and many others in his new book, *Justice in Love*. The book serves as a companion to his *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (2008), in which he sought to root contemporary discourse around rights within Judeo-Christian teaching—in Christian thinkers, the New Testament writings, and the Old Testament Scriptures. Although *Justice in Love* may be read as part of Wolterstorff's publications on justice, in this book he does a fine job of summarizing this previous work at pertinent moments, which makes *Justice in Love* accessible as a stand-alone text.

Wolterstorff begins by leveling a critique of the last century of agape ethics. He then attempts to construct an account of love's compatibility with justice, to give an extensive treatment of the literature around forgiveness and to perform a corresponding exegesis of Romans. Ambitious as this is,

how can such wildly diverse projects dwell between the two covers of one book? Wolterstorff views each of these individual sections as part and parcel of the larger project of reconciling the concepts of love and justice, two concepts that he believes have been rent asunder by scholars from various disciplines and backgrounds. In order to bring the two concepts back into harmony, Wolterstorff engages in dialogue with many disciplines: philosophy, theology, ethics, political theory, and Biblical studies, to name only a few. Thus, while the structure of *Justice in Love* may seem daunting, it is undertaken by a scholar who recognizes the complexities and far-reaching implications of speaking about love and justice.

In order to fully understand what Wolterstorff is attempting through this book, one needs a cursory understanding of the 20th-century debate about love as agapism. Among the loves named in the New Testament—*philia*, *eros*, and *agape*—agape is widely regarded as the fulfillment of Christ's love-commandment found in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 22:37-39; Luke 10:25-28; Mark 12:28-31): "Love the Lord your

God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” In issuing this command, Christ proclaimed a radically different ethic that theologians, philosophers, and ethicists alike have all sought to unravel.

Wolterstorff uses the first half of his book to differentiate his understanding of agape from that of recent agapists such as Swedish Lutheran theologian Anders Nygren. In his expansive and widely contested *Agape and Eros* (1930-1936), Nygren proposed agape as a completely distinctive ethic for the Christian life. Wolterstorff refers to this agape-ethic as “classical modern day agapism,” an agape which focuses entirely on gratuitous benevolence to the exclusion of any other motivation. Agape, according to Nygren, only flows from God’s love of us to others; our own concerns with attachment (*philia*), attraction (*eros*), or justice are at best distractions and at worst corruptions of true Christ-like love. Not only does justice, for Nygren, do less than love requires, but when an individual is concerned with justice, this concern disrupts the possibility of true and self-sacrificing agape. Agape, then, may act paternalistically; I may disregard the rights of my neighbor as long as I am pursuing his or her good.

Wolterstorff levels a thoughtful critique of Nygren’s account of agape that demonstrates Nygren’s failure to take seriously the compatibility of justice and love and the position of Scripture. To note one apt critique found in the book, Wolterstorff describes how Nygren failed to recognize that the exemplar of classical modern day agape, God’s forgiveness of sins, requires a conception of justice to make it meaningful: “This is irony indeed, that the manifestation of love that the modern day agapist cites as paradigmatic of God’s love and the model for ours should undermine his claim that the love of Jesus asks of us pays no attention to justice and injustice” (53). At the very moment that Nygren claimed that God foregoes what justice requires by forgiving, Wolterstorff identifies that the very act of forgiveness requires a robust conception of justice. Forgiveness, according to Wolterstorff, is a recognition of being wronged, and a foregoing of one’s corrective rights against the perpetrator of the wrong. Forgiveness, rather than abolishing justice, requires a notion

of what is just to be meaningfully actionable: “If forgiveness is an example of the sort of love that Jesus enjoined us to have for the neighbor, such love cannot be deaf and blind to injustice; it has to be alert to justice and injustice” (55).

However, throughout his criticism of contemporary agapism, Wolterstorff paints with a broad brush stroke. Under this umbrella of classical modern day agapism, Wolterstorff tends to lump together figures as diverse as Nygren, Soren Kierkegaard, and Paul Ramsey. More than slight shades of difference appear in the thoughts of these three men, and thus we as readers are left asking, “What use is there in characterizing each of them as benevolence-agapists? Wolterstorff would seem better served by focusing his critique on Nygren, who is his paradigmatic benevolence-agapist, and using the other thinkers to help in his own constructive project.

In place of this benevolence-agapism, Wolterstorff offers a constructive account of a justice-oriented care-agapism. In this constructive section of the book, Wolterstorff’s argument is the most compelling. He insists that, opposed to Nygren’s characterization, “New Testament agape joins seeking to promote a person’s good with seeking to secure due respect for her worth; it seeks both as ends in themselves” (93). Rather than disregarding justice and *eros*, Wolterstorff sees agape as meaningfully incorporating them into a robust vision of love as care-agapism. Care, as opposed to benevolence, does not seek to simply enact love through self-sacrificial giving, but loves through acknowledging worth and investing in long-term goods. Love as care seeks justice for the other, takes seriously the need to care for oneself, and measures paternalistic actions carefully. By positioning care as the preeminent interpretation of agape, Wolterstorff attempts to dethrone Nygren’s dualistic account of agape and gives an account of love as concerned with each step of creation, fall, redemption, and reconciliation, not simply the final two.

The constructive section of the book, however, fails to identify the full scope of application for care-agapism. Wolterstorff helpfully suggests rules for applying this type of agape ethic in practice, but he fails to identify meaningful differences between individuals acting as individuals and individuals acting on behalf of an organization, such

as the state. When individuals step into the role of governance, do they attempt to maintain an ethic of agapism? Wolterstorff attempts to make some limited punishment and paternalism possible through love as care, but it is unclear whether these amendments to agape extend far enough to accommodate the agapists who are required by their role to punish a wrongdoer or to make a decision for citizens that they would be unable to make on their own.² Wolterstorff does not make clear here whether there exists or ought to exist any morally significant difference when the individual acts on behalf of the state.

In the final two sections of *Justice in Love*, Wolterstorff attempts to ground this re-characterization of agape through two other discussions: the relationship of justice, forgiveness, and punishment, and an exegetical treatment of Romans. These final sections may hold incidental value for interdisciplinary dialogue or for practitioners (such as pastors or counselors) approaching Wolterstorff's text. However, these parts of the text do not add significant contributions to the critique and construction found in the first two sections. By the end of Part Two, Wolterstorff has given an intriguing construction of justice and love's compatibility that would spark further thought and dialogue on its own. This is not to suggest that the further discussions are not worthwhile, but that this text may not have been the proper venue to attempt such expansive discussions. In particular, Wolterstorff's exegetical treatment of Romans with a renewed focus on the justice of God feels disconnected from the rest of the text. While Wolterstorff makes provocative suggestions by engaging the New Perspective on Paul, his conclusions often feel largely disconnected from his larger discussion of agape.

Justice in Love serves as an excellent primer for understanding the complexities of the relationship of love and justice, both philosophically and practically. His critique of Nygren's work and his constructive alternative contribute significantly to discussions about the love commandment and an agape love-ethic. This text, I believe, will prove beneficial to Christian theorists and practitioners alike in developing an ethic of justice, self-love, and world engagement. While much of the discussion surrounding agape has been undertaken by voices emphasizing its radical distinctiveness, Wolterstorff helpfully speaks from a Reformed perspective that situates agape within a broader understanding of God's sovereign plan for human life. At his best moments in the text, Wolterstorff offers a vision of Christ's call to love that takes seriously care for the self, justice for all, and a transformational agapism aimed at healing a broken world.

Endnotes

1. Of particular note are Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Orders of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008; and Timothy Jackson, *Political Agape: Christian Love and Liberal Democracy*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015. Both of these authors dedicate more time and thought to the question of how compatible love is with variants of justice specific to Liberalism.
2. Think of the archetypal judge in Book XIX of Augustine's *City of God*, who is called to and carries out his task in this fallen world but recognizes the tension of his position.

I Still Believe: Leading Bible Scholars Share Their Stories of Faith and Scholarship. John Byron and Joel Lohr, eds. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 249 pp. ISBN 970-0310515166. Reviewed by Jamin Hübner, Assistant Professor of Christian Studies and Director of Institutional Effectiveness, John Witherspoon College.

One of the greatest glories of the Christian faith is its ancient and diverse tradition of changed lives. From Abraham to Augustine, Hagar to Mary, Luther to Lewis, and the millions of others throughout history, one cannot help but marvel at the power of the Christian message and God's

unrelenting pursuit of individuals. In many ways, personal and public testimony embodies the gospel; for in telling others about God's grace in our lives, we preach the good news about Christ: real, local, and meaningful (or in more trendy terms, "genuine, authentic, raw").