

BECAUSE GOD'S LOVE IS **CONDITIONAL**,  
GOD CAN'T GET STUCK WITH AN S&L CRISIS

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Unconditional love is a sentimental concept current in culture & liberal church, in both of which compassion has swamped the personal-moral sense. A white male who says so is in danger of being accused of racism, sexism, elitism, & plutism (ie, having a "preferential option" for the rich). But consider:

1 Why did the Federal government get stuck with the Savings & Loan crisis? Because the S&Ls, knowing that Washington's love of them was unconditional & that therefore they need not take responsibility for their risks & would not be accountable for their hubris (their greedy overreachings to make a fast-fat buck), proceeded on their disastrous course with equanimity, without anxiety, knowing they could not miss the BUS (Bailout Uncle Sam).

As you know, the bailout tab to cover all those Federal-guarantee loans will cost us taxpayers up to \$20,000,000,000 while radically constricting Washington's freedom to act on behalf of the public prosperity & tranquility.

2 In my view, the situation vis-a-vis Father God is even worse than the situation vis-a-vis Uncle Sam. The pop & lib notion that we have nothing to fear from God parallels the country's overconfidence in the FDIC, that it would always have enough \$ to "cover emergencies" of both investors & (consequently) investment institutions.

An historical-personal-social empirical observation: Human beings & their institutions cannot maintain morality without someone-something to fear before (as **threat**) & after (as **punishment**) malfeasance. In plain language, most of us most of the time cannot be good without fear of the consequences of being bad. In spite of behaviorism's preachment of the adequacy of positive reinforcement, family order is impossible unless parents & children fear the consequences of being bad. So the piles of toothful legislation against family abandonment, spouse abuse, & child abuse. Ditto for community order: civil life ceases to be civil if antisocial behavior is not criminalized & criminals of whatever age work their social woe without fear of punishment. All this is so rudimentary in social ethics that neglect of it in home & community is objectively astonishing. Subjectively it's not: we've not yet recovered from the Enlightenment's excessive hyperindividualism.

3 Hyperindividualism sticks God with the S&L-crisis-like illusion that his love is unconditional. (I would call this **the womb illusion** if the womb were a place to be safe, but for tens of millions round the world each year, abortion proves the womb to be the worse place to be.)

Hyperindividualism, overesteeming the human individual, sticks God with the accusation that far from loving unconditionally, he doesn't love at all, he doesn't give a damn! In my lifetime, 100,000,000 have died in wars; war is older than civilization & may outlast it; war is permanent, peace is episodic. Does this shatter my doctrine of the divine love? No, it comforts me by confirming my doctrine of original sin. Unlike the Enlightenment & "Eurocentric" sequels, God does not have an overblown notion of the value of the human individual.

The day my left eye died I was asked whether it shook my faith. I replied "Not in the slightest. I had no notion that "it shall not come nigh thee" (Ps.91.7), that God had a preferential option for my body, that I could get through the world having lived, as the old expression has it, a charmed life.

4 A correlation of hyperindividualism is **narcissism**, excessive attention to the self. Narcissists regularly lose their religion when horror comes upon them. Social narcissists, those who regularly lose their religion when horror comes upon others (as in Shoah-Holocaust), suffer from the delusion that--are we not created in God's image (Gn.1.26-27)?--we are a privileged-protected species.

5 The cure for this hyperindividualism that creates the theodic problem, the complaint that God is unloving? Theism: paying less attention to self & society & more to God, who made a big rock & it broke into pieces & each piece broke into bits & God touched one bit &--behold!--everything you see! (How do you like

my version of the Big Bang?)

C.S. Lewis was so alert & alive to the natural & human world around him that he was over 65 before he thought himself interesting enough to give attention to. He thought introspection was a form of masturbation--not bad, but unproductive. He was twice SURPRISED BY JOY: 1st, by the inbreaking of divine grace in his Christian conversion (the telling of which is the burden of the book of this title), & 2nd by Joy Davidman, whose marriage ended his 65-year bachelorhood. When she died, he fell into the well of his grief, could not resist introspection, wrote of it the little instant classic *A GRIEF OBSERVED* (Bantam/63/76), where we come upon this (p.9): "I not only live each endless day in grief, but live each day thinking about living each day in grief." On this, his friend Chad Walsh observed (*ibid.*, p.98 of Walsh's "Afterword," pp.93-151): "He found so many things outside himself interesting that he had no time to study himself. At least that was the impression that grew on me, though I had to modify it when, years later, I read 'A Grief Observed.'" Some experiences--perhaps grief is the supreme example--so rivet our attention as to rob us temporarily of the will to direct our attention elsewhere. A really bad toothache is, for me anyway, another.

6 More than anyone else, Eliz. Kübler-Ross has hung culture & church, especially the caring professions, with "**unconditional**" as almost as tightly glued to "love" as, in some quarters, "damn" is to "Yankee." Worse still, she's hung God with it, limiting the content of God's character to be "for" anybody & everybody no matter what, a notion New Age religion uses near-death experiences to confirm. As a corrective, I asked a mixed group of secular & sacred caregivers to look at the parable of the Two Prodigals (L.15.11-32):

The father did not love the son till he came home groveling: the love was conditional upon the groveling (as the **action** of grace is conditional upon repentance & faith). Of course the father's **attitude** was unconditionally pro-love, eager to welcome the penitent & throw a feast for him. The son's penitence freed the father to love, to act in love (for without action, love is only a sentiment, an inoperative inclination). The fact that "God is love[-inclined]" (1Jn.4.8,16) is only academic for the unloving (vss.7,16): it's of no benefit to them even though (vs.9) "God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him....[vs.10] to be the means by which our sins are forgiven."

CASE: Tom Oden of Drew U. theol. seminary. Having completed his three-volume systematic theology, he regrets the three decades of psychotheology in which he sold theology out to psychology. When recently a counselor quoted Tom as believing in unconditional love, that no guilt is serious enough to disturb any human being's confidence that face-to-face with God there is no need for anxiety, I had to accost the speaker for misrepresenting today's Oden, the anti-unconditional-love Oden.

7 Now imagine two other scenarios for our Prodigals: (1) incarnational love (as 1.Jn.4.9-10): the father goes to the pigpen to plead with the son; (2) unconditional love: the father has the son dragged home & imposes a party on him, doubly violating the son's freedom. You rightly complain, But the second scenario is not love at all!

8 Now for the **paradox** of the cool/warm sides of God. Cool: the horrors of nature, society, history, the human heart. Warm: (1) God provides sun & rain on everybody (Mt.5.45, the divine sanction for, in the previous vs., love of enemies, which in L.6 [vss.27,35] is supported by God's general grace [vs.35 NRSV: "the Most High...is kind to the ungrateful and wicked"]); (2) Jesus warns against child abuse, the harming of any child (threatening any who "despise one of these little ones" with punishment from their guardian angels--Mt.18.10); & (3) God cares so much for you as to know the number of hairs on your head (Mt.10.30, L.12.7)....Correspondingly, the Christian should trust & preach God's warm side while accepting & teaching his cool side.

9 Jesus was unflinching in his **will to love**. So has been Reginald Denny, beaten almost to death in the '91 L.A. rioting, toward his attackers & their parents.