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Disciplinary Responses to Theology Brief Preview

LOVE AS COMMANDED, SPONTANEOUS AND VIRTUOUS

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I am grateful for Oliver O'Donovan's Preview on "The Sovereignty of Love," which so compactly distills a lifetime of study and reflection on the special place of love in the Christian life. Anticipating the full brief, I hope that Professor O'Donovan will address there the puzzle of commanded love, and how love as commanded is to be understood in relation to love as knowledge (a question that preoccupied Kierkegaard, for one). What is the character of commanded love, in relation to spontaneous love? And how do we obey this command given the finite and fallen character of human knowing?

The charge of interpreting norms and obligations in such a way as to make them "transparent to love" powerfully captures the special standing of the virtue of love. Is there really such a thing, though, as the "wrong virtue at the wrong time"? The virtue of humility is not self-deprecating, nor the virtue of efficiency impatient, even if particular instances of not thinking highly of oneself or of not wasting time mimic the virtues of humility and efficiency. Perhaps Professor O'Donovan means to signal in this direction through his use of the qualification "habitual virtues." On my understanding, a habitual virtue that dictates automatic responses is not a virtue in the full sense, since what a virtue enables is flexible response that is attuned to the particularities of context. I am also eager to hear more about how Professor O'Donovan understands the place of the virtue of practical wisdom in relation to the virtue of love, since love as the form of the virtues in certain respects takes up the special place once held by practical wisdom.

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