

"You shall love your crooked neighbor / with your crooked heart," wrote W.H.Auden in a moment of profound whimsey. But I add, you shall not love **crooked thinking**--logically or morally crooked....This Thinksheet is about a bit of crooked thinking I've been bumping into so long it seems it must be a satanic verse from the garden of original sin. Here it is: **"If God is love, love is God."** Let's have a critical look at it, and then indulge me if you please in a few vignettes, good examples of this bad thinking.

1. A nickel is 5¢, so 5¢ is a nickel. Right? Wrong. Why? aren't they the same thing & thus the statement a reversible proposition? Yes. Why wrong, then? "So" is wrong: a nickel and 5¢ share identity but not logical continuity; you can't conclude one from the other, so "so" is invalid reasoning. To see this fallacy, which logicians call circular reasoning, think of this nonsense: "Boston is a city, so 'city' means Boston" (ie, "Boston" exhausts the meaning of "city"; "Boston" and "city" are identical)....Now let's apply this straight thinking ("orthodoxy" is the Greek word for it) to the crooked notion that "If God is love, love is God. God and love are identical, so the proposition is reversible. God means love and love means God. 'Love' exhausts the meaning of 'God.' God-Love, Love-God, is the deity, to be worshipped, adored, praised, sacrificed to and for. But since 'Love' tells us what God is, and we already know what love is, we can dispense with religious traditions and theologies and liturgies and communities. We can write our own Ten Commandments and Sermon on the Mount. We can relieve ourselves of the embarrassments of history, of Abraham and Moses and Jesus, for **Love religion** teaches us to honor only Love and to celebrate it wherever we find it in past and present."

2. For Love religionists, the holiest Scripture verse is, of course, "God is love" (1 John 4:16). The earlier part of the verse gives the context not as love in general but as "the love God has for us." Ripped out of this context and made into a general and reversible proposition, "God is love" is a vicious distortion, vicious because the distorters know they ripped it out of context. As for those who believe "God is love" without benefit of knowing the context, they are only ignorant rather than vicious. But the distortion is no less serious in its cultural effects. (See also 1 John 4:7&8.)

3. On a walk with me in 1952, **Ashley Montagu** expostulated "My lifework is to stand Darwin on his head!"--to show that cooperation (love) is life's first law, and "competition is only the frosting on the cake, to add some excitement." That this was his gospel is clear in his writings, eg THE NATURAL SUPERIORITY OF WOMEN. In an immediately preceding debate with me, he'd been quite unloving to the Christian God, whom he accused of using devotees to persecute little Ashley, a Jewish boy growing up among Christians in London. Said he, "I can and do say 'Love is God,' but I could never say 'God, the biblical God, is love.'" On newsprint I'd drawn this:



The blocking line means that subject and predicate are not reversible. "God is love," but (and here we have this Thinksheet's title) love is not God.

To make his counterpoint, Ashley erased my line and, on the circle's other side, put a line of his own: Love is God, but God is not love. We agreed upon a common enemy, viz those who draw the line nowhere--the sentimentalists who confuse God and love, and the love propagandists who illicitly coopt the biblical God to their thing.

4. **Fritz Perls**, whom I had quality days with in 1968, didn't like where I drew the line and did like where Ashley had drawn it. A Christian-persecuted Jewish boy growing up in Germany, he said to me one day at lunch "Moses and Jesus are history's two worst characters." One of the three fathers of the human-potential movement, Fritz had a genius for knowing what's going on inside you, and I liked his seeing my insides when we were walking or eating or basking in Esalen's hottubs. I saw enough of his insides to know he was listening earnestly to my case for Moses and Jesus. And when it came our time to part forever--he was 75 and I a mere 50, "still young," said he--he looked sorrowful and said "This is the Last Supper." After we had supped, he hugged me and wept till his tears flowed down both front and back of my shoulder. That old atheist and this "young" theist had come to love each other. Yes, I too wept.

5. My first two vignettes were of an anthropologist and a psychiatrist who deny the protasis "God is love" and affirm the apodosis "love is God." I try to win such, but they don't worry me. They do not sneakily coopt God for their love thing. Across a broad spectrum of dis/respect for reason, they are devotees of Eros-Aphrodite, 20th-c. troubadours of cosmic romance. Some are ditheists, trying to honor both the biblical God and the love god/dess without assimilating either to the other....While my typology is accurate, there's a subjective element in whom I put in which category; and I invite you to your own critical, objective-subjective, assigning.

6. Television lover-boy **Leo Bascaglia**, he of the all-purpose hug, preaches the religion of love but occasionally credits the biblical God with his send-off into adulthood....In preaching that love is what makes the world go 'round, some who have the biblical God in their background use mystical-poetic, even anti-intellectual language. **Bruce Davis** (MY LITTLE FLOWERS: GIFTS OF THE MOMENT [Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1988], facing the titlep.): "Love just is. And despite our attempt to manage Her, She wins....She is as we are prepared to know Her....Again and again She is here." Love religion is as feminine as truth religion is masculine....which leads me to my version of a talmudic tale:

7. In the beginning, God created the Angel of **Truth** and the Angel of **Love**. Said the latter, "Make man to love You, and man will honor me." But the former said, "No! For their own partisan advantage, human beings will weave a woof of lies on the warp of truth, and both you and I will be dishonored!" The Angel of Love won, and the Angel of Truth was right. MORAL: When you lose, being right makes it hurt a little less....Note that in my version of the tale, God did not do exactly what the Angel of Love wanted. Instead, God made man to love and set them free, male and female, to choose whom and what to love. This Thinksheet is about the abuse of that freedom, the choice to "fall in love with love" instead of with God the Source and Destiny of love.

8. Swimming in the pool of my memory are many teachers, associates, acquaintances, authors whom I might fish out and drop into the various baskets of this Thinksheet. Instead, I'll only fish them out, observe them, and drop them back in....**Henry Nelson Wieman**, father of "naturalistic theism," defined God as "the Increase of appreciable awareness" and (booktitle) THE SOURCE OF HUMAN GOOD. I loved him, and he loved Love. Through course after course, he wrote on all my papers "A+, but must you believe in a personal God?"....**Paul Tillich**, when I asked him, said evangelism is listening for what is deepest in the other, and then naming what is deepest in yourself. The deepest love he reserved not for the biblical God but for the "God beyond God."....**Matthew Fox** is a love preacher who shifts from redemption spirituality to creation spirituality and from transcendence to immanence, to a neognostic nature religion more befitting the goddess than God. His THE COMING OF THE COSMIC CHRIST agrees not with the canonical Gospels but with the (gnostic) Gospel of Thomas. To affirm nature when history has gotten too heavy is one thing; to tip the balance against history is quite another. But if I were as he is, a monk, I would be tempted to his heresy....**Elizabeth Kübler-Ross**, while occasionally alluding to the biblical God, uses, as her holophrase for the highest, "unconditional love," a sentimental notion foreign to the Bible though useful as a programmatic formula for caring--eg, for her AIDS children. Biblical love does not bypass truth, freedom, moral consequences....**Bernie Siegel**, surgeon doyen of the wellness movement, long stayed at the top of the best-seller lists with his LOVE, MEDICINE & MIRACLES (Harper & Row, 1986)--a perfect book-title for our narcissistic, paranoid, superstitious, health-myopic time. Being curved in on yourself, Luther's definition of sin, is Siegel's definition of righteousness. "Health" is the control-word, "God" is only adjunctive, exepetetic. Self-love is primary; no wonder he packs them in!....**Carl Jung** introjected his pastor-father's church: your psyche or soul is your church, and love is its religion. The God he says he "knows" ("I don't have to believe in God") is a gnostic god of his own confection, and he misappropriates biblical language to preach that god. On him **Joseph Campbell** relies for the glue to hold his mythological love-religion of academic-Buddhistic gentility together. "Follow your bliss," for "If God is love, then love is God." (To Bill Moyers, PBS series, "The Power of Myth," six hours, 1988.)