

aforementioned topics of race and disability. Barth's christocentric humanism may indeed have much to say to these issues, but they are, at best, unevenly developed in relationship to the Swiss theologian's own thought.

Nevertheless, Hauerwas helpfully pushes back against the view that Barth's critique of the liberal tradition, including liberal theology, meant that he was an anti-humanist. Barth wanted to promote a more radical humanism rooted in who God is in Jesus Christ, and thus who human beings are called to be, and Hauerwas certainly draws out aspects of this dimension of Barth's thought. Even if this has become a well-worn counter-argument by those sympathetic to Barth, it is gratifying to see how one of the most influential and provocative theological voices of the last forty years is able to work in the spirit of a giant of twentieth-century Protestant thought, to not only illuminate that figure, but to offer an arguably more nuanced, christologically explicit account of Christian engagement with the world.

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Oda Wischmeyer, *Love as Agape: The Early Christian Concept and Modern Discourse*

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Oda Wischmeyer, Professor emerita for New Testament Studies at the Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, sets out 'to present anew the New Testament concept of love', which 'has its own, indispensable contribution to make' to contemporary debates on the meaning of love (pp. 2–3). Originally published in 2015, her work is now available in an English translation by Wayne Coppins. Although for many theologians and ethicists, her subject may bring to mind Anders Nygren's classic twentieth-century work, *Agape and Eros*, she states elsewhere that her book is not in direct conversation with Nygren.¹

Following an introduction that sets out the basic premise of the work, chapter 1 argues that the earliest form of Christian teaching on love was the double commandment to love God and neighbour (e.g. Mark 12:28–34). While these commandments have their basis in the Torah, Wischmeyer asserts that their combination is distinctly Christian. The two commandments appear in separate places in the Hebrew Bible. In addition, Luke's version of the saying (Luke 10:25–37) clarifies that the 'neighbour' includes non-Israelites, something Wischmeyer also understands as an innovation of the New Testament.

Chapter 2 provides historical context for the New Testament. Wischmeyer is not tracing a developmental history of the New Testament concept, but comparing other texts

¹See Oda Wischmeyer, 'Anders Nygren and the "Babylonian Captivity of Agape" Once and Now', *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 91 (2015), pp. 164–72.

to sharpen her understanding of the term in the New Testament. She argues that in the Septuagint, *agape* refers to all kinds of relationships, and she notes that the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* also connects love for God with love of neighbour.

A wider survey of the term *agape* in the New Testament appears in chapter 3. Wischmeyer argues that love is central to Paul's thinking about Gentiles because he detaches love from the law and therefore 'detaches his thinking in general from structure of law and commandments ... The law as an ethical control mechanism ... is replaced by the open principle of the good' (p. 79). Thus, Paul presents *agape* as a new ethos for shaping behaviour in the *ekklesia*. Discussing love as being known by God (e.g. 1 Cor 8:3), Wischmeyer argues 'Paul turns the early Jewish motif of love for God into the prevenient love of God for human beings, which is characterized as "being known"' (p. 92).

Love (both as *agape* and *philia*) is central to the Johannine traditions, where it is conveyed as a 'new' commandment to love one another (John 13:34). Love of Jesus for the disciples and for God, and love of God for Jesus and the world, are essential to John, and both are related to the Father 'giving' the son (John 3:16) and to Jesus's willingness to die on the cross. Love defines God (1 John 4:8) and shapes the ethos of the disciples toward one another. Wischmeyer concludes, 'Love is not used simply for the feeling of affection or empathy or for the desire for another person but for an interpersonal saving event that can require sacrifice of life' (p. 129).

Chapter 4 takes up the 'concept of love' in the New Testament writings. While the previous chapter had displayed the variety of meanings of *agape*, here Wischmeyer is interpreting these, 'tracing out how we can make the heterogeneous statements on love accessible for our understanding in the present' (p. 132). She argues that, although *agape* had a range of meaning in the Septuagint, the meaning narrows in the New Testament. Sexual and erotic meanings are no longer present. Instead, love becomes a personal bond (often framed in familial language) that shapes the community's behaviour and ethics. She discusses two examples of love at length: Luke's version of the woman anointing Jesus (Luke 7:36–50), which Jesus interprets as an act of love, and the raising of Lazarus (John 11). These stories highlight the emotional and individual valences of love and, Wischmeyer argues, 'prohibit a perspective that has been domesticated in a caritative or communitarian way' (pp. 149–50).

In chapter 5 Wischmeyer connects the concept of love she has articulated with other notions in the New Testament or its social context. She explores love in contrast to themes like sexuality, fear, violence and death, and in parallel to mercy and friendship. These are not always ideas that New Testament writers explicitly connect to love, but in doing so Wischmeyer seeks to add clarity to her definition of the concept. Chapter 6 brings modern notions of love into the picture. Wischmeyer explores theorists from a range of scholarly disciplines who develop a concept of love. The contrast highlights the religious and communal aspects of New Testament love and the absence of beauty and sexuality in the New Testament concept.

Overall, Wischmeyer offers a deeply learned theological reflection on love in the New Testament. Her interpretations of biblical texts will be useful to anyone interested in *agape*, and her reflections upon modern theories of love bring a helpful variety to the conversation. Methodologically, the book sits firmly in the German historical-critical tradition but does so in conversation with her increasingly post-religious context.

My disagreements with Wischmeyer centre around the relationship of the New Testament to Judaism. Although it is true that the word *agape* means many things in the Septuagint, the writings that are closer in time to the New Testament period (e.g.

4 Maccabees, Sirach) bear stronger resemblance. And although Wischmeyer claims that the connection between love of God and neighbour is a New Testament innovation, she also notes the frequent connection of these two ideas in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Another scholar might look at the same material and find greater resemblance between the New Testament and its Jewish cultural surroundings. Furthermore, Wischmeyer reads *agape* as a concept that leaves the law behind. Many scholars would disagree, understanding much of the New Testament, and Paul in particular, as maintaining the law's importance. Love may indeed play a role in how Paul communicates his understanding of the law: by pointing to love as the centre of the law, Paul opens a way for Gentiles who exhibit love to fulfil the law.

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Hud Hudson, *Fallenness and Flourishing*

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Perhaps because we typically connect pessimism with crankiness or despair, self-described pessimists are currently rare. In this book, Hud Hudson defends not a psychological pessimism that, Eeyore-like, expects every event of daily life to turn out unfortunately, but a this-worldly philosophical pessimism, which he considers compatible with eschatological optimism. His resulting 'optimistic pessimism' might sound inconsistent (I prefer the less paradoxical term 'hopeful pessimism') but his argument is thought-provoking.

Hudson begins by highlighting reasons for pessimism, which I group here under four general types. (1) Temporal pessimism raises questions about the Enlightenment belief in historical progress (a theme particularly highlighted by another defender of pessimism, Joshua Dienstag). (2) Anthropological pessimism, arising from the theological doctrines of the fall and original sin, draws attention to the significant and abiding imperfections of humanity. (3) Ontological pessimism highlights a lack of fit between natural human desires and our world – since death and sickness, for example, create widespread unhappiness. (4) Noetic pessimism expresses the concern that in significant ways we do not know what is good for us or how to achieve it, and thus lack the understanding needed to seek happiness.

This-worldly optimism, Hudson suggests, is often vicious because it makes light of these concerns. Like the devils in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, who after their fall convinced themselves to try making a heaven out of hell, Americans have developed self-serving habits of 'looking on the bright side'. But are we in fact living good lives, and are we actually happy? Hudson takes up these questions by arguing that human flourishing has two interrelated parts, objective (or ontological) and subjective (or affective). The ontological part he seeks to capture by reference to an 'objective list' theory of the goods essential to the perfection of any human person (e.g. health, knowledge and joy). The affective part is captured by a 'psychic affirmation' theory of happiness,