

AS YOURSELF?
Christian Relationships
 15 February 2014, Banska BYSTRICA

0. INTRODUCTION

0.1. LOVING ONE-SELF FIRST?

- We are being taught that in order to love others we must love *ourselves* first. – Is that biblical?
- Psychology "*I'm OK – you're OK*" – how far can it go?
- What is "the self"? – What is "love"? – What is the way to obey this commandment?

0.2. CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS WITH "THE SELF"

- we live in a sea of lies – not so much of wrong *facts* but *wrong interpretations, value judgments, emotional excitements.*
- unhappy self ⇒ too high *expectations* from one self; too high opinion of the self

0.2.1. REJECTION OF THE CONCEPT OF "THE SELF"

Since the late 1960s, during which time various strains of poststructuralism and critical theory's linguistic turn have largely demarcated the field in continental philosophy, there has really been only one point of agreement among the preponderance of continental philosophers— namely, *that any philosophical approach beginning with "the subject" is utterly flawed.* In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, for instance, Habermas roundly attacks Heidegger, Bataille, Foucault, and Derrida on a variety of grounds, but not once does he attack their *rejection of the subject, which he, too, simply takes for granted.*¹

0.2.2. THE "SELF-ESTEEM" CRAZE

Dumbing down CURRICULA in order *to make kids feel good about themselves* cheats them of the opportunity to develop their full potential and, in the process, develop real self-esteem—the self-confidence that comes only from success. ...my colleagues always referred to the importance of making kids feel good about themselves but rarely, if ever, spoke of achievement, ideals, goals, character, or decency. It was all about feelings. It was all about self-esteem. ...Our current *addiction to self-esteem* grew from the increasing influence of the *therapy movement* in schools and in society over the last seventy-five years.²

0.2.3. RESULTS

CYNICISM is perhaps the most pervasive and most *pernicious effect of the self-esteem movement* and is the perfect icon of a postmodern society. It is very fashionable to down- play idealism and claim that everyone is only out for oneself and that there's nothing left to believe in.

1. A HISTORY OF "THE SELF"

1.1. CHANGES OVER THE AGES

- (1) self as the *highest value*, valuable in itself ("Know thyself!") – the Greeks
- (2) self as inaccessible [too complex; too elusive] – e.g. HUME
- (3) self as self-critique – know what is best for the self

1.2. WHICH "SELF"?

- DEFINITION?

Psychologists trace the self's formation back to instinctual urges, unconscious conflicts, or biological interactions. Philosophers cast the self's emergence as a process of intellectual development, culminating in

¹ SHERMAN, D. *Sartre and Adorno*, p. 1 [14]

² STOUT, M. *The Feel-Good Curriculum*, p. xi.

the emergence of the modern autonomous self, whose identification with external authorities and larger communities is seen as an entirely conscious and voluntary act. **Anthropologists**, followed by historians, have focused on the self as a **cultural** construction fashioned through discursive practice, an approach often in tension with the views of psychologists and philosophers. The self presents itself as a different kind of problem to different kinds of scholars.³

1.3. NARCISSISTIC AGE

1.3.1. SELFISM

The Divine Creed⁴ St. Matthew and St. Luke version Promotes idea the God is separate from us	Our Divine Creed Some part of the Self version Reinforces our unity with God
Our Father, which art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven Give us this day our daily bread And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil For thine is the kingdom the power, and the glory for ever and ever Amen	Our Self who art in heaven Hallowed be Our name. Our kingdom come Our will be done On Earth as We are in Heaven We give ourselves our daily bread (and anything we need) And forgive all our trespasses As We forgive selves who trespass against us We lead us not into temptation but deliver Us from evil For ours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen

1.3.2. CHRISTOPHER LASCH: THE CULTURE OF NARCISSISM

- the myth of Narcissos -

the message that “political solutions don’t work,” as Allen flatly announces at one point. When asked what he believes in, Allen, having ruled out politics, religion, and science, declares: “I believe in sex and death—two experiences that come once in a lifetime.”

- lost historical continuity – no past, no future – just the present (society has no future)
 - no sense of community – just *the self* – “cultivate transcendental self-attention”⁵
- ty of the seventies. The “world view emerging among us,” writes Peter Marin, centers “solely on the self” and has “individual survival as its sole good.” In an attempt to identify the peculiar fea-
- hair dye advert: “If I only have one life, let me live it as a blonde!”

The Therapeutic Sensibility The contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious. People today hunger not for personal salvation, let alone for the restoration of an earlier golden age, but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of **personal well-being, health, and psychic security**.

³ BRAKKE – SATLOW – WEITZMAN *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, p. 1

⁴ <http://selfism.us/> (21-Jan-14)

⁵ LASCH, C. *The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 6.

- our culture is full of emotional lies, e.g. movies and TV series teaching us to sympathize even with a villain character
- facts – often valid, but interpretations are wrong
- “believe in yourself” – self-esteem as a result of therapy and not of self-sacrifice
- When we read the biblical challenge “...love as yourself”, this is what we have in mind (maybe subconsciously, but culturally communicated and taught).

2. WHAT BIBLICAL “LOVE” MEANS

2.1. THE BIBLICAL WORDS FOR “LOVE”

- אָהַב — like, love: — 1. acc. **person**: father/son, man/wife wife/husb.; — 2. acc. **thing**: justice bribe, Jerus.; — 3. **love God**, his salvation; — 4. **God loves**: Isr., his faithful

2.2. THE CONTEXT OF THE OT COMMANDMENT

- אָהַבְתָּ — (kahmohk^{hah}) “just a suffix“
- no "self" in this text – a possessive suffix instead of a possessive pronoun
- **Lev 19:18** Do not take *revenge* (נָקַם) or bear a *grudge* (נָטַר) against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.
 - לְאַתְּקֶם וְלֹא־תִטֹּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶהְבֵּתָ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:
- opposite of revenge: forgiveness (→ “I desire to be forgiven”)
- opposite of grudge: forgetting; no suspicions; “guarding against” (→ “I want others to restore relationship after I fail them.”)
- the context is of *the courtroom* – not of *self-worth*!

3. THE TWIN COMMANDMENTS

- **Mark 12:30-31** καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου. ³¹ δευτέρα αὕτη ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. μείζων τούτων ἄλλη ἐντολὴ οὐκ ἔστιν.
- **1 John 4:20-21** If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And we have this command from Him: *the one who loves God must also love his brother.*

3.1. LOVE GOD

- (1) **all heart**, (2) **all soul**, (3) **all mind**, (4) **all strength**
- ⇒ how much is left for loving your *SELF*?

3.2. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

- because you are loved by God (**1 John 4:19** We love because He first loved us.)
- **1 Cor 13:4-8** Love is patient; love is kind. Love does not envy; is not boastful; is not conceited; ⁵ does not act improperly; is not *selfish* (οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτοῦς.); is not provoked; does not keep a record of wrongs; ⁶ finds no joy in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for languages, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

4. ATTITUDE TO THE SELF IN THE BIBLE

4.1. THE SELF → AN IMAGE

- (1) beliefs, (2) desires, (3) emotions – from where?
- man – image of God (Gn 1) → Jesus (Heb 1-2)

4.2. MAN – A VESSEL

- **Rom 9:21** Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?
- **2Cor 4:7** But we have this treasure *in earthen vessels*, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.
- **1 Thess 4:3-4** For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body (τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος) in holiness and honor,

4.3. HATE BEFORE LOVE

- **Luke 14:26** If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters-- yes, and even his own life/*soul!* (τὴν ψυχὴν ἑαυτοῦ)-- he cannot be My disciple.
- **John 12:25** The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life/*soul!* in this world will keep it for eternal life. (ὁ φιλῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἀπολλύει αὐτήν, καὶ ὁ μισῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον φυλάξει αὐτήν.)
- **Mt 10:39** Whoever finds his life/*soul!* will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (ὁ εὐρῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἀπολέσει αὐτήν, καὶ ὁ ἀπολέσας τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ ὑρήσει αὐτήν.)
- **Gal 2:19-20** ...I have been crucified with Christ. ²⁰ It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
 - Jesus gives us freedom from ourselves and gives us love to Him and to our neighbor
 - The only good thing in us is the thing He is doing
 - I can only love myself when I forget about myself and look at Him
 - Without God my self is empty

5. CONCLUSIONS

- Beware of the power of lies! – you are not meant to be what they want you to make into!
- Your *self* is a vessel go be filled with the Holy Spirit – meaning and significance can come only from the outside! Loving God is first and everything comes only after it!
- Remember Jesus' words – (1) death before life, (2) hate before love