



## LOVING TO KNOW

by N. T. Wright

February 2020

In many spheres, the question not just of what we know but of how we know is urgent and vital. I have tried to develop the notion of love as the ultimate form of knowledge and to explore its wider relevance.

My history with this question begins in the 1980s, when I was growing concerned by profound distortions in my discipline of New Testament studies. These distortions could be traced to the philosophy, and especially the epistemology, of the Enlightenment. Biblical scholars seldom think about philosophical presuppositions. We plunge straight into the texts, often assuming a positivism in which we can know straightforwardly what's true and what's not, distinguishing sharply between "the sure and certain results of scientific research" on the one hand, and the fluid, uncertain world of possible theological meanings on the other. The former is (supposedly) "objective" and the latter (supposedly) "subjective," mere pious speculation.

This sharp distinction reflects, the other way up as it were, the divide famously characterized by G. E. Lessing as the "broad and ugly ditch"

between the eternal truths of reason and the contingent truths of history —a distinction in part ontological and in part epistemological. You might start “from above” and attempt to discover “the eternal truths of reason” by beginning with lofty intuitions and thinking rationally about their implications. But this Platonic truth-quest would never join up with the messy, accidental events in the world of space, time, and matter, and if you started with that world you’d never get to the eternal truths. This great divide, reflected also in Kant, eventually produced the disastrous but influential theories of Rudolf Bultmann. The English-speaking world, largely ignorant of Bultmann’s neo-Kantianism and existentialist Lutheranism, picked up that this learned German had cast doubt on much of the gospel story, particularly on Jesus’s resurrection. This doubt was then translated into the pragmatic but brittle positivism of English and American liberalism, which wanted to doubt these events for quite other reasons. And it reinforced, particularly in America, the division between liberal and conservative that has played out so disastrously in many spheres.

As a historian, I knew that this either/or of “objective history” and “subjective meaning” was a gross oversimplification. In my 1992 book, *The New Testament and the People of God*, I suggested that we needed a better integration, one that transcended the antithesis of objective and subjective. I had been introduced to the idea of critical realism through the work of Bernard Lonergan, whom I encountered in the work of Ben Meyer. And in that context, I met what they thought of as “an epistemology of love.” Ever since then, I have tried to understand what that might mean and to put it into practice.

Along the way, I have realized that it isn’t only in biblical studies that the Enlightenment’s epistemological proposals result in false antitheses. In my Gifford Lectures for 2018, now published as *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology*, I laid out the ways in which so-called natural theology, on the one hand, and the historical study of Jesus, on the other, have become dangerously detached from each other. This isn’t because we have now discovered, in some objective sense, something about natural theology or the history of Jesus that requires them to be kept separate. It is because both studies, and any link between them, have been distorted by Enlightenment epistemology.

Enlightenment thought rejected Jesus’s resurrection, but not because of a new scientific awareness that dead people do not rise. Everybody has known from earliest times that dead people stay dead. The Enlightenment’s real reason for the rejection was that, if Jesus had risen from the dead, his resurrection would be the turning point of world history—a status the Enlightenment claimed for itself. There cannot be two such turning points. Here lies the crucial epistemological battle. The Enlightenment was in thrall to the split-level epistemology that, by insisting on hard facts and creaming off everything else into a subjective

sphere, realized Francis Bacon's maxim that "knowledge is power." Knowledge of the Enlightenment sort—"we know the way the world is and we're going to impose it on you"—became the instrument of the imperial projects of the modern West. But that kind of knowledge does not do justice to the ultimate realities of the world; and it fails to grasp, or be grasped by, the Ultimate Reality itself, which is the resurrection of Jesus as the launch of new creation in the midst of the old. As Wittgenstein said, "*It is love that believes the resurrection.*" Many of our current ills, social, political, and cultural, have emerged from our ignoring this or trying to bypass it.

My proposal is that paying attention to Jesus as a real figure of first-century history can point some ways forward for the Church and, through the Church, for our misguided and muddled world. And for all this—and for the multiple resultant tasks in theology and mission—we need to understand, and put into practice, new ways of knowing: specifically, an epistemology of love.

But first we must look more closely at the Enlightenment settlement and some of its disturbing results.

Following various analysts, I see the Enlightenment not simply as a secularist movement, but as Epicurean, a modern retrieval of an ancient philosophy. That identification enables us to highlight various things the “secular” label screens out—particularly the fact that modern Western culture is not a new thing based on modern science, as is so often assumed, but an ancient worldview with some modern twists and footnotes.

In the ancient world, Epicureanism was very much a minority position. In the eighteenth century, however, it attained in the Western world not only majority status, but worldview status, in the sense that most Westerners to this day—including, alas, many Christians!—don’t realize they are looking at the world through Epicurean spectacles. By “Epicurean” I refer principally to cosmology: The gods may exist, but they are in an entirely different sphere to ourselves, taking no notice of us and certainly not intervening in our world. (The other meanings of Epicureanism, especially its moral implications, are relevant too, but they are not my theme.) There is an easy commerce between the hard Epicurean split of heaven and earth and the more flexible Deism embraced by many, particularly in America.

Epicureanism commended itself strongly to many Enlightenment thinkers because part of the Enlightenment’s impetus was antipathy to top-down social, political, cultural, and religious systems in Church and state, which were perceived as denying a proper aspiration for freedom. The newly enlightened world wanted to work from the ground up. Thus, what the West has come to mean by “freedom” is indebted to the Epicurean settlement: Get God out of the picture and you can do what you like. This settlement received its classic expression in science, at the level of both method (look at the data without having the Bible tell you what you ought to find) and results (the world “makes itself” without any divine hand on the tiller). Erasmus Darwin was an Epicurean in most senses of the word, many decades before his grandson went off in search of biological specimens.

Epicureanism has played out in historical scholarship as well, with the attempt to replace deduction—deducing what must have happened from some antecedent dogmatic framework—with induction, the process of looking at evidence, supposedly without presuppositions, and working up without fear or favor. That is what the historical revolution represented by Hume and Gibbon was all about, resulting in the challenge to long-standing Christian assumptions about the interaction between God and the world.

In politics, the French and American revolutions had exactly the same (as it were) epistemological shane: so too with other moves toward fuller

democracy across the Western world. Thus, we now observe what some have called “the biopolitical” in which political societies would develop like biological organisms, working “from below” without any tyrannical intervention from above or outside. This has then been allied to the powerful modern belief in progress, a combination of optimistic Hegelianism and still more optimistic social Darwinism—forgetting that both Epicureanism itself and Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” assume that there will be many random developments that prove disastrous and unsustainable. (Hegel got around that by assuming that the immanent Spirit was at work to produce the utopian future, and that apparently undesirable developments were all part of the ongoing dialectic.) Thus the dangerous puzzles we face today, which cause some to question democracy itself, are the direct analogues of the dangerous puzzles of modern science, which rightly celebrates its medical achievements but also produces deadly weaponry and the deeply ambiguous Internet.

In the late eighteenth century, we find similarly ambiguous reconstructions of Jesus. Part of the problem is that “the historical question of Jesus” and “the theological question of God and the world” were posed and addressed in radically flawed ways precisely through the *epistemological turn* to supposedly objective, bottom-up induction. Any attempt at a more integrated epistemology, and a more rounded historiography, is met with the accusation that one has smuggled in some extra presuppositions, some other narrative, that one is doing deduction rather than induction. This is where we need a *tertium quid*. The epistemology of love operates through *abduction*, to which I shall return.

There is, of course, irony here. I have been talking about the development of modernity, which originated in protest against hierarchic rule in Church and state. But modernity itself is now hierarchical, generating the postmodern protest that turns the old rhetoric against itself. That may be why postmodernity has failed to halt the modernist juggernaut—the ideology of progress, for instance—and has instead merely spawned a Machiavellian cynicism in which fake news on the one hand and conspiracy theories on the other thrive unchecked. All this flows directly from the failures of *knowledge* I have been tracking through their various out-workings.

One of the great losses in Christian modernity is the fact that Deism and Epicureanism have eaten away at our worldview. Many have tried to reassert Christian truth, but they have done so within a split-level world, assuming a “god” who is normally out of the picture. To think Christianly within the Deist worldview is to speak in the modern way of “natural” and “supernatural,” where the supernatural is what happens when the normally absent god reaches in, does something peculiar, and then goes away again. That is not how ancient Jews or early Christians would have thought. So, to think Christianly within the Epicurean worldview, many have reached for Plato, accepting the idea of a gulf between the worlds but

suggesting that we have immortal souls that belong in God's world and look forward to returning. Theological questions then emerge *within* these variations on split-level worlds, so that (for instance) natural theology has often seemed to inquire whether one might after all discover the *Deist* god by inspecting the natural order. This framing of theological questions within a split-level world has produced many muddles and mistakes. But to slice through it all, we need to think clearly about what has happened.

Western modernism, a great and powerful movement, deserves to be clothed in the splendid garments of myth. Two myths in particular have emerged: Faust and Frankenstein.

The medieval legend of Faust, who sold his soul to the Devil in return for great power and glory, was given classic modern expression by Goethe in the 1770s and Thomas Mann in the 1940s. The key feature for us is the renunciation of love. Faust is given all a man could desire—power, wealth, pleasure—provided only that he never says to anyone, to any moment, *Verweile doch, du bist so schön*—Linger awhile, you are so beautiful. In Mann's brilliant retelling, with Hitler's Germany making exactly this kind of Faustian pact, the diabolical instruction is even more explicit: *Thou maist not love.*

This renunciation of love echoes ancient Epicureanism. In ancient Epicureanism, pleasure was to be pursued for its own sake, a pursuit that required an escape from worldly concerns. The great first-century b.c. Epicurean poet Lucretius suggested that love can impede erotic pleasure. By contrast, modern Epicureanism has grasped at the pleasures of power, of conquest, of empire: of colonizing and controlling the world. These pursuits require kicking God upstairs out of the way, denying the possibility of his interference, and rejecting love. Self-aggrandizing Western conquests can then proceed unchecked.

**T**hese conquests bring us to the second myth: Frankenstein. Western modernity has created a monster. We supposed this monster would do what we wanted. But now, it is rampaging around, and we seem powerless to stop it.

A Jewish or Christian analysis would want to speak here of idolatry. We have worshipped Mars, who leads us to address all problems with tanks and bombs. We have worshipped Mammon, so that turning a profit trumps all else. We have worshipped Aphrodite, and any suggestion that we should resist her infringes on our human rights. And so on. The false gods obtain their power and apparent authority from the fact that they really are aspects of the created world that, for a Jew or a Christian, is itself the loving gift of the wise creator. But when we respond to the idols, rather than to the creator, we are driven not by love but by greed and lust. That's what idols do: They lure you into the Faustian trap.

love is the appropriate response. But we cannot reach that true understanding of creation by a direct approach, for it quickly leads us back to idols. We must start with the center of creation: Jesus himself.

Two key Pauline passages sum this up. In Galatians, after speaking of God's sending the Son and then sending the Spirit of the Son, Paul says, "Now that you've come to know God—or better, to be known by God—how can you turn back again" to the "elements of the world?" (Gal. 4:9). In other words, the gospel events have unveiled the true God in all his glory: the God who sent the Son and the Spirit of the Son. Since these actions are always God's initiative, our knowledge of this God must always be seen as the *reflex* of God's knowledge of us. This idea is amplified in 1 Corinthians 8, which deals with the problem of idolatry. Paul mocks the Corinthians' pretensions to any kind of special knowledge, *gnōsis*. "If anybody thinks they 'know' something, they don't yet 'know' in the way they ought to know. But if anybody loves God, they are 'known'—by him" (1 Cor. 8:2). And what does it mean to love this God? Paul quotes—and adapts!—the central Jewish prayer, the *Shema*. Instead of "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one . . . and you shall love the Lord your God . . ." Paul incorporates Jesus within the prayer: There is one God (the Father) and one Lord (Jesus the Messiah). Paul's whole letter is, then, an exposition of what it means to love this God—to love, not by taking the initiative, but by responding to the love revealed in the gospel; and to allow that love to be the mode of all other knowledge.

Paul's exposition of love receives its classic expression in the great poem we know as 1 Corinthians 13. Paul here places love at the center of his *eschatological epistemology*:

We know, you see, in part;  
We prophesy in part; but, with perfection,  
The partial is abolished. As a child  
I spoke, and thought, and reasoned like a child;  
When I grew up, I threw off childish ways.

Why, in a poem about love, does he take this time to contrast an earlier phase of life with the later maturity? Because love is the mode of knowing that provides continuity between the present age and the age to come. Love is the constant between our present incomplete knowledge and the full knowledge yet to come:

For at the moment all that we can see  
Are puzzling reflections in a mirror;  
Then, face to face. I know in part, for now;  
But then I'll know completely, through and  
through,  
Even as I'm completely known. So, now,

Faith, hope, and love remain, these three; and, of them,  
Love is the greatest.  
(1 Cor. 13:9–13)

Paul's Christian virtue is always responding, always discovering, the love that is the heart of true knowledge, the love inspired in him by the love revealed in, and flowing from, the gospel. Galatians again: "The life I do still live in the flesh, I live within the faithfulness of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (2:20).

Paul focuses here on the love within Christian communities—the love that holds together the varied ministries of 1 Corinthians 12, the love that prevents disorderly chaos in worship in chapter 14. But this poem in chapter 13 indicates what it means to know God's world, to know one another within God's world, and to know God himself, with a love that, though awaiting fulfillment in the age to come, has already broken into the present world and time. And when we see how this love works, we recognize that it transcends the antitheses of modern thought.

The Enlightenment has often tried to propose its own replacement for love, in the form of tolerance. But tolerance is a hands-off, arm's-length kind of relationship. We can understand its appeal in the eighteenth-century world, weary of revolution and wars of religion—though about to collapse into internecine murder in the French Terror and the American Civil War, to look no further. But as we all know, tolerance is not enough. Invoking it produces a downward spiral of ineffective semi-moralism. We urgently need to explore the possibilities of a genuine epistemology and hermeneutic of love.

The two most obvious areas to explore might be science and history.

Early modern scientists were often quite explicit about "thinking God's thoughts after him" (Kepler's words). They understood their task as *responding to reality*, not investigating it with supposedly neutral objectivity. To see the natural world as "creation," not as a self-governing or self-making "nature," is a big step in that direction, particularly because it puts the human researcher on the same footing as the research: as one creature to another. This is where the biblical doctrine of the "image" stands out. The idea of the image comports with the idea of the cosmos as a vast temple. Humans are the image in this shrine, designed to stand at the threshold between heaven and earth, transmitting the loving stewardship of the creator into his world and translating the unspoken worship of all other creatures into articulate praise. In this context, to speak of humans "knowing" God, or "knowing" the rest of creation, would demand a higher value to the word "knowing" than we are accustomed to accord it.

Image-bearers are called to be *knowers* —that is, to be suffused with a rich and personal knowledge of God, through which to bring blessing to his world; and to understand in all appropriate ways what the created order is all about, so as to sum up and express something of the reality of the richly varied creation. Both the suffusing and the understanding involve speaking words that construct the true reality. That is the prophetic vocation of the image-bearers, standing alongside their royal vocation of being stewards and their priestly vocation of summing up creation's praises. These vocations combine in a rich vocation of "knowing," in which the scientist will relish paradigm-shifting discoveries, not least those that contradict *a priori* theory. Here we note an irony: Even as eighteenth-century science was challenging the theological *a priori* theories of the time, it was eager to set up its own, so that the evolution of species was approached not simply as a newly discovered bit of inductive knowledge from below, but as the necessary postulate from *evolutionism*, the Epicurean assumption that if the gods do not act within the world then the world must make itself; and with that "must" we have just as much a deduction, a top-down theory, as what was being rejected. If we could hold on to that distinction, a lot of current bother could be set aside.

**A**n epistemology of love, seeing the creation as the outflowing of divine creative love, must pay attention to that creation. It isn't enough to know that it is God's creation, and so to infer that we already know all that's important to know about it. Love demands patient curiosity. Love transcends the objective/subjective divide, because as the image-bearing stewards of creation, as liturgists of creation's praise, as prophets called to speak creation's reality, we humans are called not to a cool, detached appraisal of the world, nor to a self-indulgent grasping of it, but to a delighted exploration and exposition, in which respect and enjoyment go together.

If this is true with respect to science, it is true also with respect to history. Ever since Lessing's dictum, following on the historical skepticism of Gibbon and Hume, many have concluded that we can't know very much about "what actually happened," since all we can discover is what people *said about* things that might have happened; and so on. Sometimes this seems like an endless regress. Instead of recovering Jesus, we recover Mark's Jesus, or perhaps Mark's source's Jesus, or whatever. But this hyper-caution, bred from a pseudo-scientific quasi-objectivity, is unwarranted. Yes, we must always allow for the bias of sources, just as the scientist factors in the perspective of the researcher. But just as particles of light really exist even though our observing them changes them, so the fact that fake news exists doesn't mean that nothing happened.

The epistemology of love, applied to history, insists (along with Vico and other early critics of the Enlightenment) that understanding the past means entering sympathetically into the minds of people in cultures very different from our own. It is all too easy to project our own hopes and interests onto "the other." Pure objectivity about other persons would

appraise them at a distance, rather than engaging with them; pure subjectivity would use them to gratify one's own whims or desires. Love means not just allowing others to be themselves but *relishing* them as being themselves, as being both other than ourselves and other than our initial hopes and expectations of them. Thus, the historian will study in full detail the thought world of the culture and people under investigation—its symbolic structure, its underlying taken-for-granted narratives, its characteristic praxis, and so on. This is the larger social and cultural structure that I have loosely and heuristically called “worldview.” It is a matter of the historian’s due diligence.

With history as with science, the Christian must never say simply that God is the lord of history and that’s all we need to know. That is like asking your bank manager what you have in your account and receiving the answer, “Money.” Refusing to investigate history is a way of staying on the safe side of Lessing’s ugly ditch. History, like science, is full of surprises. Only when we pay attention to them, allowing our expectations to be modified—including our expectations of what God’s world ought to look like and how God ought to behave in relation to it!—are we actually operating with an epistemology of love.

This is why I stress that, in both biblical scholarship and Christian faith, it won’t do to speak about the Incarnation unless we are prepared to look long and hard at what Jesus’s incarnate life actually consisted of. It isn’t enough to say, “He was fully human,” and then move on to other matters. The four Gospels insist that you investigate, in a way very few theologians have done, what Jesus intended by what he did and said, where he fitted in to his culture and where he cut across it with a fresh reading of Israel’s Scriptures, and so on.

Both science and history contain many things that a proper, loving engagement will wish to challenge. The scientist may be fascinated by the way a cancer cell grows, but that fascination will increase his determination to stop it in its tracks. The historian may be intrigued by the causes of the First World War, but she may well hope that her investigation of the complex tangle of motivations will help us spot future warning signs. And the parent who enjoys watching the child climbing a tree will, as a matter of love, simultaneously affirm the child’s freedom and seek to mitigate any clear danger. Love is always on the lookout.

My main case is that the Enlightenment’s spurious either/or of objective and subjective must be transcended in an epistemology of love. With the Enlightenment project under attack on all sides, now is the time for such a reappraisal.

The attack on the Enlightenment comes from many quarters. Some non-Westerners resent our self-awarded privilege. Sometimes they mistake Enlightenment triumphalism (think of Steven Pinker!) for Christian

triumphalism (which of course exists as well). Other non-Westerners, seeing a house full of good things, naturally want to enter and enjoy some for themselves. And a good many Westerners, knowing from the inside the hollowness of modernist claims and the counterexamples to the boast of “progress” (world wars, nuclear bombs, the Holocaust and other genocides, global warming, child abuse), have tried to pull the house down on their own heads through deconstruction, hypercritical analysis, identity politics posited against the “big narrative,” and so on.

Postmodernity, aping its parent modernity in its protest against tyrannical narratives, has nothing to put in modernity’s place except the celebration of ever smaller “identities,” its only moral imperative being the scream of the victim. And neither modernity nor postmodernity has any idea what to do when the oil runs out, the ice caps melt, and the barbarians turn up at the gates. Augustine, watching something similar from his bishopric in Hippo, wrote *The City of God*. His residual Platonism may not supply us with the answers we need; but his emphasis on love certainly might.

Yet this is only a start. As Christians we may be able to affirm that “love is the greatest” (1 Cor. 13:13). We can apply ourselves to the tasks of science and history and much besides with a new integration, holding together the falsely opposed subjective and objective within the epistemology of love. We must explore, as part of that effort, the meaning of “abduction,” C. S. Peirce’s term for the method of hypothesis and verification, the virtuous epistemological circle. And we ought to refine the meaning of “critical realism” to make clear that this is not a way of smuggling in a neopositivism by the back door, and indeed that the “critical” bit doesn’t mean playing fast and loose with Scripture.

This, too, is only a start. What happens when we run into serious problems? How will we respond to the neo-Machiavellian methods that insist, like Pontius Pilate, that we, the imperialists, make our own truth—that if truth claims are power claims, then it’s better to get your truth claims in first, to tell big lies that people then act on so that they become true, to create facts on the ground and let others grumble if they must? How can we stand up to the bullying positivist system that elbows everything and everybody out of the way with the old Roman slogan, *Oderint dum metuant* (“Let them hate so long as they fear”)? How can we stop our epistemology of love from retreating before all this and becoming simply a private game?

The answer comes by looking to that which Enlightenment modernism had done its best to rule out of order: the resurrection of Jesus. I already quoted Wittgenstein: “It is love that believes the resurrection.” What might this mean, and how might it help?

I have argued that the polarized epistemologies we inherited from the Enlightenment are not fit for this purpose, and that a freshly reappraised epistemology of love is required for a fuller, wiser, and more fruitful knowing. This prescription has ramifications for our

education systems and our public life. It requires taking creation seriously, which for the Christian means receiving creation as what it is, the gift of love from the good and wise creator. Our delighted, sensitive, respectful, and curious exploration of creation is the response of love to the love we have received. But often, of course, creation does not appear to be a gift of love. There are (what we call) natural disasters; there is human wickedness and sin; there is sickness and pain; ultimately, there is death. So a good deal of human exploration of the world, in science or history or art or politics, has either lashed out against perceived evil, or tried to limit the damage, or simply tried to escape. Some of the present initiatives to investigate “transhumanism,” or to find and deactivate the gene that causes death, fall into that category. These are responses not of love, but of fear and fantasy.

The resurrection of Jesus holds out a different possibility. The Enlightenment has rejected the resurrection since there cannot be two “climaxes to history.” But it is not only the failure of the Enlightenment that should lead us to question that rejection. There is the fact that the resurrection of Jesus *unveils to the world the new creation that is the reaffirmation of the creator's love in the first creation*. This fact is obvious in one way, but so unseen in another that it needs spelling out.

I have argued that creation in all its rich variety speaks to us of the creator's love, so that to know God's world ought to be the action of an answering love. But the horrors of the world, and particularly of death, call the creator's love into question. Affirmation of creation's goodness without acknowledgment of its horrors risks collapsing into sentimentalism. But the New Testament sees Jesus's bodily resurrection as the reaffirmation of creational love, and hence the retrospective validation of the love that was already expressed in creation. Jesus's resurrection answers the ultimate question, by overcoming death and launching a new world in which, as John Donne put it, “death shall be no more.” And thus—though I don't think this was exactly what Wittgenstein had in mind—belief in Jesus's resurrection is not a private option for those blessed with peculiar credulity, nor the simple affirmation that after his death Jesus's kingdom-project somehow continued, nor any of the other things the modern and postmodern world, and as often as not the Church, have imagined. The resurrection of Jesus was nothing less than the launch of the new creation in which all wrongs would be put right. In this new world, the creator's love, which had always been displayed in the original creation, is displayed in all its glory. A biblical view of Easter has to struggle not just against skepticism—which was as strong in the ancient world as in the modern—but against Christian misunderstandings going back to the Middle Ages, when “heaven and hell” became the big categories and the very idea of “new heaven and new earth” was forgotten, despite its biblical prominence.

So the love that believes the resurrection, like the love that responds to

creation in science and history, is the love answering the creator's love in launching the new creation. This view opens up a new vision of natural theology. Not only are the present signals of transcendence (as they are sometimes called) retrospectively validated, but the puzzles within the present creation—the ways in which those signposts let us down—are answered by the crucifixion of the one who was then raised. We see in retrospect, from the resurrection of Jesus, that the questions raised before were the right questions. All this, of course, depends on factoring in Jesus's historical kingdom-work, focused eventually on his confrontation with the Temple. This, in turn, depends on understanding his strongly implicit claim that, through and in him, Israel's creator God was finally returning to rescue and reestablish not only God's people but God's whole creation.

This fresh vision of creation and new creation makes its way not simply by rational persuasion, though that is important, but through the life-giving and life-transforming work of the gospel in the power of the Spirit. That work has continued, despite post-Enlightenment sneers and denials, for the last two millennia. The more the Church gives itself to the healing and creative work of love, the more credible its resurrection message will be. As that work continues, so the epistemology of love should take the lead in science, history, politics and economics, and indeed theology.

As we pursue this work, we should remember that grief also is a mode of love, and that the epistemology of love thus includes within itself the epistemology of grief. The sorrow we rightly experience at the horrors and wickednesses of the world, including our own folly and failures, is the shadow side of love for God's world, and longing for it as it was meant to be. Epicureanism always tried to avoid sorrow: "Life is random and meaningless, so shrug your shoulders and get what pleasure you can." Jews and Christians saw things the other way up. In Romans 8, the grief of God's people, sharing the world's pain and sorrow, is the appropriate vehicle for God's own grief in the groaning of the Spirit. This is a paradox deserving fuller exploration, and an integral part of the epistemology of love. Our true knowledge, neither holding the world at arm's length in a spurious objectivity, nor merely feeling it in an unhelpful subjectivity, includes centrally that prayer of unknowing of which Paul speaks. Just as God called Israel to be the means of rescuing the world so that he might himself rescue the world by becoming Israel's Messiah, so he gave Israel the tradition of lament, and brought this tradition to a yet deeper level in Jesus and his people, so that he might himself lament from within the heart of his world, through the groaning of his own Spirit. The epistemology of love is thus a richly Trinitarian mode of knowing: God the creator calls us to be his image-bearers indeed, summing up both the praises and the laments of the world, reflecting his wise, stewarding love back into that world, and speaking prophetically the words that bring healing, order, truth, and new creation.

**T**he have been commending an epistemology of love, in respect of the

**I**multiple areas where the Enlightenment's split world has brought confusion, corruption, and danger. The postmodern critique of the Enlightenment has failed either to stop the juggernaut or to point a positive way forward. But we have the tools to do both. The Church needs to step over the wreckage of the trivial liberalism of the last generation and lead the way—not to a renewed or chastened modernism! —but to a reclaiming of the older Christian tradition of the *missiology* of love, growing out of the correlated epistemology of love.

I suggested earlier that the rhetoric of freedom, common to all empires, comes to us shaped by the divided worldview of eighteenth-century Epicureanism. Not only has it thus tended to highlight “freedom from” as opposed to “freedom for” but the vaunted “freedoms” of the Enlightenment have been framed within that Epicurean worldview. We have thus sought freedom not only from the gods and their interference, but also from political tyranny and religious authorities. The sharp separation of Church and state tellingly reflects one construal of Lessing’s ugly ditch. The modern West has also embraced the other Epicurean “freedom”: the freedom of the enlightened elite to detach itself from the rabble down the road. But this privilege is rapidly expiring. So if my critique of modern Epicureanism is accurate, it should force us to reappraise what we mean by freedom itself. If it is love that believes the resurrection, answering the love revealed in new creation, what might it look like to have a freedom shaped by that love? Here as elsewhere, Paul and John, and Jesus himself, would have some suggestions. But that would be a topic for another occasion.

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