pagan idea of a matter co-eternal with God. It is worth remarking that in their radical solution of this problem by denying the existence of matter St. Basil and St. Gregory stand rather apart from the general patristic tradition, just as the author (or authors) of the objection in Plotinus does from the general tradition of pagan Neoplatonism. Origen[1] and Augustine[2] both admit the existence of an Aristotelian prime matter, though they insist that it was created "in the beginning" by God. Perhaps now, when few people except strict Thomists have very much use for the concept of *materia prima*, the ideas of the objector in Plotinus, of St. Basil and St. Gregory, may seem to be of more than merely historical interest and to merit more attention from Christian theologians and philosophers than they have so far received.

[1] Contra Celsum IV 56. De Principiis 2. 1. 4: 2. 9. 1.
[2] Confessions XII 17ff.

IX

PLATONIC *EROS* AND CHRISTIAN *AGAPE*

An increasing number of people who have seriously studied and thought about Plato, Plotinus and the later Neoplatonists are increasingly dissatisfied with the sharp antithesis between Greek philosophical *eros* and Christian *agape* which was given currency by Nygren's famous book. In this contrast *eros* appears as essentially acquisitive and self-centred, the passionate impulse to the satisfaction of the lover's need, the fulfilment of his desire. So man's *eros* for God can, in the last resort, be only his desire for his own perfection and fulfilment, and God, who is perfect and needs nothing, can have no *eros* at all. *Agape*, on the other hand, is essentially unselfish, gratuitous, generous, giving love. God's *agape*, manifested in his giving of his only Son for us, is primary, and is the source, cause and exemplar of *agape* in man. Now those who are dissatisfied with this contrast have no quarrel with the account given of *agape* as it is revealed in the New Testament. What they maintain is that Nygren and those who follow him have failed to grasp the depth, range and value of the conception of *eros* in Plato and the later Platonists. It is not only a question of finding a place for *eros*-love, as defined above, in Christian life and thought, and of justifying the important place which it has occupied in that life and thought in the past. It is of course necessary to find a place for the passionate love of desire and aspiration, even if that place is far below that held by the love of divine generosity and sacrificial self-giving, if we are not to repudiate a great deal of our Christian past, and be content to present Christianity as something which has no connection with one of the most important parts of human life and some of the strongest and noblest forms of human religion. But the purpose of this paper is to show that the conception of *eros* was so deepened and widened by Plato and later Platonists

that Origen and the Greek Christian writers who followed him were not wrong in thinking it a suitable word to use for the *agape*-love of God revealed in Christ: and that this was done without losing sight of the original meaning of *eros* or breaking the connection with it.

Before we begin to explore the Platonic doctrine of *eros* it will be as well to remind ourselves of what the word meant to the ordinary unphilosophical Greek. Its primary and always predominant meaning was, of course, sexual passion, and it could carry every shade of meaning and overtone appropriate to the different forms of that passion, from the highest and tenderest love (in the usual English meaning of the word) to the animal lust of rape and buggery. But *eros* for the Greeks was not just the name of a human passion. It was the name of a god, who was not only recognized by poets and philosophers (with most unusual unanimity) as a great cosmic force, responsible for the coming into being of the world and gods and men and all other living things, but also had a place in ordinary everyday religion and received a real cult, and a very ancient one, especially at Thespiae in Boeotia, where his image was an unhewn stone. (Of course, unsophisticated Greek thinking did not separate Eros the god and *eros* the passion. Any strong emotional disturbance or impulse was attributed by the ancient Greeks, at the time when the Homeric poems were composed and long afterwards, to the direct action of a god.) This belief that Eros was a god had an important influence on later philosophical developments.

My starting-point in examining the Platonic tradition about *eros* is the interpretation of Plato's *Symposium*, put forward some years ago by my colleague and friend Dr R. A. Markus in an article in THE DOWNSIDE REVIEW.[1] This seems to me completely convincing, and an important contribution to our understanding of Plato. His profound and subtle analysis of the movement of thought in the dialogue needs to be studied closely with the text to appreciate its

[1] *The Dialectic of Eros in Plato's Symposium*, DOWNSIDE REVIEW No. 233, Summer 1955, pp. 219-30. This is summarised in chap. VII, *Love and Will*, of our joint book *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy* (Darton, Longman and Todd 1960) My own work, and that of others which I have seen, has led me since this book was prepared for publication to take a rather different view of the later Platonic doctrine of *eros* and its relationship to Christian thought from that given by Dr Markus in this chapter.

quality fully, but all I can do here is to give a summary of his conclusions. He shows how Plato moves, so unobtrusively that the movement has often passed unnoticed, away from the conception of *eros* as acquisitive, unsatisfied desire (the 'daemonic' Eros of the myth, child of Poverty and Plenty, half-way between god and man); how he arrives at a conception of *eros* which, first of all, is not indiscriminate desire for any and every object experienced as desirable, but, if it is true *eros*, for that object only in so far as it is good. 'Good' here is obviously not just synonymous with 'desirable', but implies reference to a standard of goodness, which, as the whole context makes clear, is nothing less than absolute and eternal good. Next, and most important of all, Markus shows how Plato faces the dilemma that, if *eros* is just desire to possess its object, it must cease to exist when it achieves possession. The lover must stop loving precisely when he is united with his beloved. To deal with this difficulty Plato first introduces the idea that true *eros* is 'desire for *perpetual* possession of the good', and goes on from there to develop a conception of *eros* as a desire completely different from that with which he started, a desire which is no longer a desire for possession but the desire of the lover united with his beloved to produce, to 'bring forth in beauty'— a desire which is no longer acquisitive but creative. Plato keeps within the analogy of sexual love, but goes far beyond the too narrow conception of that love as self-centred passion with which he started.

We must now add something from the other great dialogue on love, the *Phaedrus*. The teaching of the two dialogues on *eros* is very similar, but there is an important difference in their account of beauty. In the *Symposium* beauty is simply good as lovable, and everything that is good has its own beauty; there is moral and intellectual beauty which is higher than physical beauty, and absolute beauty is identical with absolute good. In the *Phaedrus* the moral Forms are still described in the most impassioned language as glorious to see and supremely lovable. But beauty is now one Form amongst many, distinguished only by the superior vividness with which it is imaged in the sense-world (250); that is, it is not here simply the good as lovable (so that all the Forms are beautiful, participating in beauty in their participation in good) but the Form or transcendent principle of physical beauty, beauty in the

narrow sense, one perfection among many, not a synonym for all perfection, sharply distinguished from the (in this life) less attractive moral Forms. Plato (and Plotinus following him) seem to have seen that you can talk about beauty in two ways: one which brings out the real and close connection which exists between aesthetic and moral values, so that it makes sense to talk about the beauty of laws and institutions, good ways of life, and moral virtue: and another which recognizes that moral and aesthetic values can, and sometimes must, be distinguished, and that in human life there can be competition, and sometimes conflict, between the love of beauty and the love of goodness.[2]

We have seen that in the *Symposium* true *eros* is not just any and every sort of indiscriminate desire but love of the good, and that, when the lover is united to the good which he seeks, his *eros* does not disappear but turns into a desire to produce good offspring, a desire for procreation in beauty. In the *Phaedrus* the true lover loves his beloved because he sees in him an image of the beauty which he once saw in the World of Forms, and reverences him as one would reverence an image or apparition of a god (250-1); or, as Plato puts it a little further on, with a very interesting variation, because the beloved is like the god whom the lover followed when he took the heavenly path to the vision of the Forms (252-3). And the true lover's *eros* does not lead him to want to possess and use his beloved, physically — Plato condemns this in the plainest terms as bestial perversion (250E) — or even spiritually. It leads him to try to make his beloved more godlike, to 'work on him and adorn him' as if he was an image of the patron god (252D). And it is precisely in trying to make his beloved more like the god that he becomes more like the god himself (253A). Here again we find the idea that *eros* is not just a self-centred passion to satisfy one's own need by acquiring something good or beautiful. It is a desire of absolute good or beauty which is somehow inevitably also a

[2] Cf. the superb treatment of this theme in Plotinus *Enneads* V5 [32] 12, especially 33-38. 'The Good is gentle and kindly and gracious and present to anyone when he wishes. Beauty brings wonder and shock and pleasure mingled with pain, and even draws those who do not know what is happening away from the Good, as the beloved draws a child away from its father: for Beauty is younger. But the Good is older, not in time but in truth, and has the prior power; for It has all power' (my translation).

desire to increase good and beauty, to make someone else better and more beautiful. This is the thought of both *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*; only the metaphor is different, 'working on the statue' in the latter being substituted for 'procreation' in the former. The reason for this substitution may be that the earthly love which is the starting-point is more explicitly and exclusively in the *Phaedrus* than in the *Symposium* that aristocratic paederasty which, in the society in which he lived and for which he wrote, was the kind of love from which Plato had to start. This convention of homosexual love was not just an approval of perversion and unnatural vice (to which the attitude of those who accepted it was oddly ambiguous). It included, at least ideally, and sometimes in practice, an obligation for the lover to educate and improve the boy he loved, to make him as good a man as possible. This Plato accepted, though already at the time when he wrote the *Phaedrus* condemning unnatural sexual intercourse, which later in the *Laws* (VIII836A–839D) he denounces with a ferocity worthy of a father of the Church; the passage ends with an admirable statement of natural law in these matters, which makes marriage the only legitimate form of sexual intercourse. A later pagan Platonist, Plutarch, in his tediously charming *Erotikos* (Amatorius) develops this line of thought further, ending the dialogue with a well argued defence of the position that married love is the highest form of *eros*: and Plotinus was made more indignant by an apology for philosophical sodomy than by anything else in his life except Gnosticism.[3]

We must now consider shortly some features of Plato's thought about goodness, human and divine, which he never explicitly connects with his thought about *eros*, but which are important if we are to see its full possibilities. It is the cardinal doctrine of Plato's theology that the gods are good and causes of good, never of evil.[4] He insists that because they are good they cannot be responsible for any of the real evils in the world, for which some explanation other than divine action must be found. Being good for Plato means doing good. Neither god nor man can be really good without in some way communicating his goodness to others.[5]

[3] Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, chap XV.
[4] Cp. e.g. *Republic* II, 378-9.
[5] Aristotle develops this line of thought about human goodness finely in *Nicomachean Ethics* IX, 8, 1168b-1169a.

This way of thinking reaches its climax in the description of the Maker of the world in the *Timaeus*. 'He was good, and one who is good is always absolutely without any sort of selfish jealousy (*phthonos*): so since he was quite free from this he wanted everything to be as nearly as possible like himself.'[6] I now think, after having for many years rather uncritically accepted Cornford's criticisms of A. E. Taylor's 'Christianising' interpretation of this passage, that Plato has here come as near as a philosopher could reasonably be expected to do to the Christian doctrine of God's *agape* as manifested in creation. And if he had ever combined this doctrine of divine goodness with his doctrine of *eros* he would certainly have come startlingly close to the Christian revelation of God's love. But he never explicitly did so, perhaps because *eros* always remained for him a human passion, however much his conception of it was purified and extended, and, in accordance with the tradition of Greek philosophical theology, he is very much concerned to deny anything like human passions to the gods. We should always remember when we are considering Greek philosophical theology that it began in a reaction against the gross anthropomorphism of the poets, Homer and the rest, who gave the gods bodies, parts and passions just like men. One of its first great utterances was that of Xenophanes 'One god, greatest among gods and men, in no way like mortals in body or thought' (Diels B23), and this tone continued in later speculation. This accounts, I think, to a considerable extent for the tendency of the Greek philosophers to prefer impersonal ways of speaking about God. (In Plato, of course, the object of *eros*, the highest divine perfection, is always presented as an impersonal Form, not a god, and the evidence — as I think — is insufficient to determine how he thought of the Forms as related to the supreme divine intelligence, 'the maker and father of the universe'.) If we find Greek philosophical theology chilly, we should remember that the alternative to that chilliness was the heat of Zeus's embraces and Hera's tempers. Plotinus, the greatest of Greek philosophical theologians, whose doctrine of *eros* we shall next have to consider, could no longer regard poetic theology as a

[6] 29E: cp. 29A. Here, as at other points in this paper I am much indebted to an unpublished dissertation by Mr J. M. Rist of Trinity College, Cambridge, which I have had the opportunity of seeing. His defence of A. E. Taylor's view of this passage seems to me to be convincing.

living enemy; the poets are for him venerable sources of images and allegories to decorate his thought. But in his critical re-thinking of Platonic and Aristotelian theology he carries on and develops the anti-anthropomorphic tendency. His God is the One or Good who gives good equably, as the sun's light shines upon all, to all the beings he creates, by an eternal action at once free and inevitable which does not break his peace, according to their capacity to receive it: and even at a level far below the Good divine action is tranquil and universal, without choice or planning or break in contemplation. This, I think, is why he so much disliked Judaeo-Christian theism as he understood it.[7] These barbarian theists seemed to him, in contrast to his own conception, to think of God as a fussy, arbitrary little deity who, after aeons of inertia, suddenly decided to create a world and started to make plans and possibly even collect celestial machinery in order to do so, and would eventually destroy it with equal caprice, and in his management of it showed deplorable favouritism and arbitrariness. And before we attack him on the ground of the extreme 'impersonality' in his conception of God (which is not by any means wholly impersonal) we should remember how far our own traditional theology has followed Plotinus and the Hellenic tradition in bringing out the implications of God's infinite and eternal perfection. The Church has seen the amount of truth there was in the Hellenic conceptions and has laid upon her theologians the obligation of reconciling them with, not rejecting them in favour of, the personal revelation of God in Scripture. The personal revelation must of course, for Christians, have the priority. And it seems to be true that, while someone who starts with a wholly impersonal conception of God will have to reject personal conceptions as inadequate or inferior, someone who is aware of God as a person will be able to accept the truth contained in impersonal ways of speaking or thinking about him without inconsistency or loss of anything essential: provided, that is, that he is prepared to purify his conception of personality of anthropomorphic elements, of everything in it that derives from human weakness or simply from the limitations of created being.

[7] He may only have known anything about it through the Christian Gnostics who were members of his circle at Rome: but the criticisms summarised here do not seem to be aimed at specifically Gnostic ideas.

And if he is not prepared to do this, if he remains too simple-mindedly biblical in his thinking, the history of Christian thought and piety shows only too clearly that he will be in danger of thinking and speaking about God as if he was a man, and, sometimes, not even a good man, of representing him as the sort of being whom no responsible appointing body would choose as the headmaster of a school or the bishop of a diocese.

We must now consider in some detail Plotinus's doctrine of *eros*. At first sight, and especially if we confine our attention to the two treatises where he is particularly concerned to expound the teaching of the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* as he understood it (the early I 6 [1] *On Beauty* and the late III 5 [50] *On Love*), it looks as if Plotinus had completely missed just the point in Plato's teaching that Markus and I have been trying to bring out, the idea of *eros* as creative, or productive of good in others. For instance, in I 6, 9, 13-15, he uses the metaphor of 'working on the statue' from the *Phaedrus* with a very significant change. Plato showed the lover working on his beloved to make him more godlike, and becoming more godlike himself in the process. Plotinus exhorts the lover of absolute beauty to go on working on '*his own* statue' so as to make himself perfect and fit for the final vision.[8] And in III 5, 1, he distinguishes the desire of beauty from the desire of perpetuity, though admitting that the objects of the two desires are akin, and places the pure desire of beauty, for itself alone, above that which is mixed with desire for perpetuity through generation, though asserting that both are good and legitimate: this effectively rules out the idea that the highest form of *eros* is essentially productive and creative. And further study of the *Enneads* confirms that for Plotinus the *eros* of aspiration to and union with the Good is a solitary love, a love of one for One (to discuss the reasons for this, and the amount of truth there is in it, would take us too far from our main theme). None the less, if we read him carefully, we shall find that he made some important contributions towards developing the meaning of *eros* to the point where it became an appropriate term to use for the love of God for men.

[8] Cp. W. Theiler's very pertinent comment on this passage in *Plotin Zwischen Plato und Stoa, Entretiens Hardt* V, p. 70.

The first point to notice is that the *eros* for the Good is given by the Good. The Good, as we have already seen, creates all things, gives them being, by a process at once free and inevitable, and the being, which he gives them is a dynamic being which turns back towards its source, which looks, tends, strives towards him: and in us this movement back to our source is *eros*, a love given by and conforming us to the Good we love. 'The soul loves him, moved by him to love from the beginning.' (VI 7 [38], 31, 17-18: the whole chapter is one of the best expressions of this part of his thought.) Furthermore, Plotinus is prepared, with all the qualifications and reserves that in his view necessarily apply to any positive terms which we use about the transcendent source of being, to say that the Good is not only *erasmion*, lovable, but is *eros*. 'He is at once lovable and love and love of himself' (VI 8 [39], 15, 1). Our soul, too, when it is on its way to the Good 'lifted by the giver of its love', itself becomes *eros* (VI 7, 22, 10). And its *eros* persists when it reaches its goal of vision and is perfectly conformed to and united with the Good, and is then clearly distinguished from *oregesthai*, still aspiring, unsatisfied desire (I 6, 7, 14-19). This is also the significance of the distinction between Eros-god and Eros-daemon in III 5 (cp. especially 4, 23-25). Plotinus therefore maintains two of the most important points in Plato's doctrine of *eros*: the first, that true *eros* is always love of the good, a love, that is, that carries in it its own principle of regulation and purification, that is not just blind passion: and the second, that it is not just unsatisfied desire, desire seeking fulfilment, but a love which persists when it has attained to union with its beloved, the absolute Good which it seeks. And he makes two important additions : one that *eros* is caused by the Good, not only in the sense that he is its 'final cause', its object, but in the sense that he gives it in his eternal creative act, which is the creation of dynamic being 'homed' on him, whose being is constituted by its movement towards him: and the other that the Good is himself *eros*.

Having reached this point, it might seem natural to our way of thinking that Plotinus should go on to say that the *eros* which is the Good extends to all that he causes ; that he should bring together his doctrine of the universal free giving of good by the Good and his statement that the good is *eros*; or at least that he should

establish some connection between *eros* and the good *pronoia* or providence which (at a divine level far below the Good) directs everything in the universe for the best, as far as the nature of the universe allows. But in fact he does nothing of the sort: I, at least, can find no indication in the *Enneads* that he ever thought in terms of the *love* of God for his creation or for men. One reason for this is that the idea of *eros* at its highest as procreative or productive of good has, as we have seen, dropped out of his account of human love. But there is another and more important one. Plotinus is always intensely concerned to maintain that God remains unchanged and undiminished by his creative giving, that he has no need to produce and no need of the beings he produces, that it makes no difference to him whether they exist or not. 'He suffices, and need seek nothing beyond himself since he transcends all things: He suffices to himself and the others, being what he is' (VI 7, 37, 29-31). 'He does not need the things which have come into being from him, but leaves them altogether alone, because he needs none of them, but is the same as he was before he brought them into being. He would not have cared if they had not come into being; and if anything else could be derived from him he would not grudge it existence. But as it is, it is not possible for anything else to come into being, and there is nothing left. He is not all things; if he were he would need them: but since he transcends all things he can make them and let them exist by themselves while he remains above them' (V5, 12, 41-49).[9] It is clear from this last passage that Plotinus thought that his doctrine that God is unaffected by creation excluded any idea of divine love or care for creation. And there are two other features of his thought which may have helped to keep this idea out of his mind. One is the doctrine, found everywhere in the *Enneads* but most fully expounded in III 8 [30], that divine action, and the best and most godlike human action, springs directly from contemplation, without willing or planning or concentration of attention on the activity. A man, in his opinion, will act more

[9] There are of course historical reasons for this insistence that God is unaffected by what he produces : the influence of Aristotle, reaction against the dynamic materialism of orthodox Stoicism, in which the divine substance undergoes an endlessly recurring cyclic change in producing and re-absorbing the universe (though Plotinus's own doctrine of divine production probably owes something to the Platonizing Stoicism of Posidonius), and reaction against the melodramatic imaginations of Gnosticism which he hated so much.

virtuously if, instead of thinking 'I propose to perform the following virtuous actions', he simply concentrates his mind on virtue so intensely that the virtuous actions follow naturally and spontaneously as occasion requires. And this, apparently, was not only how he thought but how he lived.[10] The other is his insistence that man's true self is divine in the sense of being eternal and impassible; it cannot change, nothing can ever really happen to it, it has been given all it needs in the eternal act which constitutes it in being.[11] This doctrine in its full rigour is held by only Plotinus and Porphyry, as is now generally recognised by Neoplatonic scholars, and marks them off clearly from their Middle Platonist predecessors and later Neoplatonist successors. It would certainly tend to prevent Plotinus from feeling any need to postulate a divine love and care for man.

This account of Plotinus's thought brings out very clearly the challenge presented to Christian theologians by the degree to which the Church has accepted Hellenic religious philosophy. Those who follow the Catholic tradition are bound to accept Plotinus's teaching that creation makes no difference to God, that it does not react upon him or affect him. They must therefore, when they speak of God's love for us and all created things with proper theological precision, make clear that it is a love in which there is no passivity, that God feels no need for us and cannot be hurt by our rejection of him. The alternative, if we wish to construct a really original, un-Hellenic metaphysic of love, is to adopt an extreme 'kenotic' theory of creation, as well as of redemption: and this is impossible for Catholics.[12]

Plotinus is the greatest of the Platonists, but in many ways (we have just noticed one of the most important ones) his thought stands apart from the main Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition. When we turn to consider the teaching about *eros* given by the great systematic expounder of later Neoplatonism, Proclus, we shall find that it differs from that of Plotinus and is, as I think, in some ways closer to the real thought of Plato. Proclus the Platonic

[10] Porphyry, *Life*, chap. IX.
[11] On this see my *Salvation, Plotinian and Christian*, DOWNSIDE REVIEW, Spring, 1957, pp. 126-39.
[12] Cp. the very careful examination of kenotic theologies in P. Henry's article *Kénose* in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, letter K. cols 7-162.

Successor (i.e. head of the Academy at Athens) lived in a world which was officially Christian (his dates are A.D. 410-485), but he was, like all the Athenian school of Neoplatonists, an extremely stalwart pagan, and I can find no serious evidence of Christian influence on his doctrine of *eros*, which seems to me to be, for all the peculiarities of its late Neoplatonist theological setting, an authentic development of Plato's thought on lines which owe nothing to the New Testament or Christian theology. In accordance with the general character of his philosophy, Proclus limits the scope of *eros* more rigidly than Plotinus. It is only found in one particular group of gods and the godlike men who follow them. But it is interesting and important for our purpose that he does believe in a divine *eros* which is a particular manifestation of the universal divine goodness and moves the gods and their followers to work for the salvation of men. His most striking and easily accessible passages on *eros* are in his commentary on Plato's *Alcibiades I*.[13] The following will give some idea of his thought without plunging us too deeply into the obscure complexities of late Neoplatonist theology:

'. . . so the whole order of love is for all beings the cause of reversion to the divine beauty, on the one hand elevating to, uniting with and establishing in it all that is secondary, and on the other filling therefrom what lies subsequent to itself and making to shine hereon the communications of divine light that proceed from it' (30).[14] 'For after the unitary and primary principle of love and triple subsistence and self-perfecting thereof[15] appears the manifold mass of loves, whence the choirs of angels are filled with their participation of love, the bands of spirits through the fullness imparted by this god accompany the gods in their ascent to intelligible

[13] Throughout this section I am much indebted to the work on the Alcibiades commentary of my friend and pupil Mr W. O'Neill, whose translation I quote.
[14] The numbers are those of Creuzer's pages, given in the margin of the edition of L. G. Westerink (Amsterdam 1954), whose text has been translated by Mr O'Neill.
[15] As it would require another article roughly twice the length of this one merely to sketch the theology of Proclus, I will simply state my own belief, based on very thorough researches by Mr O'Neill, that neither this triplicity nor the mysterious three gods who appear later in the commentary (51) on whom the famous triad *pistis*, *aletheia*, *eros*, depend, show any influence of Christian theology. The *pistis* of Proclus is not Christian faith but Platonic firm rational confidence: and the triadic structure runs through his whole system and has clearly non-Christian origins. Proclus's angels, of course, come from Judaism, via the 'Chaldean Oracles' (from which the triads also derive).

beauty, the armies of heroes revel with the spirits and angels because of their sharing in the beautiful, and everything as it were is aroused, re-kindled and warmed in respect of "the effluence of beauty". Furthermore, men's souls receive a share of such inspiration, and through intimacy with the god are moved with regard to the beautiful, and descend to the region of coming-to-be for the benefit of less perfect souls and out of forethought for those in need of salvation. For the gods and their followers "abiding in their own characters" benefit and turn back to themselves all that is secondary, and men's souls descending and laying hold on process imitate the providence of the gods, which has the form of goodness' (31-32).

Here, it seems to me, we have an authentic development of Plato's thought about *eros*, in particular of the *Phaedrus* (as often in Proclus, this passage has very little to do with the text of *Alcibiades I* 103A on which he is supposed to be commenting: it would be unduly polite to call its exegetical foundation 'insecure' — it is hardly there at all). *Eros* here is not an acquisitive, grasping, self-centred desire. It is a great uniting and harmonising force, which spreads down from above through the vast complexities of the Proclan divine universe, holding it together and inspiring it in the ascent to its source and goal: and it is a force which moves the gods and men who share in it to work for the perfection and salvation of those less good than themselves. At the end of the second passage quoted it is clearly presented as a form of the divine goodness which expresses itself as divine providence: that is, we have here the link between *eros* and *bonum diffusivum sui* which was missing in Plato and Plotinus.[16]

[16] How positively Proclus understood the supreme Good's diffusion of itself can be seen from the following passage of the *Alcibiades* commentary: 'The Good from above — seated as it is beyond the intellectual nature — if it is lawful to say so, proceeds to the last limits, and illuminates all things and preserves and adorns all things and turns them towards itself' (181). The 'if it is lawful to say so' (*ei themis eipein*) suggests that he thinks this is a bold use of language, which might shock some Neoplatonists: it would probably have shocked Plotinus, especially as Proclus goes on to make clear that by 'the last limits' he means formless matter. In his account of the action of the Good which follows it is interesting to note that on the human level the return to the Good comes about through fellowship and consultation, and the uniting of the many by one good counsellor, to secure that unity and self-sufficiency (characteristics of the good), which each individual cannot attain by himself (182). Proclus's dynamic conception of the divine goodness, and his idea of *eros* as a uniting and harmonising force, owe a good deal to the 'Chaldean Oracles' (late second century A.D.). These, like other theosophical literature of the period, reflect in mythical form a type of dynamic Platonism which first appears in Philo: cp. H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy* (Cairo 1956), chap. VI, especially pp. 345-53.

In the modern Christian account of philosophic *eros* with which we started, this kind of love was presented as a desire aspiring to its divine object with which that object had nothing to do except precisely as object of desire, a desire, in fact, like that which moves the heavenly spheres in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1072 a-b). It was alleged to be a purely human aspiration, which was not God and was not caused by God except as 'final cause' or object, and which did not result in love of other men for God's sake. Our examination of the ancient evidence for the Platonic doctrine of true or philosophic *eros* has shown that Plato, Plotinus and Proclus between them present it as a love which is not simply aspiration or unfulfilled desire, because it persists when the lover finds fulfilment in union with the object of his love; a love which when it reaches fulfilment becomes productive and creative; a love which moves the lover to work for the good of his human beloved and find his own good in so doing; a love which God is, and which he causes in men in the act by which he constitutes them in being; a love which expresses the divine goodness in uniting all beings and leading them back to their source, and in moving gods, spirits and godlike men to work for the salvation of those whom it is their mission to help. As we have seen, not all these points of doctrine are to be found in the writings of Plato himself, or in any one of his successors: and I have tried to indicate the limitations of each. But I think it has been shown that the pagan Platonists were able to develop all these ideas about *eros* from Plato's original insights without any help from outside the bounds of the Hellenic philosophical tradition. And this is surely enough to make it clear that the conventional modern Christian account is inadequate and inaccurate, and that Origen and the Greek Christian writers who followed him in this were right in thinking that *eros* in the sense in which it was used by the Platonic philosophers was a word which could rightly be used for the *agape* of God revealed in Christ.

To say that the word could rightly be used by Christians in speaking of God's love for men means that the New Testament and the Platonic philosophers were not talking about two essentially different kinds of love. It does not, of course, mean that the Christian revelation had nothing more to tell us about love than we can find

in the philosophers: and if Origen ever thought that it did[17] he was clearly wrong. In trying to state what that something more is which the revelation of Christ has to tell us we must be careful not to fall into the common error of Christian apologists of giving a distorted or incomplete picture of our own beliefs in order to make the contrast with those of others more striking. One such possible distortion has already been mentioned, when we were discussing Plotinus, that of talking as if we held an extreme 'kenotic' view of God's saving action, according to which God can really be made to suffer in his divine nature by the creatures for whom he reveals his love in the sacrifice of Christ. If we intend to hold the Catholic faith, we must, in all our thought and talk about this supreme revelation of God's love, preserve the tremendous antinomy of the orthodox teaching about the God-Man, that, at the moment when Christ was dying on the Cross for the salvation of the world, he was sustaining cross and world in being in the unbroken, eternal, peace and glory of the Trinity. And another distortion is possible on the other side, if we lay an emphasis on the total undeservingness, the worthlessness of the sinful men for whom Christ died which can only be justified by the heretical doctrine of total depravity. The metaphysical undeservingness of man, so to speak, is firmly established in the Neoplatonism of Plotinus. All that he is, is given, and he has no independent good which will justify him in saying to the Good 'I deserve and have a right to demand my salvation'. And according to Catholic teaching sinful man has still a created, given, worth simply because he is man. The lost sheep is still a sheep: the lost coin still bears the image, however dirty and defaced. Christ died for sinners, but for sinners to whom he had given in creating them a worth which all their efforts could not altogether destroy. But, after all, when we have done our best to talk in terms of sound theology and not of rhetorical piety, when we have refused to draw an unhistorically and untheologically exaggerated contrast between the Christian God who suffers for utterly worthless sinners and the passionless deity of the philosophers who only gives the good their due, the distance between the speculations of the Platonists

[17] Cp. *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy*, pp. 89-90. I do not now feel at all as sure as Dr Markus and most modern scholars that Origen misinterpreted the *eros*-passage in Ignatius *Romans* vii, 1.

and the revelation of God's love in Christ remains great enough to satisfy any reasonable Christian and to convince any reasonable unbeliever that Christianity has something to offer which cannot be found elsewhere. The Christian revelation gives us a new kind of assurance. Faith in Christ is something very different from assent to the conclusion of a philosophical speculation about God's love (though it does not destroy or contradict that assent). This would remain true even if Christ had done no more than live out the myth of some pagan 'saviour' and confirm with his authority the teachings of some pagan philosophers. The fact that he, the Incarnate Son of God, had really done and taught these things would still have made all the difference. The essential uniqueness of Christianity lies, not in any theory about love or anything else, but in the fact of Christ. But the revelation of God's love in the Incarnation and Redemption does really show us that it has a depth, intensity and universality far beyond anything that anyone ever thought or imagined. It far surpasses, though it does not contradict, the conclusions of the philosophers. The proclamation of the good news that God has shown his love for us by becoming man and living, dying and rising again for us, made without exaggeration and with all necessary theological safeguards, at once enlarges our understanding of divine, and human, love beyond the limits set to it by natural experience.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

Another late Neoplatonist who found in Plato's *Phaedrus* the idea that philosophic *eros* should move us to work for the good of our fellow-men was Hierocles, who lectured at Alexandria from about 420, and had been a pupil of Plutarch the Great of Athens who taught Syrianus, the master of Proclus, and, in his extreme old age, Proclus himself. Hierocles was a very old-fashioned Platonist, whose thought was curiously little affected by Plotinian and post-Plotinian developments. It is probable, though not certain, that he was influenced at some points by Jewish or Christian ideas. But the passage in which he interprets the 'philosophic paederasty'

of the *Phaedrus* is so completely Platonic in thought and context that it would be unreasonable to suspect any Christian influence here. It is preserved by Photius in his *Bibliotheca* (cod. 251, pp. 464-66 Bekker). Hierocles takes (wrongly) the 'genuine philosopher' and the 'philosophic lover' of *Phaedrus* 249A as two distinct people. The first is a contemplative utterly detached from the affairs of this world, according to the philosophic idea of Plotinus. The second is identified with the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic*. He is just as genuine a contemplative as the other, but he tries to impart to others the intelligible goods he contemplates and bases a political and educative activity on his contemplation. Being a lover means caring for his fellow-men and bringing beauty and order into the lives of his kindred. And, Hierocles says, the two kinds of life, the purely contemplative and the contemplative-loving, are equal in honour and lead those who live them back equally quickly to the divine world (cp. W. Theiler's remarks on this passage in his paper, already cited, in *Entretiens Hardt* V, p. 68, where he draws the contrast with the teaching of Plotinus which Hierocles certainly intended).