



Defining Love According to the Teachings of Saint Porphyrios Kafsokalyvitis: Terms, Concept, Content

Ion Marian CROITORU

“Valahia” University (Târgoviște, Romania)
Department of Orthodox Theology
ioncroitoru@yahoo.fr

Gabriel Victor BÂCLEA

“1 Decembrie 1918” University (Alba Iulia, Romania)
Department of Orthodox Theology
gabriel.baclea@gmail.com

Abstract. This study delves into the profound conceptualization of love as depicted in Christian theology, particularly through the teachings of Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia. It explores the evolution of the term “love” from its origins in the Greek language and early Christian writings to the intricate theological expositions by the Church Fathers, with a focus on the contemporary insights of Saint Porphyrios. Despite his lack of formal education, Saint Porphyrios brought a refreshing and experiential perspective to the theological understanding of love. His teachings, characterized by a profound understanding and personal experience of divine love, offer insightful reflections on its transformative power. Saint Porphyrios articulates love not merely as an ethical imperative but as the essence of Christian life, embodying the union with God and theosis. Through a comparative analysis, this study aims to delineate how Saint Porphyrios’s theology of love aligns with, and expands upon, the traditional Christian understanding of love, offering both a continuity with and a deepening of this central theological concept.¹

Keywords: Orthodox Christian theology, Saint Porphyrios Kafsokalyvitis, theology of love, Church Fathers

1 This study was carried out with the support of the Ministry of Education of Romania, through *Agencia de Credite și Burse de Studii*.

1. Introduction

The exploration of love within the Christian theological tradition reveals a profound journey through the ages, from the earliest New Testament writings to the rich expositions of the Holy Fathers and to the nuanced interpretations of contemporary theologians like Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia. Love, as a divine virtue, forms the bedrock of Christian life and spirituality, embodying the highest call to believers and reflecting the very nature of God. This study aims to delve into the complex and layered understanding of love, tracing its evolution and expression within Christian theology, with a particular focus on the contributions of Saint Porphyrios Kafsokalyvitis.

The term “love”, as presented in the New Testament, provides the foundational framework for Christian ethics and spirituality, highlighting its sacrificial and unconditional nature. This paper begins by examining the term “love” in Greek language and culture. Then it will unfold the early scriptural references to love, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of its significance within the Christian tradition. Moving through the centuries, the teachings of the Church Fathers will be presented through the eyes of one of the most influential Saint, Dionysius the Areopagite, that managed to differentiate between the terms used to describe the concept of “love”, emphasizing its central role in the believer’s life and the path to union with God.

At the heart of this investigation lies the figure of Saint Porphyrios Kafsokalyvitis, a contemporary beacon of divine love, whose theological vision offers a unique perspective on this eternal virtue. Known for his profound experience and understanding of love, Saint Porphyrios articulates it not just as an ethical directive but as the essence of Christian existence. His reflections on love’s transformative power, its capacity to unite the soul with God, and its role in theosis (deification) present a compelling vision that both aligns with and deepens the Christian understanding of love.

It is important to clarify that Saint Porphyrios’s perspectives on the concept of love were not formulated through deliberate scholarly inquiry or philosophical speculation. He was not primarily a scholar or a thinker in the traditional sense, and he did not actively engage in writing; rather, the writings that we have are due to the love of his spiritual children that published them from their own notes or audio recordings.

Saint Porphyrios was born into a poor Greek family during the turbulent early twentieth century in Greece, where circumstances did not allow him to receive formal education. Nevertheless, his lack of formal schooling did not diminish his profound love for learning, because his fervent aspiration to embrace monastic life granted him divine wisdom. He entered monastic life in Aghion Oros (Holy Mountain) at the age of twelve, took monastic vows by fourteen, was ordained

a priest at twenty, and became a confessor at twenty-one years old. Over thirty-three years, he served as a spiritual father at the Polyclinic of Omonia in central Athens, dedicating more than seventy years to serving Christ and humanity, guiding many towards a life filled with love and devotion to Christ.

That such a person, of humble origin and simple character, offers a boldly outspoken account on divine love is a paradox challenging the human reason. Most of his teachings come directly from his experience of living according to the word of Christ – fulfilling the divine commandments, overpassing the passions, and reaching purification, enlightenment from above and theosis (deification) due to his humble, obedient, and loving heart.

2. The term “love” in Greek language

In exploring the linguistic richness of the term “love” within the Greek lexicon, we encounter a complex tapestry of meanings that reveal the cultural and philosophical depths from which Christian theological concepts of love later emerged. Ancient Greek provides several words for “love”, each conveying distinct nuances and aspects of this multifaceted concept, enabling a profound comprehension of its usage in both classical and Christian texts.

The primary term, *ἀγάπη* (agápi),² denotes a form of love that transcends the personal to encompass a universal, unconditional quality, often associated with the divine love of God for humanity (qtd in Romanidis 2012: 80). This love is selfless and sacrificial, extending beyond mere emotional affection to the wilful and deliberate choice to seek the good of others. In the Christian doctrinal context, *ἀγάπη* is pivotal, embodying the highest form of love that believers are called to emulate.

Another significant term is *ἔρως* (éros), which traditionally refers to a passionate, intense form of love that can be directed towards another person, but it can also express the soul and spiritual bond between two people, especially when one of them takes the other as a model of spiritual perfection, considering them superior to oneself (qtd in Romanidis 2012: 80). While often associated with romantic or sexual love, *ἔρως* in philosophical terms also encompasses a yearning for beauty and truth, a longing that motivates the soul’s ascent to the divine.

Στοργή (storgí), a third term, expresses a natural affection typically found within the family between parents and children. It connotes a deep-seated bond characterized by familiarity and deep emotional connection, highlighting the innate aspect of love that fosters familial and communal relationships (qtd in Romanidis 2012: 80).

2 For transliteration, we used the Koine Greek pronunciation.

Lastly, *φιλία* (*philía*) represents a broad category of love that includes friendship and brotherly love. This form of love is based on mutual respect, shared values, and a reciprocal relationship. In philosophical discourse, *φιλία* is often considered essential for the social and ethical bonds that underpin community and society (qtd in Romanidis 2012: 80).

By examining these terms, we gain insights into the multifaceted nature of love as conceived by the Greek philosophical and later Christian tradition. This exploration not only enriches our understanding of the term's lexical heritage but also frames the subsequent theological discussions that seek to integrate these ancient insights with Christian ethical teachings. The nuanced understanding of these Greek terms for love provides a foundational framework for examining their influence on the theological elaborations of love by the Church Fathers and their interpretation and adaptation by the contemporary theologians like Saint Porphyrios Kafsokalyvitis.

3. The term “love” in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the concept of love evolves significantly from its classical Greek roots, adopting a distinctly Christian theological dimension that shapes the ethos of the early Church and its teachings. The Greek term most prominently featured is *ἀγάπη* (*agápi*), which becomes central in the scriptural narratives and epistles, reflecting the divine, unconditional love that God has for mankind and that Christians are urged to emulate towards one another.

Αγάπη is described in various passages throughout the New Testament, not only as a moral virtue but as the very essence of God's nature (Dogaru & Dorneanu 2000: 126). John 4:8 succinctly states, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love [*ἀγάπη*].” This encapsulation directly ties the ability to love with the knowledge and relationship with God, elevating love from a simple human emotion to a divine attribute that believers are called to participate in. The Gospel of John particularly emphasizes the sacrificial nature of love, summarizing this in the famous verse, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Here, *ἀγάπη* is not merely an emotional affection but a profound willingness to sacrifice for the good of others, a hallmark of Christian ethical practice (Lampe 1961: 8).

The practical implications of *ἀγάπη* are extensively articulated in the teachings of the Gospels, most specifically in the Great Commandments – to love God and one's neighbour as oneself (Matthew 22:37–9), which summarizes the law and the prophets. This commandment is not merely an emotional disposition but an active choice to will the good of the other as an expression of one's love for God. Saint Paul the Apostle further expands on the concept of *ἀγάπη* in his

epistles, most notably in 1 Corinthians 13, describing love in its most ideal form: patient, kind, without envy, and not proud. He asserts that love is the greatest of all virtues and that without it other spiritual gifts are devoid of value. The Holy Apostle Paul not only defines love but also places it at the centre of Christian life as the fullest expression of a lived faith.

The second term used in the New Testament to describe love is the word *φιλία* (*philía*), typically translated as ‘friendship’ or ‘affection’. Most commonly, the word *φιλία* is utilized to express a form of love characterized by deep mutual respect, shared values, and common goals among believers (Dogaru & Dorneanu 2000: 120). This term underscores a relational warmth and loyalty akin to that found among close friends or family members.

The usage of *φιλία* in the New Testament is reflective of a broader, communal bond that Christians are encouraged to cultivate. It emphasizes the importance of supportive, caring relationships within the Christian community, relationships that are integral to the believers’ spiritual growth and resilience (Lampe 1961: 1478). This is particularly evident in texts such as John 15:13–15: “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

Here, Christ elevates *φιλία* to a spiritual partnership, far beyond conventional friendships, characterized by transparency, mutual engagement, and a shared mission. This deepens the understanding of *φιλία*, associating it with a willingness to sacrifice for each other, mirroring the sacrificial love (*αγάπη*) of Christ Himself. However, the less frequent occurrence of the term *φιλία* suggests that while this form of love is important, the New Testament places a greater emphasis on *αγάπη* as the ultimate form of love that Christians are called to emulate.

Last but not least, the concept of *ἔρως* (*éros*) is notably absent in the explicit language of the New Testament, likely due to its associations with physical desire and passion, which could conflict with the New Testament’s emphasis on spiritual purity and divine love. However, the transformative power of love that elevates the soul towards the divine, a key aspect of *ἔρως* in Platonic philosophy, can be seen in the way Christians are called to seek a deeper union with Christ.

Related to the Greek term *στοργή* (*storgí*), representing familial affection, we observed that it is not found independently in the New Testament but in the compound term *φιλόστοργοι* (*philóstorgi*), as seen in Romans 12:10. This unique instance highlights a directive for believers to exhibit a profound brotherly love, welded with the loyalty and affection typical of family bonds.

The New Testament enriches the classical understanding of love with a divine dimension, presenting *αγάπη* as a sacrificial and transcendent virtue essential to Christian life and doctrine, while *φιλία* enriches community bonds, and *στοργή*,

though less pronounced, subtly underscores the importance of familial devotion within the faith community.

4. The term “love” according to the tradition of the Church Fathers

In exploring the term “love” within the tradition of the Church Fathers, significant attention must be given to Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, whose profound integration of Christian doctrine with philosophical insights from his era marks a pivotal moment in theological history. This study does not attempt to resolve the scholarly debate concerning his exact historical placement – whether in the first few centuries of the early Church or as late as the sixth century influenced by Neoplatonism. Instead, it acknowledges his pivotal role in shaping the theological perspectives of subsequent theologians’ figures.³

Saint Dionysius is particularly noted for his nuanced distinction between the terms *ἔρως* (éros) and *ἀγάπη* (agápi). Unlike the conventional understanding of *ἔρως* as mere erotic or romantic love, the Areopagite saint reinterprets this term to encompass a profound form of spiritual love – a dynamic, self-transcending desire directed towards the ultimate goodness and beauty of God. He eloquently describes this concept in his theological writings, illustrating how *ἔρως* transcends mere human affection to become a vector towards divine union. That is why, according to him, love, in its highest form, is not merely an emotional state but a movement of the soul towards its Creator (Dionisie 2018: 111).

Furthermore, Saint Dionysius elaborates on the nature of divine love, or *Θεῖος ἔρως* (Theíος éros), which he argues is the foundational motive behind God’s creative and redemptive actions in the world. According to him, God’s love is not static but abundant and expansive, flowing from Himself into the cosmos and drawing creation back to Himself in a perpetual cycle of divine fullness:

Through the transcendence of His goodness, the cause of all loves all [the term used here is *ἔρα* – éra], produces all, perfects all, contains all, just as divine love itself [*Θεῖος ἔρως*] is a good love, of the good for the good. For this beneficent love [*ἔρως*] for all beings, which exists transcendently in the good itself, did not allow itself to remain unproductive within itself, but was moved to act according to the transcendence that produces all things. (Dionisie 2018: 115)⁴

3 Such as Saint John of Damascus, Saint Maximus the Confessor, Saint Symeon the New Theologian, Saint Gregory Palamas, even contemporary saints such as Saint Porphyrios the Kavsokalyvite.

4 Throughout the article, the English translations from Romanian belong to us.

The distinction between *ἔρως* and *ἀγάπη* is also reflected in his discussion of God's relationship with humanity. While *ἔρως* involves a reaching upward towards God's perfection and beauty, *ἀγάπη* is characterized by its downward movement, seen in God's condescension to humanity and the sacrificial love demonstrated in Christ's incarnation and crucifixion (Dionisie 2018: 121). This dual movement of love encapsulates the Christian narrative of salvation, where divine love bridges the infinite distance between God and man.

In his writings, Saint Dionysius the Areopagite offers an insightful explanation for the absence of the term *ἔρως* in the New Testament, a concept that was central in ancient Greek. He points out that the early Church Fathers were cautious in their use of language that could carry ambiguous or potentially misleading connotations. While *ἔρως* was often associated with a passionate form of love, its implications of desire and physical affection might not align clearly with the spiritual and sacrificial love emphasized in Christian teachings. The Righteous Saint clarifies that although *ἔρως* was used in older scriptural texts – such as Proverbs 4:6, Wisdom of Solomon 8:2 – and by some early Christian writers to signify a profound form of love, it carried the risk of being misunderstood as merely sensual or romantic (2018: 117–119). Thus, the New Testament writers chose to focus on *ἀγάπη* as the primary term for love, which better conveyed the notions of unconditional, divine love that were central to Jesus's teachings and Christian life.

Saint Dionysius argues that this choice was not a denial of the depth or significance of *ἔρως* but a strategic decision to guide the faithful towards a purer, more spiritual interpretation of love. According to him, both *ἀγάπη* and *ἔρως* share a common divine quality in their deepest sense; however, to avoid confusion and maintain theological clarity, *ἔρως* was largely omitted from the canonical texts of the New Testament. This careful linguistic selection by the Church Fathers was meant to foster a clearer understanding of love as a foundational Christian virtue, transcending the physical to embrace the metaphysical.

The Areopagite Saint offers a profound theological framework where *ἔρως* and *ἀγάπη* are not opposing forces but complementary manifestations of the divine reality that animates the cosmos and guides the soul towards ultimate truth and goodness. His teachings remain a cornerstone in the study of Christian love theology, providing a robust model for understanding the multifaceted nature of love as both a personal experience and a universal, theological reality.

5. The term “love” according to Saint Porphyrios Kafsokalyvitis

Saint Porphyrios's life was a testament to the power of love, which he held as the cornerstone of spiritual life and the pathway to God. His emphasis on the

transformative power of love shaped his guidance to his spiritual children, urging them to cultivate love not only as an ethical or theological concept but as a living, breathing dynamic in their daily interactions and personal growth in faith. His approach to pastoral care and spiritual guidance was deeply rooted in these principles; he lived as a testament to the power of love, often going beyond mere words to demonstrate a practical, lived love towards his neighbours and spiritual children. His entire pastoral care highlighted love as the greatest spiritual pathway, one that leads to God through the service and love of those around us. Thus, for Saint Porphyrios, to love was to see the face of Christ in every individual, making his teachings on love not only a doctrinal stance but a daily, practical reality.

Following the tradition of the Holy Fathers, Saint Porphyrios articulates the concept of love primarily through two Greek terms: *αγάπη* (agápi) and *ἔρως* (éros). The term *αγάπη* is extensively used to denote a universal form of love, towards either God or one's neighbour, embodying a broad, encompassing benevolence. On the other hand, *ἔρως*, which we previously encountered in the teachings of Saint Dionysius, is often reserved for expressing a profound divine love or a deep-seated passion directed towards a specific object or beloved individual: "The connection with Christ is love [*αγάπη*], it is love [*έρωτας*], it is fervor, it is a burning desire for the divine. Christ is everything. He is our love [*αγάπη*], He is our love [*έρωτας*]. The love [*έρωτας*] of Christ is a love [*έρωτας*] that cannot be lost. [...] The whole mystery is the love [*αγάπη*], the love [*έρωτας*] for Christ; the dedication to the things of the spiritual world" (Porfirie 2005: 165, 188).

It is important to mention that Saint Porphyrios does not bring anything new or different from the Holy Fathers or the words of the Gospel; however, his teaching on love bears a remarkable striking affinity with Saint Dionysius. What can be confirmed throughout his teaching on love is that his source is – precisely as for the Areopagite – the Scripture. Nonetheless, in his teaching, it can be observed that through his own experience, Saint Porphyrios presents various nuances of the term love, nuances that are adapted and suitable to our times. In what follows, we will present some of these nuances found in the theology of Saint Porphyrios regarding the term love.

5.1. The difference between divine love and worldly love

Through his rich spiritual experience, Saint Porphyrios observed that there is an important difference between divine love and worldly love. Due to human weakness and passion, worldly love often consumes itself, has an end, and then jealousy, envy, boredom, and dissatisfaction with the loved one may appear. In contrast, further highlights Saint Porphyrios, those who dedicate themselves to divine love, although not devoid of troubles or difficult moments in life, realize that the love for Christ, for God has no end, is insatiable:

Christ is the highest thing that can be desired. There is nothing higher. All the things that we feel lead to satiation, only God does not. He is everything. [...] Love for Christ is something else. It has no end, is without satiation. [...] While human love can spoil a person, can drive them mad. When we love Christ, all other loves remain in the shadow. Other loves have satiation, only the love of Christ does not. Carnal love reaches this satiety. Then jealousy, dissatisfaction, even murder can begin. It can turn into hate. The love of Christ does not change. Worldly love lasts a little and gradually fades, while divine love increases and deepens. Any other love can bring a person to despair. Divine love, however, lifts us to the realm of God, gives us peace, joy, fullness. Other pleasures exhaust, while this one is never satiated. It is a pleasure without satiety, which a man never wearies of. It is the highest thing that can be desired. (2005: 173)

5.2. The love for God brings eternal joy and happiness

Saint Porphyrios sates that the first thing God asks for our joy, for our happiness, is to love Him. The Holy Father shows the greatness and richness offered by fulfilling the “first and greatest” commandment; however, seen from this perspective, the commandment is no longer a commandment but becomes an encouragement for obtaining eternal happiness and joy. Notably, the Athonite Father spoke from his own spiritual experience. He did not quote from certain books when presenting this but shared the effect that devotion to the love of Christ had on him:

The feast and core of all joy is the Person of Christ. When we acquire holy humbleness, then we see and live everything; we live God manifestly, fully, and we feel His mysteries. Then we begin to love Him. And this is something He Himself asks for. It is the first thing He asks for our happiness. [...] The entire mystery is love, the love for Christ; dedication to the things of the spiritual world. The person no longer feels loneliness or anything else. They live in another world. Where the soul rejoices, is happy and is never satiated. (2005: 190, 188)

5.3. Love for one's neighbour cultivates love for God

Saint Porphyrios guided his spiritual children to cultivate love for their brethren. Similar to Saint Evangelist John, the Righteous Saint emphasizes the importance of loving our neighbour because as we cultivate this love, our love for God also grows:

Love for the brother cultivates love for God. We are happy when we secretly love all people. Then we will feel that everyone loves us. No one can reach God if they do not pass through people. Let us love, let us sacrifice for everyone selflessly, without seeking reward. [...] Above all is love. What we need to care for, my children, is love for the other, for his soul. Everything we do – prayer, advice, scolding – should be done with love. Without love, prayer is useless, advice hurts, the scolding harms and destroys the other, who feels whether we love him or not, and responds accordingly. Love, love, love! Love for our brother prepares us to love Christ more. (2005: 304)

Furthermore, Saint Porphyrios loved all people. He made no distinction between religious or atheists, Christians or of another religion, educated or uneducated, poor or rich, etc. His theology was not just theoretical but practical; he welcomed everyone, regardless of confession or sexual orientation, receiving them all with love and respect. Therefore, he advised through his words that our love should extend to all people by forgiving and loving everyone: “Love for Christ has no boundaries, nor does love for our neighbour. Let it spread everywhere, to the far ends of the earth. Everywhere, to all people. I wanted to go and live with the hippies at Matala, of course, without sin, to show them Christ’s love, how great it is and how it can transform and transfigure them. Love is above all” (2005: 315).

5.4. The love for all creation makes us love God

Saint Porphyrios urged us to pour out our love not only on our neighbour but also on all creation. One of the particularities of his teaching is that through God’s creation, by contemplating the beauty and greatness of His creation, we come to know Him, to appreciate Him, and thus to love our Creator (Sava 2012: 84).

Seeing the nature, the trees, the flowers, the birds, the bees, the sea, the fish, the stars, the moon, the sun, and the other wonderful creations of His, we turn our minds to God, and by praising Him through these, we try to understand how beautiful and wonderful they are, and we strive to love them. When we will love all these, then our love will ascend to our Creator, and, in this way, we will truly love Him. A necessary condition is the love of His creatures, but even more powerful must be our love for our fellow human beings. Therefore, we must make visits to hospitals, prisons, orphanages, homes for the elderly, etc. Then our love is sincere. (Tzavaras 2002: 83; our translation)

5.5. The relationship between us and God should be based on love

In the light of contemporary society, marked by secularism and concerned with technological progress and consumerism, Saint Porphyrios's teachings highlighted an Orthodox moral approach that counteracts these trends. Facing a culture of pleasure and exacerbated moral laxity, his moral theology represents an adequate antidote to these deviations. Thus, he brought a fresh and updated perspective on Christian morals, considering the moral and spiritual context of his time.

The Kafsokalyvite Saint explained that there are two ways to reach God: one difficult and exhausting, involving the struggle against passions or the evil one, and an easier one, based on the love of God, fulfilling the commandments, and cultivating virtues. The Athonite Father emphasized the importance of dedicating oneself to loving God, thus offering an approach updated to the needs and aspirations of contemporary society: "There are two paths that lead to God: the difficult and tiring path, with fierce assaults against evil, and the easy path, with love. Many choose the arduous path and shed blood to receive the Spirit until they reach virtue. In my opinion, the shorter and surer way is that of love. This is the path you should also follow" (Porfirie 2016: 74).

Therefore, the blessed hieromonk observed that a gentle and loving approach to the soteriological message, in accordance with the Gospel teaching and the particularities of his theology, can positively influence modern man, prompting him to give up unnatural concerns in search of love and joy. By presenting a perspective of life lived in harmony with Christian teaching, Saint Porphyrios managed to attract the attention of contemporary man and guide him towards divine love and true joy. He set aside threats of hell's torments and eternal soul death or the struggle with passions and presented the path to Christ through the perspective of love and eternal joy:

I find the shortest and surest way is this, through love. [...] Instead of worrying about the devil and his wiles, instead of worrying about passions, turn to the love of Christ. [...] Fighting your enemy is a struggle with pushing and straining. In the love of Christ, however, there is no pushing and straining. Here the soul's power is transformed without toil. [...] Confronting evil through the grace of God is done bloodlessly and effortlessly. Through divine grace, all become painless. Serve in this gentle way. [...] Do not fight to drive out darkness or evil. You achieve nothing by hitting the darkness. [...] This is the perfect way: not to fight directly with evil but to love Christ, His light, and evil will dissipate. (Porfirie 2005: 248–252)

5.6. Through God's Love, we overcome fear, death, and our enemies

Saint Porphyrios teaches that the Church represents the beginning of a new life in Christ, an existence where death and suffering are abolished by following Christ's commandments. This allows us to live from this life in Paradise, anticipating eternity. He also emphasizes that, through the love for Christ, we live His life, an existence where fear, death, and evil have no power over us because the true concern for the spiritual person becomes the love and service of Christ and our neighbour:

The Church is new life in Christ. In the Church, there is no death, there is no hell. [...] Christ abolishes death. [...] He who follows Christ's commandments never dies. Dies according to the flesh, according to passions, but is worthy to live from this life in Paradise, in our Church, and then in eternity. With Christ, death becomes the bridge we must cross at some point to continue living in the uncreated light. [...] When we love Christ, we live the life of Christ. As soon as we achieve this, by the grace of God, we live another state. [...] For us, there is no fear. No death, no devil, no damnation; all these exist for people who are far from Christ [...] for us, who do His will, these things do not exist. [...] What concerns us is love, the service of Christ and his neighbour. (Porfirie 2005: 170, 288)

5.7. Cultivating the Virtue of Love

Among all the virtues Saint Porphyrios spoke about, he dedicated himself most and spoke most about the virtue of love. This was his main activity, goal, desire, and mission, as Saint Porphyrios's disciple, Abbess Ekaterini, says, "he lived to love and loved to live" (Ecaterina 2012: 111; our translation). He wanted to speak to everyone about love, wanting everyone to know God, true love, to become one with divine love. Therefore, he guided all his disciples, by his own example, to place the love of Christ and the love of neighbour above any ascetic or spiritual endeavour: "Our goal is one – the love of Christ, of the Church, of our neighbour. Love, the service of God, fervent longing, union with Christ and the Church is earthly Paradise. The love of Christ is the love of our neighbour, of all, of enemies" (Porfirie 2005: 167).

Through love, commandments are no longer prohibitions or obligations that a Christian must strive to fulfil, but they become natural, *sine qua non*, for every lover of God. Christ is clothing the Old Testament commandments with divine love and love of neighbour, and He transforms them into beatitudes, into blessings: "If Christ enters your heart, He will fill it with His love. Then nothing will be prohibited to you... Only love... Above all will be love. Prohibition did not exist

before Christ. He, however, has nullified this state of affairs. Christ brought love. Life in Christ, obedience, and humility are a true paradise” (Agapie 2005: 56; our translation). “Living within God’s love, you will live in freedom, for where there is love, there is freedom. Move only within divine love” (Porfirie 2005: 268).

6. Conclusions

The journey through the conceptual landscape of love within Christian theology, as traced in this study, shades light on a profound and transformative understanding that transcends mere sentimentality to touch the very essence of divine communion. From the rich lexical heritage of the Greek language and the foundational expositions of love in the New Testament to the nuanced articulations of the Holy Fathers and the deeply personal and experiential teachings of Saint Porphyrios Kafsokalyvitis, love emerges not only as a central tenet of Christian life but as its very heartbeat.

Saint Porphyrios, with his unique blend of simplicity and depth, reminds us that love is the ultimate criterion of authentic Christian life, a transformative power that aligns the soul with God’s will, leading to theosis. His teachings, grounded in the lived experience of divine love, offer a refreshing and compelling vision that speaks directly to the heart of contemporary seekers. By emphasizing the capacity of love to overcome fear, transcend death, and unite us with the divine, Saint Porphyrios underscores the timeless relevance of this virtue in navigating the complexities of modern existence.

Furthermore, his emphasis on cultivating love for God, for one’s neighbour, and for the entire creation serves as a powerful antidote to the prevailing currents of secularism and moral relativism. In a world often characterized by fragmentation and alienation, the theology of love as articulated by the Athonite saint offers a path to wholeness and sanctity, inviting us to a life marked by joy, peace, and deep fulfilment.

Lastly, examining the concept of love according to the teachings of Saint Porphyrios Kafsokalyvitis enriches our understanding of this fundamental virtue, bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary challenges. It reaffirms that at the heart of Christian theology and praxis lies a call to embody love in its most authentic and expansive form. As we navigate the complexities of the twenty-first century, the insights gleaned from this study invite us to rediscover love’s transformative potential, encouraging us to live out the simplicity and profound depth of divine love in our daily lives.

References

- ***. 1977. *The New American Standard Bible* (NASB). The Lockman Foundation.
- Agapie, Monahul. 2005. *Flacăra dumnezeiască pe care a aprins-o în inima mea Părintele Porfirie* [The Divine Flame That Father Porphyrios Lit in My Heart]. Trans. Cristina Băcanu. Bacău: Bunavestire.
- Dionisie, Areopagitul. 2018. *Despre numele divine. Teologia mistică* [About Divine Names. Mystical Theology.] Trans. Marilena Vlad. Iași: Polirom.
- Dogaru, Vasile & Dorneanu, Neculai. 2000. *Concordanță Biblică Tematică* [Thematic Biblical Concordance]. Iași: Mitropolia Moldovei și Bucovinei.
- Ecaterina Monahia, Stareța. 2012. *Cuviosul Porfirie Inima iubitoare* [Righteous Porphyrios the Loving Heart]. Trans. Sabin Preda. Pantelimon: Gutenberg.
- Lampe, Geoffrey William Hugo. 1961. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Porfirie, Sfântul. 2005. *Ne vorbește Părintele Porfirie – viața și cuvintele* [Father Porphyrios Speaks to Us – Life and Words]. Trans. Evloghie Munteanu. Galați: Egumenița.
2016. *Hristos este plinătatea vieții* [Christ Is the Fulfilment of Life]. Trans. Mihaela-Adina Eros. Bucharest: Meteor Publishing.
- Romanidis, Ioan. 2012. *Teologia Patristică* [Patristic Theology]. Trans. Ion Marian Croitoru. Târgoviște: Bibliotheca.
- Sava, Aghioritul. 2012. *Vindecarea sufletului în învățătura părintelui Porfirie* [Healing of the Soul According to the Teaching of Father Porphyrios]. Trans. Cristian Spătărelu. Galați: Egumenița.
- Tzavaras, Anastasios Sotirios. 2002. *Aminitiri despre Bătrânul Porfirie* [Memories about Elder Porphyrios]. Trans. Cristina Băcanu. Bacău: Bunavestire.