

Love at the Core: The Grain of the Universe

Matthew 5: 1-14; 38-48; I John 4:7-8; 12, 16b

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The theme for today's reflection has been announced as: Love at the Core: The Grain of the Universe

The first letter of John affirms, "God is Love." Pitirim A. Sorokin concluded that, with the birth of the atomic age, humanity needed more than ever a quantum leap both in the scientific understanding of altruistic love and its implementation. By the late 1940s, he was especially interested in discovering how love for others is related to their felt participation in a presence that is higher than our own and that serves as a source of unlimited love across all divisions of tribal, religious, political and ethnic loyalties. Sorokin's *The Ways and Power of Love*, published in 1954, is a careful scientific analysis of love with regard to its higher and lower forms, its causes and effects, its human and cosmic significance, and its core features.

Combining Biblical insights and Sorokin's analysis, I will claim love is the core of reality reflected in the grain of the universe.

As you can well imagine, it is one thing to stake a claim; it is quite another to establish it. My intention here is to hear Sorokin's contention and show how it aligns with New Testament teaching and especially the Way of Jesus as it comes to expression in the Sermon on the Mount. My endeavor is not the introduction of material foreign to Sorokin's research. Indeed, he begins his Preface with a quotation from the Sermon on the Mount and goes on to relate his own personal experience that caused him to embark on his life's work – the description of and advocacy for altruistic love. Sorokin begins,

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

In 1918 I was hunted from pillar to post by the Russian Communist Government. At last I was imprisoned and condemned to death. Daily, during six weeks, I expected to be shot, and witnessed the shooting of my friends and fellow prisoners. During the subsequent four years of my stay in Communist Russia I underwent other painful experiences and observed, to the heartbreaking point, endless horrors of human bestiality, death, and destruction. Exactly in these conditions I jotted down in my diary the

following “observations of a cold intellect and plaintive murmurs of a saddened heart”:

“Whatever may happen in the future, I know that I have learned three things which will remain forever convictions of my heart as well as my mind. Life, even the hardest life, is the most beautiful, wonderful, and miraculous treasure in the world. Fulfillment of duty is another marvelous thing making life happy. This is my second conviction. And my third is that cruelty, hatred, violence, and injustice never can and never will be able to create a mental, moral, or material millennium. The only way toward it is the royal road of all-giving creative love, not only preached but consistently practiced.”

Some thirty-five years have passed since these lines were written. The tragic events of these years, as well as my scientific studies, immeasurably reinforced these beliefs, and led me even to the establishment of the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism. Now more than ever before I believe in the following truths, which are fully confirmed by our experimental studies:

Hate begets hate, violence engenders violence, hypocrisy is answered by hypocrisy, war generates war, and love creates love.

Unselfish love has enormous creative and therapeutic potentialities, far greater than most people think. Love is a life-giving force, necessary for physical, mental, and moral health.

Altruistic persons live longer than egoistic individuals.

Children deprived of love tend to become vitally, morally, and socially defective.

Love is the most powerful antidote against criminal, morbid, and suicidal tendencies; against hate, fear, and psychoneuroses.

It is an indispensable condition for deep and lasting happiness.

It is goodness and freedom at their loftiest.

It is the finest and most powerful force for the ennoblement of humanity.

Finally, only the power of unbounded love practiced in regard to all human beings can defeat the forces of interhuman strife, and can prevent the pending extermination of man by man on this planet. Without love, no armament, no war, no diplomatic machinations, no coercive police force, no school education, no economic or political measures, not even hydrogen bombs can prevent the pending catastrophe. Only love can accomplish this miracle, providing, however, we know well the nature of love and the efficient ways of its production, accumulation, and use.

But, unfortunately, Sorokin writes, we know less about the energy of love than about light, heat, electricity, and other forms of physical energy. He continues, citing A. H. Maslow:

“It is amazing how little the empirical sciences have to offer on the subject of love,” correctly says A. H. Maslow. “Particularly strange is the silence of the psychologists. Sometimes this is merely sad or irritating, as in the case of the textbooks of psychology and sociology, practically none of which treat the subject... More often the situation becomes completely ludicrous. [As a rule] the word ‘love’ is not even indexed [in psychological and sociological works].”
 (“Love in Happy People,” in Ashley Montagu, ed., *The Meaning of Love*, pp. 57-58)

It is obvious from the Preface that Sorokin will offer no dry academic treatise on love. Much rather, what he offers is an existential quest to discern the nature of love, its creative source, its characteristics in real life and the fruitful practices by which Love is enacted and embodied. Before outlining the flow of the work, he expresses his sense of urgency about researching love’s nature and his commitment to adding to our understanding and practice of love.

At the present juncture of human history an increase in our knowledge of the grace of love has become the paramount need of humanity, and an intensive research in this field should take precedence over almost all other studies and research.

This present work, together with its companion volume, *Forms and Techniques of Altruistic and Spiritual Growth: A Symposium*, is my humble contribution to this great objective. Considering the immensity of the task, the contribution is very modest in comparison with the total sum of the necessary studies. Since, however, the better brains are busy with other problems, including the invention of means of extermination of human beings; since educators are largely engrossed in cultivation of the intellect and tribal patriotism of their pupils, while many a religious leader is absorbed in the intertribal crusades against various enemies – under these conditions somebody, somehow, must devote himself to a study of the miracle of love, no matter how inadequate is his capacity to do the work well. *Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes*. This is my excuse for the innumerable infirmities of this contribution. (xii)

The Introduction, “Pitirim Sorokin as Pioneer in the Scientific Study of Unlimited Love,” by Stephen G. Post, gives a portrait of Sorokin’s life which sets his passion and his work in historical context. First, however, he gives a concise summary of Sorokin’s analysis of love. He begins the Introduction with a reference to Sorokin’s life but quickly moves to the summary.

A towering figure in twentieth-century sociology, Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889-1968) was born in Russia, and died near Boston. One might introduce his *The Ways and Power of Love* with a summary of the author’s life, which would indeed be fascinating. As a young man in Russia, for instance, he

was imprisoned first by the Czarists and then by the Bolsheviks, allowing him to conclude that Czarist prison was the more comfortable of the two. After immigrating to the United States in 1923 to teach at the University of Minnesota, he went on to become the founding chairman of the Department of Sociology at Harvard University in 1931 and later established the Harvard Research Center for Creative Altruism. It is best, however, to reflect on Sorokin's life only after acquainting the reader with the essential features of his analysis of love. The scope and depth of his analysis, which can only be described as uniquely insightful, will naturally kindle the reader's curiosity about the man behind these enriching ideas. (p. xv)

The Ways and Power of Love was published in 1954 when Sorokin was leading the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism. In Mortimer J. Adler's *Concepts of Western Thought* Series, the philosopher Robert G. Hazo wrote,

Sorokin treats love as a separate subject in a treatise devoted exclusively to it. His elaborate discussion and analysis of love, its causes and effects, its human and universal significance, its higher and lower forms, and its implications for other subjects constitute one of the most extensive treatments to be found in the systematic literature about love. *The Ways and Power of Love* is an ambitious attempt to subject analytical schemes to a phenomenon that Sorokin claims has both a human and a cosmic dimension. (p. xvf)

Post relates the rich background of Sorokin in the nineteenth-century Russian tradition. He was, "a creative and idealistic social thinker devoted to scientific observation but with too wide-ranging an intellect to rest content with a purely technical rationality." The Russian movement sought "integral knowledge," and included Feodor Dostoyevsky. A close friend of Dostoyevsky, Vladimir Solovyov, was a special influence on Sorokin. He synthesized philosophy and mysticism in his classic work entitled *The Meaning of Love* (1894). Solovyov wrote of love and its contrasts:

The basic falsehood and evil of egoism lie not in this absolute self-consciousness and self-evaluation of the subject, but in the fact that, ascribing to himself in all justice an absolute significance, he unjustly refuses to others this same significance. Recognizing himself as a center of life (which as a matter of fact he is), he relegates others to the circumference of his own being and leaves them only an external and relative value.

Positively stated, Solovyov described the nature and value of love thus:

The meaning and worth of love, as a feeling, is that it really forces us, with all our being to acknowledge for another the same absolute central significance which, because of the power of our egoism, we are conscious

of only in our own selves. Love is important not as one of our feelings, but as the transfer of all our interest in life from ourselves to another, as the shifting of the very center of our personal lives.

Solovyov, like Sorokin, understood human love as a partial reflection of, and at its heights a participation in, divine love. (p. xvif)

According to the Russian movement that sought “Integral Knowledge,” Sorokin analyzed love under seven aspects – the tenets of integral knowledge, which Post summarizes thus:

The religious aspect of love identifies it with a Higher Presence, however variously symbolized in the great spiritual and religious traditions; the ethical aspect of love identifies love with goodness itself; the ontological aspect of love defines it as a “unifying, integrating, harmonizing, creative energy or power” that works in the physical, organic, and psychosocial worlds (p. 6); the physical aspect of love is shown in “all the physical forces that unite, integrate, and maintain the whole inorganic cosmos in endless unities, beginning with the smallest unity of the atom and ending with the whole physical universe as one unified, orderly cosmos” (pp. 8-9); the biological aspect of love is evident in procreation and parental care.

The sixth aspect of love is the psychological, and it is here that Sorokin defines love as follows: “In any genuine psychological experience of love, the ego or I of the loving individual tends to merge with and identify itself with the loved Thee. The greater the love, the greater the identification” (p. 10). He views love as a “life-giving force” because of studies showing that people who are altruists live longer than egoists do, although Sorokin does not elaborate. Love is also defined as “the loftiest form of freedom” (p. 11), for where there is love there is no coercion. Sorokin refers to the writings of St. Paul on this point, and was conversant with his Russian contemporary, the theologian Nicholas Berdyaev, who emphasized that love nailed upon a cross compels no one. On the psychological level, Sorokin also notes that love overcomes fear, as exemplified by the life of Gandhi, whom he much admired as a modern saint: “Love does not fear anything or anybody. It cuts off the very roots of fear” (pp. 11-12). In a manner that brings to mind the various spiritual-ethical writings of the contemporary Dali Lama, Sorokin associates love with “the highest peace of mind and happiness (p. 12).”

Seventh is the social aspect of love: “on the social plane love is a meaningful interaction – or relationship – between two or more persons where the aspirations and aims of one person are shared and helped in their realization by other persons (p, 13).” (p. xviif)

The depth and breadth of Sorokin’s analysis of love is demonstrated by his careful scientific description of love as lived out in human experience, but is not satisfied

with such a phenomenological approach. Rather he wrote, “Concentrating on these planes, however, we shall always keep in mind the manifoldness of love as a whole because, without its religious, ethical, and ontological aspects, we cannot truly understand a “visible” part of this cosmos, its psychological, empirical aspects” (p. 14), (p. xviii).

Post comments,

Methodologically committed to new scientific knowledge that can move our understanding of love forward, he was also attentive to a wider cosmic context and to the fullness of human experience and history. (p. xviii).

While Sorokin’s analysis of love, its marks, dimensions, practice in varying groups and disciplines, is painfully thorough and expansive, it is not my intention to go into any depth or breadth of his remarkable analysis. That would be beyond the limits of time and beyond my capacity. What struck me about Sorokin is the combining of careful scientific study along with the realization that such love as he was analyzing and calling for, if the human family is to have a future, must be rooted beyond its surface manifestation that was observable. Here was a serious scientist, a truly great scholar, pointing beyond the limits of empirical research. Yet the love he was researching has been lived out from time to time by truly exceptional human beings. Post notes,

Of special interest to Sorokin was the love of figures such as Jesus, Al Hallaj, Damien the Leper, and Gandhi. Persecuted and hated, and therefore without any apparent social source of love energy, they nevertheless were able to maintain a love at high levels in all five dimensions. Such love seems to transcend ordinary human limits; it seems to suggest, argued Sorokin, that some human beings do, through various spiritual and religious practices, participate in a love energy that defines God....

Sorokin was convinced that such perfect or unlimited love can best be explained by hypothesizing an inflow of love from some higher source of love energy that far exceeds that of human beings. One might ask why, after all, we human creatures should arrogantly think that our paltry manifestations of love represent love’s highest expression in the universe of being. Sorokin, following the Russian tradition of integral knowledge, was willing to hypothesize the existence of a higher source of love in the universe in which degrees of human participation are possible. He writes quite metaphysically of the exemplars of love at its fullest, many of whom were despised and had no psychosocial inflow of love to sustain them:

The most probable hypothesis for them (and in a much slighter degree for a much larger group of smaller altruists and good neighbors) is that an inflow of love comes from an intangible, little-studied, possibly supraempirical source called “God,” “the Godhead,”

“the Soul of the Universe,” the “heavenly Father,” “Truth,” and so on. (p. xxi).

In a section entitled “Creative Personality and the Supraconscious,” Post states that “Sorokin openly asserted a view of human nature that included the supraconscious.” It is at the level of the supraconscious that genuinely creative love resides. Post continues,

Of course, Sorokin was running against the grain of the social sciences, with their “materialistic and mechanistic metaphysics” (p. 98), and he therefore felt compelled to “lay down the very minimum of evidence” (p. 98) for the reality of the supraconscious. This evidence, as Sorokin offers it, includes the supraconscious intuition that informs so much of the highest human creativity (and the work of child prodigies) in virtually all fields from mathematics to ethics and religion (ch.6). The perfectly integrated creative genius achieves the highest level of creativity without strenuous effort. In ego-centered love, i.e., love “of low intensity, narrow extensivity, and short duration, impure and inadequate” (p. 125), no supraconscious is involved. However, “quite different seems to be the situation with the supreme forms of creative love – intense, extensive, durable, pure, and adequate. Like supreme creativity in the field of truth or beauty, *supreme love can hardly be achieved without a direct participation of the supraconscious and without the ego-transcending techniques of its awakening*” (p. 125), italics in original). Sorokin gathers empirical support for this statement from the testimony of “innumerable eminent apostles of love” who, across cultures and generations describe themselves as instruments of the supraconscious: “God, Heaven, Heavenly Father, Tao, the Great Reason, the Oversoul, Brahma, Jen, Chit, the Supre-Essence, the Divine Nothing, the Divine Madness, the Logos, the Sophia, the Supreme Wisdom, the Inner Light” (p. 127).

One realizes immediately, reading Sorokin, that this is no ordinary scholarly pursuit; for Sorokin was dealing with the possibility of a human future. Relating something of Sorokin’s life, Post writes,

In 1945, anxious over the human condition in the wake of World War II and Hiroshima, he determined to found a program on creative altruism. Here Sorokin’s autobiography, entitled *A Long Journey* (1963), becomes essential. Sorokin expresses pessimism about potential political or other attempts to bring about peace without the “notable altruization of persons, groups, institutions, and culture.” He is hardly sanguine about the role of extrinsic religion, because his own studies indicated that a “purely ideological belief in God or in the credo of any of the great religions” rarely results in more altruistic behavior. He became increasingly interested in investigating “scientifically this unknown or little known energy” of love: “The phenomena of altruistic love were thought to belong to religion and ethics rather than to science. They were considered good topics for

preaching but not for research and teaching.” He thought that research grants on the topic of creative, unselfish love would be uniformly rejected by peer reviewers. In a voice that has since been heard by the now rising positive psychology movement of the 1990s, Sorokin noted the tendency of scientists to focus research on the disease model:

While many a modern sociologist and psychologist viewed the phenomena of hatred, crime, war, and mental disorders as legitimate objects for scientific study, they quite illogically stigmatized as theological preaching or non-scientific speculation any investigation of the phenomena of love, friendship, heroic deeds, and creative genius. This patently unscientific position of many of my colleagues is merely a manifestation of the prevalent concentration on the negative, pathological, and subhuman phenomena typical of the disintegrating phase of our sensate culture. (p. xxvi)

Sorokin recognizes his concern, his passion, was “the stuff of preaching, of theological discourse,” but he had no confidence in religion in the form of institutions or in credal formulation that often not only unite a group but also divide the human family – “purely ideological belief in God” cannot effect the loving community as broad as humanity and finally anything less than that is inadequate to cast the mantle of creative love over humankind. Post points to Sorokin’s final chapter:

The final part of the book, *Tragedy and Transcendence of Tribal Altruism*, consists of a single chapter 23, entitled *From Tribal Egoism to Universal Altruism*. This is the last and most pessimistic chapter. Sorokin asserts a general law:

If unselfish love does not extend over the whole of mankind, if it is confined within one group – a given family, tribe, nation, race, religious denomination, political party, trade union, caste, social class or any part of humanity – such in-group altruism tends to generate an out-group antagonism. And the more intense and exclusive the in-group solidarity of its members, the more unavoidable are the clashes between the group and the rest of humanity. Herein lies the tragedy of tribal altruism not extended over the whole of mankind or over everyone and all. An exclusive love of one’s own group makes its members indifferent or even aggressive towards other groups and outsiders (p. 459, italics in original)

Sorokin’s concern with in-group insularity pervades his writings, especially in his many passages regarding the extent to which apostles of universal love have clashed with tribalists and been imprisoned, banished, tortured, and killed. But in addition to exemplars of unlimited love for all humanity, innumerable groups have themselves been destroyed by the collective egoism of group loyalty. As Sorokin writes, “Whether in the form

of a cold or a hot war, this intergroup warfare has gone on incessantly in human history, and has filled its annals with the most deadly, most bloody, and most shameful deeds of Homo sapiens” (p. 461). In-group exclusivism has “killed more human beings and destroyed more cities and villages than all the epidemics, hurricanes, storms, floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions taken together. It has brought upon mankind more suffering than any other catastrophe” (p. 461). Religious, ethnic, tribal, caste, and class wars have thus far defined much of human history and experience. What is needed, argues Sorokin, is enhanced extensivity. His recommendation is that the power of hatred be focused on threats to the whole of mankind, such as disease, ignorance, and poverty. He also recommends that competitions be sponsored on the basis of new values: “Unselfish love and humility can successfully be one of the most important competitive values” (p. 468). Indeed, humility was a core value in Sorokin’s approach to a better human future. (pp. xxiiiif).

Sorokin writes about love but he is not a sentimentalist. He is painfully aware of the violence that has marked the human story. Neither is he naïve. He faces honestly the terrible blood-soaked history of humanity. He writes,

“Imperialistic” encroachments of any selfish group are opposed, first of all by all persons whose love behavior extends over other groups and especially over the whole of humanity. They cannot approve aggressive misdeeds of an exclusive tribal loyalty. Their universal or more extensive love cannot help clashing with the narrow, tribal love of the group. Hence the conflict between such persons and the group. Hence the persecution of such individuals by the group. Hence the tragic martyrdom of the apostles of universal love, who have been condemned to death, imprisoned, banished, tortured, and variously persecuted by the partisans of tribal loyalty. Socrates, Jesus, St. Peter, St. Paul, Al Hallaj, Gandhi and some 37 per cent of the saintly Christian altruists are eminent examples of its victims. The total number of the martyrs of tribal patriotism of various political, ethnic, racial, religious, economic, occupational, and other collectivities with exclusive in-group solidarity has been enormous in human history.

Jesus well understood this clash between the two types, and the persecution of the universal altruists by the tribal ones, when he said to his disciples: “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake....” “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother.” Almost any universal altruist is bound to become a “subversive enemy” to be persecuted by the “patriotic” tribal altruists. In this sense the eternal tragedy of the *agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi* continues in human history unabated. The tribal patriots of “the Athenian Committee on un-Athenian Activities” condemned to death Socrates; “the Jewish Committee on un-Jewish Activities” crucified Jesus;

“the Muslim Committee on un-Muslim Activities” quartered and burned Al Hallaj; the self-appointed guardians of Hindu Orthodoxy shot Gandhi for his “un-Orthodox” activities. The annals of history are sprinkled with the blood of altruistic “heretics and schismatics” put to death by the tribal “orthodox” religions; indeed, each page of these annals is soaked in the blood of altruistic “subversives” executed by the tribal state governments. Most of the political parties, racial occupational, national, and other groups have been guilty in persecution of their “disloyal” members whose “disloyalty” consisted exactly in extension of their love far beyond the boundaries of the respective organization. And so this drama is continued up to this day when a multitude of “patriotic governments” and “crusading committees” relentlessly persecute many a “disloyal” altruist in the name of Communist, Socialist, Liberal, Conservative, Fascist, Democratic, Capitalist, Labor, Atheist, Religious, and other tribal solidarities and lilliputian in-group patriotisms. And so far, no end of this tragedy is visible. (p. 459f)

That was published in 1954 and the half-century since has only been an exclamation point to Sorokin’s sad portrait. But he will not yield to despair and hopelessness. The vast variety of human beings, of such different orientations, cultural differences, traditional formation, religious understanding – in a word, everything that uniquely marks individuals, groups, tribes, nations is not the cause of aggression, violence, warfare and bloodshed. Rather, Sorokin asserts,

History exhibits to us thousands of dissimilar families and millions of heterogeneous persons who have at various periods peacefully lived side by side in mutual harmony. If dissimilarity were the cause of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts, such a peaceful coexistence of heterogeneous individuals and collectivities would have been impossible. If it has occurred many times, as it undoubtedly has, then the real cause of the warfare lies not in these differentiations, but in something else – namely, in the poison of tribal selfishness that infiltrated in the differentiated societies and their members. This poison consists exactly of the restricted extensity and exclusiveness of their tribal love or solidarity. If this hypothesis is correct, then the disease can be cured only by extension of solidarity or love to include everyone and all. This extension does not require elimination of all interpersonal and intergroup dissimilarities. It requires only a thorough cleaning of individuals and groups from the poison of exclusive selfishness. (p. 463)

Perhaps now the reader will shake her head and write the author off as an impossible dreamer. But Sorokin will not falter before the seeming impossible dream. Rather, he continues,

If this diagnosis is correct, can the prescription of the universal love be carried through? Can one indeed love equally every human being, the

strangers and the enemies as much as the members of his family and friends? Is not such love a biological and psychological impossibility?

Taken literally, the prescription is impossible for the overwhelming majority of human beings; however, the extension of love over the whole of mankind neither means nor requires an equal distribution of love among all human beings. At its initial stage it means three things: first, that everyone loves the members of his family and the limited circle of his friends and acquaintances as his special part of humanity chosen by and entrusted to him for this purpose. If everyone does so, every member of the human race will find himself loving and loved by the members of his special groups. Under such conditions not a single person in the whole human population remains unloved and not loving. Second, universal love means that everyone must abstain from all actions harmful to any human being. Through this *neminem laedere* in the whole human race nobody remains hated, harmed, and seriously mistreated by other human beings. Third, it means that everyone, within his capacity, extends his loving hand beyond his special group to everybody who is in need of help and warm sympathy – first of all, in one's immediate community and second, in the whole human universe. If everybody does so in regard to the persons in his own community, then every human being will find the needed loving help from his community. If each community does the same in regard to other communities in need of help, then the whole human population will be blessed by, at least, the minimum of love and vital help. Under these conditions in the whole mankind there will be found not a single person lonely, forsaken, unloved, or unhelped. This extension of love can be done privately and publicly, in individual and social forms. If now and then it requires sacrifice on the part of the individual and his group, such sacrifice is to be gladly given. If every person and group do so, these sacrifices will be repaid by other individuals and groups when the sacrificing persons and groups are in need of help. Viewed so, the sacrifices are but a form of a mutual insurance of all human beings against possible insecurity and misfortune.

Such is the meaning of the universal love at its initial stage. It is easily seen that it does not contain anything utopian or impossible. At this stage it represents but a development of the existing "network of love," and an increased inhibition of the interhuman aggression. Once established in this initial form, it will in the course of time and practice spontaneously develop into ever richer, nobler, and more perfect universal love. If wisely guided and earnestly executed, the initial phase of universal love can be achieved without serious difficulty and at a much cheaper cost in the terms of death, suffering, and destruction, than the price to be paid in this sort of "money" for continuation of tribal loyalties and tribal warfare. Within the life cycle of one or two generations this phase will bring mankind much closer to the ideal of security, brotherhood, and peace on the earth, than the leaders and followers of tribal patriotisms have been

able to do for millennia or can do in the future. Here are some of the practical prescriptions as to what the first steps of realization of the universal solidarity should consist in, and how they should be carried through, to bring mankind nearer to this objective. (pp. 463-464)

Nothing utopian or impossible here, Sorokin claims and he is surely right. We have become so pessimistic, so despairing. So easily we simply throw up our hands and don't even take seriously such an impossible dream. But might that not be because we are mired in our own present experience of a world at war, of violence and aggression, of the vast treasure spent on armaments, of terrorism and "the war on terror?"

But what about the long view, the evolutionary drama that has seen the emergence of the human, of consciousness, of the recognition that at the core of the human is an empathy that is triggered by human suffering, human pathos, human tenderness, human beauty?

The summer of 2010 I tackled Jeremy Rifkin's *The Empathic Civilization* whose subtitle is "The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis." I have been struck by how much Rifkin's claim that empathy is at the core of the human reflects Sorokin's belief that love is the core of the human because it is the core of reality – the supraconscious, however named, pouring out love's energy in limitless supply. (I was also amazed that Sorokin's name does not appear in the index nor *The Ways and Power of Love* in the bibliography!) Here is Rifkin:

Historians, by and large, write about social conflict and wars, great heroes and evil wrongdoers, technological progress and the exercise of power, economic injustices and the redress of social grievances. When historians touch on philosophy, it is usually in relationship to the disposition of power. Rarely do we hear of the other side of the human experience that speaks to our deeply social nature and the evolution and extension of human affection and its impact on culture and society.

The German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel once remarked that happiness is "the blank pages of history" because they are "periods of harmony." Happy people generally live out their existence in the "microworld" of close familial relations and extended social affiliations.

History, on the other hand, is more often than not made by the disgruntled and discontented, the angry and rebellious – those interested in exercising authority and exploiting others and their victims, interested in righting wrongs and restoring justice. By this reckoning, much of the history that is written is about the pathology of power.

Perhaps that is why, when we come to think about human nature, we have such a bleak analysis. Our collective memory is measured in terms of crises and calamities, harrowing injustices, and terrifying episodes of

brutality inflicted on each other and our fellow creatures. But if these were the defining elements of human experience, we would have perished as a species long ago.

All of which raises the question “Why have we come to think of life in such dire terms?” The answer is that tales of misdeeds and woe surprise us. They are unexpected and, therefore, trigger alarm and heighten our interest. That is because such events are novel and not the norm, but they are newsworthy and for that reason they are the stuff of history. Today, our twenty-four hour cable TV news shows become the chroniclers of the accounts of pathological behavior, bombarding us with tales of horror and woe.

The everyday world is quite different. Although life as it’s lived on the ground, close to home, is peppered with suffering, stresses, injustices, and foul play, it is, for the most part, lived out in hundreds of small acts of kindness and generosity. Comfort and compassion between people creates goodwill, establishes the bonds of sociality, and gives joy to people’s lives. Much of our daily interaction with our fellow human beings is empathic because that is our core nature. Empathy is the very means by which we create social life and advance civilization. In short, it is the extraordinary evolution of empathic consciousness that is the quintessential underlying story of human history, even if it has not been given the serious attention it deserves by our historians. (*The Empathic Civilization*, p. 10)

Rifkin criticized the historians for focusing on “crises and calamities, harrowing injustices and terrifying episodes of brutality inflicted on each other and our fellow creatures” while Sorokin makes a very similar criticism of the field of psychology. This is what he wrote over half a century ago:

MAIN BLUNDERS OF THE PREVALENT THEORIES

The ultimate task of these studies is to find out the efficient ways of making persons more creative and altruistic. In order that this purpose may be fruitfully advanced, one has to have an adequate theory of the mental structure of human personality and of the energies generated in and operating through the human organism.

The prevalent theories in this field are grossly defective. The first of the blunders consists of merging into the category of the “unconscious” or “subconscious” (E. von Hartmann, P. Janet, S. Freud, and others) two radically different energies of man: the biologically unconscious that lies below the level of the conscious state of mind and the supraconscious (“genius,” “creative élan,” “divine inspiration,” etc.) that lies above the level of any conscious and rational thought or energy. The “depth psychology” of the prevalent theories of personality is in fact quite shallow. It either flattens the mental structure almost exclusively to the level of the unconscious or subconscious, with a sort of epiphenomenal and vague

“ego” and “superego,” or just depicts it as a “two-story building” – the unconscious (subconscious) and the conscious (rational). In harmony with the negativistic character of the disintegrating Sensate culture, the prevalent theories of personality also move mainly in the region of the “social sewers.” They see mainly the lowest form of man’s energies (the unconscious and subconscious) and are blind to man’s highest supraconscious genius. They emphasize man’s animal, sadistic, and masochistic tendencies and pass by man’s sublime, creative, and altruistic properties. They interpret the highest creative élan as a mere biological reflex or drive; the sublimest sacrifice as masochistic tendency; the noblest inspiration as this or that subnormal complex; the genius as an abnormal neurotic; and the saint as a doubtful “deviant.” (p. 83)

Anticipating Rifkin’s claim of empathy at the core of the human, Sorokin declared the power of creative love and took note of the widespread contrary views.

In the atmosphere of our Sensate culture we are prone to believe in the power of the struggle for existence, selfish interests, egoistic competition, hate, the fighting instinct, sex drives, the instinct of death and destruction, all-powerful economic factors, rude coercion and other negativistic forces. Yet we are highly skeptical in regard to the power of creative love, disinterested service, unprofitable sacrifice, mutual aid, the call of pure duty and other positive forces. The prevalent theories of evolution and progress, of the dynamic forces of history, of the dominant factors of human behavior, of the “how” and “why” of social processes unanimously stress such negativistic factors as the above. They view them as the main determinants of historical events and of the individual life courses. Marxism and the economic interpretation of history; Freudianism and its libidinal-destructive explanation of human behavior; instinctivist, behaviorist, and physiosomatic theories of personality and culture; Darwinistic and biological theories of the struggle for existence as the main factor of biological, mental, and moral evolution; even the prevalent motto of the chambers of commerce that “rivalry and competition made America great” – these and similar theories dominate contemporary sociology, economics, psychology, psychiatry, biology, anthropology, philosophy of history, political science, and other social and humanistic disciplines. These ideologies have an enormous appeal to the prevalent Sensate mind, are eagerly believed by Sensate man, and are considered by him as “the last word in modern science.”

In contrast to that, Sensate minds emphatically disbelieve the power of love, sacrifice, friendship, co-operation, the call of duty, unselfish search for truth, goodness, and beauty. These appear to us as something epiphenomenal and illusory. We call them “rationalizations,” “self-deceptions,” “derivations,” “beautifying ideologies,” “opiates of the people’s mind,” “smoke screens,” “idealistic bosh,” “unscientific delusion,”

etc. We are biased against all theories that try to prove the power of love....
(p. 47)

Rifkin very astutely prefaces his monumental study with a full account of December 24, 1914, on Flanders Field – Christmas Eve, the German and English troops in their trenches thirty to fifty yards from each other. The Germans lighted candles on Christmas trees brought to them and began to sing carols – “Stille Nacht”...from the British trenches arose a response – “Silent Night.” You have heard the story – by morning it is estimated up to 100,000 soldiers came out of their trenches, met in the middle between the lines, sharing Christmas greetings, showing photos of their families, sharing cigarettes and sweets, telling where their home was – a fully human moment. In the morning news of the event filtered back to the command centers, and the soldiers were ordered back to their trenches to take up again the awful conflict.

I cannot read that account without a lump in my throat because it is such a beautiful human moment, redolent with the presence of God – on Christmas Eve, the Prince of Peace. Rifkin says it well:

Yet what transpired in the battlefields of Flanders on Christmas Eve 1914 between tens of thousands of young men had nothing to do with original sin or productive labor. And the pleasure those men sought in each other’s company bore little resemblance to the superficial rendering of pleasure offered up by nineteenth-century utilitarians and even less to Freud’s rather pathological account of a human race preoccupied by the erotic impulse.

The men at Flanders expressed a far deeper human sensibility – one that emanates from the very marrow of human existence and that transcends the portals of time and the exigencies of whatever contemporary orthodoxy happens to rule. We need only ask ourselves why we feel so heartened at what these men did. They chose to be human. And the central human quality they expressed was empathy for one another.

Rifkin introduces his startling claim with the incident of Christmas Eve, 1914, because it is a powerful witness to his central thesis. Interestingly, Sorokin, as I have indicated, opens his Preface with three of Jesus’ Beatitudes:

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.

In his discussion of the aspects of love, the final aspect is the social aspect. He defines it and then cites another section of the Sermon on the Mount.

Finally, on the social plane love is a meaningful interaction – or relationship – between two or more persons where the aspirations and

aims of one person are shared and helped in their realization by other persons. A loving person not only does not hinder the realization of the wise aims of the loved person but positively helps it. So far as he helps, he does not cause pain or sorrow to the loved person, but increases his happiness. It is the joy of giving and the joy of receiving; it is fulfilling oneself in others and by others. The terms “solidarity,” “mutual aid,” “co-operation,” “unity of good neighbors,” “familistic relationship,” and the like denote various forms of love as social relationship. Its highest forms are magnificently defined in the Sermon on the Mount.

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.

Agree with thine adversary quickly.

First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift [to the altar].

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

These norms outline the social relationships of love at their highest and best. (p. 13)

Sorokin quotes these verses because he is explaining the social aspect of love. But, to my mind, even more remarkable, indeed the epitome of what both Rifkin and Sorokin are pointing to, is expressed in the paragraph calling us to love for enemies.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

As we have noted above, this is precisely what Sorokin calls for as the only cure for our human malady – ...the disease can be cured only by “the extension of love to include everyone and all.” Jesus calls us to be God-like. Matthew uses the word *teleios* which is translated “perfect.” That is an accurate translation but I think a bit misleading. Are we not quick to declare, “Nobody’s perfect!” The Greek word

points to fulfilling one's purpose, realizing one's end. I prefer the word "mature." Is that not what so often we fail to be? Our conception of God as perfect, yes, but being mature. Perfection tends to scare us I think; it has an edge. Whereas in the context of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is saying, "Be mature." One might even suggest Jesus say, "Grow up!"

In Luke's Gospel, the word *oiktirmones* is used, translated "compassionate," which also works well but I prefer Matthew's choice – be mature because maybe indeed that is what is happening to humankind over the aeons of time. The movement from the hunter tribes of early humans to herders and farmers has been underway for millenia. And we surely are dismayed by the ongoing mayhem we create in the human family. Ongoing militarism, brutal dictators holding their people with iron grip in fear of expressing their longing for freedom and a decent human existence, weapons of mass destruction at the ready, a flourishing arms industry, the perfecting of ever smarter more lethal weapons systems – drones that can kill half a world away.

In light of all of that are Rifkin and Sorokin simple idle dreamers? An even more poignant question I would pose for you – was Jesus simply a good person who really didn't get it?

Wrestling with a major work such as Sorokin's *The Ways and Power of Love* is no easy task. Trying to follow his intensive analysis of creative love and its application to the human situation is not summer reading lite, fit for a beach chair. But, as I struggled to get my head around his analysis and its implications and applications, there was another presence of which I was aware throughout and that was the presence of Jesus.

If you have been with me for some time you have probably heard me confess that I did not know what to do with the Sermon on the Mount; not the Beatitudes, not the turning of the cheek, and certainly not the love of enemies. Rifling my old files I found once I did a series on the passage – probably 35 or 40 years ago. At that time I was locked into orthodox Reformed theology with a heavy dose of pietism. The center of my faith and my preaching was the atonement – Christ's death in our place whereby our sin is forgiven and heaven's gate is open. Then the Christian, thus "saved," was called to a life of righteousness, of goodness and mercy; indeed, one was to love one's neighbor and, because Jesus said so, love one's enemy.

But the broader context was a world unredeemed that would only be transformed at the coming again of Jesus Christ in glory to judge the world, claiming his own and giving their just reward to those who had not bowed their knee to Him. This was the scheme of world history moving toward the end, the damning of the wicked" and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount was a blueprint for the life of a Christian but we "knew" world history, human development would not emerge as the Kingdom of God about which Jesus spoke.

I will not burden you with the long journey that has brought me to where I am today. I also want to say the faith and piety of my early years produced generations of really good human beings, sincere, faithful, generous, compassionate. In no way do I denigrate the community in which I was shaped, formed and given a deep sense of God's love and grace that is with me still.

Neither will I attempt to portray the whole vision of faith by which I now live and how the old understanding has given way to the new. Only this I will say; moving from an atonement centered theology, I came to see Jesus as dying the way he died because he lived the way he lived. Speaking truth to power, he was killed through the collusion of church and state. I do not understand him calling people into the kingdom that was imminent, forsaking "the world," awaiting his re-appearing to bring history to its consummation. I see him rather calling people to a new way to live in order that the will of God would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In contrast to my questions about the Beatitudes, about turning the other cheek, about loving one's enemies, I now see Jesus as dead serious. He was calling people to live a life of love, of compassion, of non-violence, of peacemaking – not until God's last dramatic act to end history with all its darkness and bring in the Kingdom from beyond. This earth, this history, this human family are the subjects of Jesus' calling to live here and now the life of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was serious; he meant it when he spoke of human behavior, human encounters, human beings under the imperative to love all and everyone.

This is what Sorokin affirmed. It is what Rifkin sees emerging. And think of the lives that have been world-transforming – Jesus himself and in his steps the Hindu Gandhi and Martin Luther King, among others. Recently I read a marvelous book portraying the life and business of Warren Buffett. Related there is the time Buffett heard Martin Luther King speak.

Finally King strode to the podium, dressed in his preacher's robes. He had chosen the theme of "Remaining Awake During a Revolution," and his resonant voice rang out with a quote from poet James Russell Lowell's "The Present Crisis", the anthem of the civil-rights movement.

The Scaffold Sways the Future

Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne:
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above His own.

He spoke of the meaning of suffering. Inspired to nonviolent resistance by Gandhi, King invoked the lessons of the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the persecuted, it said, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

... Buffett had always responded to powerful, charismatic orators. Now he saw King standing before him: moral courage in the flesh, a man who had been beaten and imprisoned, put in shackles and sentenced to hard labor, stabbed and clubbed for his beliefs, a man who had carried a movement on the strength of his ideas for nearly a decade despite enraged opposition, violence, and limited success. King had once described the power of nonviolence, which “has a way of disarming the opponent. It exposes his moral defenses. It weakens his morale and at the same time it works on his conscience.... Even if he tries to kill you, you develop the inner conviction that some things are so precious, that there are some things so dear, some things so eternally worthwhile, that they are worth dying for. If an individual has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn’t fit to live. When one discovers this, there is power in this method.” (*The Snowball*, p. 304)

Buffett was struck by a statement which King repeated often: “The laws are not to change the heart, but to restrain the heartless.”

As I stated above, immersed in Sorokin, I was so conscious of the presence of Jesus, of the spirit of the one whose call to a way of love, nonviolence and peace I failed to grasp in my early ministry and only gradually, haltingly have come to see as the way to life.

This is not the stuff of preaching. It is not something I can explain and advocate and you can hear and accept. Too often preaching pleads and people resist or preaching declares and the critical faculties are alerted to question. No, to find the way of Jesus compelling, to determine however poorly to follow, to commit oneself to the way of non-violence and peace – that is the stuff of witness. To that I witness and invite you to wonder about it.

Love is at the core of reality, the creative center of the cosmos. The grain of the universe is Love. It is to love we are called everyday in every way to one and all. It is the Way of Jesus for me, a very concrete way to which I am called, which I betray and fail miserably to fulfill. Yet a way I will not deny or rationalize away; a way I will self-consciously cultivate because it compels me. I choose that way and will not give up in spite of falling so far short. Love is the answer to the world’s violence, to humanity’s disease and finally Love will prevail because there can be no doubt, Love wins.

This I believe.

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