

## from *Love and Responsibility* **Betrothed Love**

Betrothed love differs from all aspects of love analysed hitherto. Its decisive character is the giving of one's own person (to another). The essence of betrothed love is self-giving, the surrender of one's 'I'. This is something different from and more than attraction, desire or even goodwill. These are all the ways by which one person goes out towards another, but none of them can take him as far in his quest for the good of the other as does betrothed love. 'To give oneself to another' is something more than merely 'desiring what is good' for another - even is as a result of this another 'I' becomes as it were my own, as it does in friendship. Betrothed love is something different from and more than all the forms of love so far analysed, both as it affects the individual subject, the person who loves, and as regards the interpersonal union which it creates. When betrothed love enters into this interpersonal relationship something more than friendship results: two people give themselves each to the other.

This matter demands more thorough consideration. First of all, the question arises whether any person can give himself or herself to another person. We said above that the person is always, of its very nature, untransferable, *alteri incommunicabilis*. This means not only that it is its own master (*sui juris*) but that it cannot give itself away, cannot surrender itself. The very nature of the person is incompatible with such a surrender. Indeed, in the natural order it makes no sense to speak of a person giving himself or herself to another, especially if this is meant in the physical sense. The person as such cannot be someone else's property, as though it were a thing. In consequence, the treatment of a person as an object for use is also excluded, as we have already seen in our closer examination of that subject. But what is impossible and illegitimate in the natural order and in a physical sense, can come about in the order of love in a moral sense. In this sense, one person can give himself or herself, can surrender entirely to another, whether to a human person or to God, and such a giving of the self creates a special form of love which we define as betrothed love. This fact goes to prove that the person has a dynamism of its own, and that specific laws govern its existence and evolution. Christ gave expression to this in a saying which is on the face of it profoundly paradoxical: 'He who would save his soul shall lose it, and he who would lose his soul for my sake shall find it again' (Matthew 10:39).

Indeed, the problem of betrothed love does contain a profound paradox, a very real, and not merely verbal paradox: the words of the Gospel point to a concrete reality, and the truth which they contain is made manifest in the life of the person. Thus, of its very nature, no person can be transferred or ceded to another. In the natural order, it is oriented towards self-perfection, towards the attainment of an ever greater fullness of existence - which is, of course, always the existence of some concrete 'I'. We have already stated that this self-perfection proceeds side by side and step by step with love. The fullest, the most uncompromising form of love consists precisely in self-giving, in making one's inalienable and non-transferable 'I' someone else's property. This is doubly paradoxical: firstly in that it is possible to step outside one's own 'I' in this way, and secondly in that the 'I' far from being destroyed or impaired as a result is enlarged and enriched - of course in a super-physical, a moral sense. The Gospel stresses this very clearly and unambiguously - 'would lose - shall find again' 'would save - shall lose'. You will readily see that we have here not merely the personalistic norm but also bold and explicit words of advice, which make it possible for us to amplify and elaborate on that norm. The world of persons possesses its own laws of existence and of development.

Self surrender as a form of love is the result of a process within the person, and presupposes a mature vision of values, and a will ready and able to commit itself in this particular way. Betrothed love can never be a fortuitous or imperfect event in the inner life of the person. It always constitutes a special crystallization of the whole human 'I', determined because of its love to dispose of itself in this particular way. In giving ourselves we find clear proof that we possess ourselves. As for the particular manifestations of this form of love, they can, I think, vary greatly. Leaving aside the devotion of a mother to her child, do we not find self-giving in, for instance, the relationship of a doctor with his patient, or in a teacher, who devotes himself with utter dedication to the education of his pupil, or a pastor who devotes himself with equal dedication to a soul entrusted to his care? In the same way great public figures or apostles can devote themselves to many people at once, people for the most part personally unknown to them, whom they serve by serving society as a whole. To determine in any of the cases mentioned, or in others like them, how far genuine dedicated love is involved is no easy matter. For in each of them no more than sincere goodwill and friendliness may be at work. In order, for instance, to 'give oneself entirely' to the vocation of a doctor, teacher or pastor, it suffices simply to 'desire the good' of those for whom these duties are performed. And even if this form of behaviour comes to resemble a complete surrender of the self and so establishes its claim to be love, it would still be difficult to apply the name 'betrothed love' to it.

The concept of betrothed love implies the giving of the individual person to another chosen person. We speak therefore of love in certain cases when we seek to define the relationship between man and God. (This will be discussed separately in Chapter IV.) We have also the best possible grounds for speaking of betrothed love in connection with matrimony. The love of two persons, man and woman, leads in matrimony to their mutual dedication one to the other. From the point of view of each individual person this is a clear surrender of the self to another person, while in the interpersonal relationship it is surrender of each to the other. 'Self-giving', in the sense in which we are discussing it, should not be identified (confused) with 'giving oneself' in a merely psychological sense, with the sensation of self-surrender, still less with the surrender in a merely physical sense. As far as surrender in the first (the psychological) sense is concerned, it is only the woman, or at any rate it is above all the woman, who feels that her role in marriage is to give herself; the man's experience of marriage is different, since, 'giving oneself' has as its psychological correlative 'possession'. However, the psychological approach is insufficient here for if we think the problem through objectively, and that means ontologically, what happens in the marital relationship is that the man simultaneously gives himself, in return for the woman's gift of herself to him, and thus although his conscious experience of it differs from the woman's it must none the less be a real giving of himself to another person. If it is not there is a danger that the man may treat the woman as an object, and indeed an object to be used. If marriage is to satisfy the demands of the personalistic norm it must embody reciprocal self-giving, a mutual betrothed love. The acts of surrender reciprocate each other, that of the man and that of the woman, and though they are psychologically different in kind, ontologically they combine to produce a perfect whole, an act of mutual self-surrender. Hence a special duty devolves upon the man: he must give to 'conquest' or 'possession' its appropriate form and content - which means that he too must give himself, no less than she does.

It is all the more obvious that this giving of oneself of which we speak cannot, in marriage or indeed in any relationship between persons of opposite sex, have a merely sexual significance. Giving oneself only sexually, without the full gift of the person to validate it, must lead to those forms of utilitarianism which we have endeavored to analyse as thoroughly as we could in Chapter I. We must stress this because there is a more or less pronounced tendency to interpret the 'gift of self' in a purely sexual, or sexual and psychological, sense. A personalistic interpretation is, however, absolutely necessary in this context. Thus, the moral code which has the commandment to love at its centre finds itself in perfect agreement with the identification of marriage with betrothed love, or rather - looking at it from the educational point of view

with the treatment of marriage as the result of this form of love.

from Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, ``The Person and Love'', pp. 96-99.

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[augustine@columbia.edu](mailto:augustine@columbia.edu)

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