

DIVINE AND HUMAN INTIMACY: A TRIANGLE OF LOVE FOR THE NEW CIVILIZATION OF LOVE

MARK MANNION

Documento recibido: 10-X-2009
Versión definitiva: 15-XII-2009
BIBLID [1139-6600 (2011) n° 13; pp. 175-186]

RESUMEN: En este artículo se estudia el tema del amor en el contexto del matrimonio y familia. Investiga la distinción entre las cuatro palabras griegas que denotan amor: *agape*, *eros*, *storge* y *philia*. El 1º dice relación a Dios; el 2º, entre esposos; el 3º, de padres a hijos; el 4º, entre hijos. Relaciona el tratamiento poliano del amor con el de la encíclica *Deus caritas est* de Benedicto XVI.

Palabras clave: amor, *agape*, *eros*, *storge*, *philia*, Polo, Benedict XVI.

SUMMARY: In this article we study the love in the context of marriage and family. We investigate the distinction between the four greek words which are employed to designate different types of love. This 1st says relation to God; the 2^d, between spouses; the 3^d from parents to children; the 4^d between the children. We put in relation the polian treatment of love with the other of Benedict XVII in *Deus caritas est*.

Key words: love, *agape*, *eros*, *storge*, *philia*, Polo, Benedict XVI.

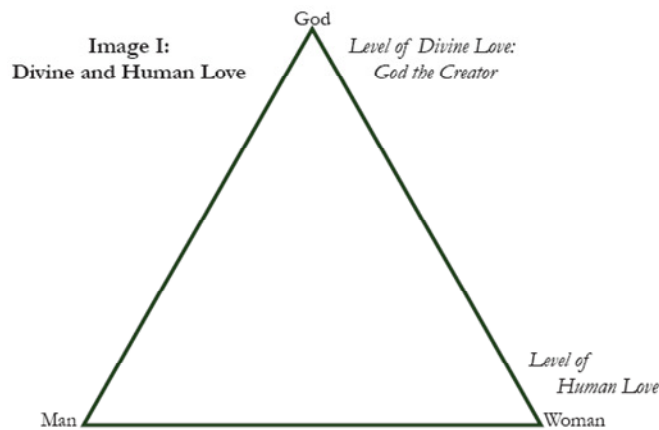
1. Introduction

An external and internal hierarchy of love can be examined in all relationships whether they are between God, our selves, and others or other things in creation. The primary focus of this work will be to use a series of images of a triangle and the four Greek words for love to analyze personal relationships of love, particularly those relationships between a man and woman as creatures of God in the context and foundations of the family, the basic unit of society. Once explained, the external hierarchy of personal relationships will serve as the structure with which to delve into the depths of the internal hierarchy of love in those personal relationships. The internal hierarchy of love will be ordered and measured using the quality of love known as intimacy, both human and divine. The desired effect of this endeavor is to enlighten individuals to the reality and necessity of divine and

human intimacy in order to find and foster the fairest love in the family so as to bring about the New Civilization of Love.

2. The External Hierarchy of Love

Imagine a triangle. (Image I: Divine and Human Love). The point of the triangle represents the level of divine love, God the Creator, while the baseline symbolizes the level of human love, that between two persons starting with a man and a woman. God is the ultimate objective at the apex; man and woman are at the extremes of the baseline of the triangle. The two individuals find themselves that far apart from each other and that far away from God. Basically, this manifests the essential external hierarchy of love.



This triangle is a simple way by which we can recognize and assess our relationships of love starting with that individual relationship of love between our selves and God, as well as the relationship of love between two persons, in this case a man and a woman in love and in the presence of God. Both of these realities mutually exist or co-exist, and therefore, must be taken into consideration together. So many people forget or ignore the reality, beauty and power of divine love in and for human love. Really there cannot be human love without divine love, and there cannot be divine love without the proper human love. The New Civilization of Love must be founded firmly upon divine love and a corresponding appropriate human love in the context of marriage and the family.

Humanae Vitae, number 8, aptly describes the mutual interdependence of the love of man and woman in union with God and each other in marriage and at the service of family and society:

“Marriage is not, then, the effect of chance or the product of evolution of unconscious natural forces; it is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love. By means of the reciprocal personal gift of self, proper and exclusive to them, husband and wife tend towards the communion of their beings in view of mutual personal perfection, to collaborate with God in the generation and education of new lives.”

3. The Four Greek Words for Love as the Basis for the Relationships of Love in the External Hierarchy of Love

Traditionally the Greeks identified four terms to distinguish four kinds of relationships of love: *agape*, *eros*, *storge*, and *philia*. A brief definition of each kind of love from various sources will suffice as the framework for our discussion¹:

Agape: a noble love of the gods, parents, country, and the wise. The love of God for man and of man for God. Also termed a “vertical love” and typically translated into latin as *dilectio*.

Eros: love, desire. A love that is inflamed in the face of the corporally beautiful committing the vital forces of a subject and its passion, but immediately ascending to forms more pure than beautiful, arriving to the contemplation of the divine.

Storge: love, affection, of parents and offspring. A tender love between parents and offspring.

Philia: friendly love, affection, friendship. A love between spouses, children, brothers and sisters, and friends. Also termed a “horizontal love” and typically translated into latin as *amare*².

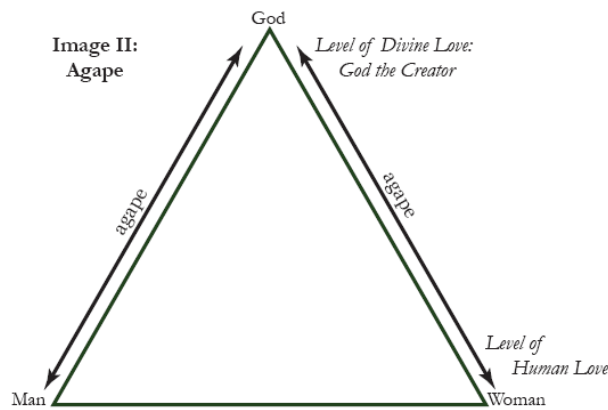
The first observation might be that the lines of distinction between these four loves are not so clear; the second could be that these four types of love

1. *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis, Harcourt, Inc, New York, p. 141. *La ontología del amor en Tomás de Aquino*, Cuadernos de Anuario Filosòco, Juan Cruz Cruz, Pamplona, 1996, p. 135.

2. *La ontología del amor en Tomás de Aquino*, Cuadernos de Anuario Filosòfico, Juan Cruz Cruz, Pamplona, 1996, pp. 4-6. Also the *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994.

do not include all of the loves or combinations of love that are possible; and thirdly, all of these varieties of love could be different qualities of one love, but manifested in different ways at different times and between different people. As Benedict XVI states in *Deus caritas est*, “So we need to ask: are all these forms of love basically one, so that love, in its many and varied manifestations, is ultimately a single reality, or are we merely using the same word to designate totally different realities?”³ St. Josemaría Escrivá would declare that, “We do not have one heart to love God with and another with which to love men. This poor heart of ours, made of flesh, loves with an affection which is human...”⁴ Regardless of the lack of clarity, let's return to the image of a triangle applying these concepts as perfectly as possible.

If we begin looking at the highest form of love, that of *agape*, we see that this is the kind of love closest to being purely spiritual, divine. (Image II: Agape).



This is the uppermost extreme of love. It is divine love. One that descends from God and then from the human being soars “vertically,” establishing the relationship of love between a person and God. This kind of love does not carry with it sensual attachments. Both man and woman must begin to love here, before even meeting each other, at the highest point of the external hierarchy of love, in God. Of course it is not true that the first motion on our part is “to accept” the love that we receive first from God?⁵ God loved us first and awaits our response⁶. Here we might properly say that the quality we search for most is that of “spiritual intimacy,” “nearness to God.”

3. *Deus caritas est*, Benedict XVI, December 25, 2005, number 2.2.

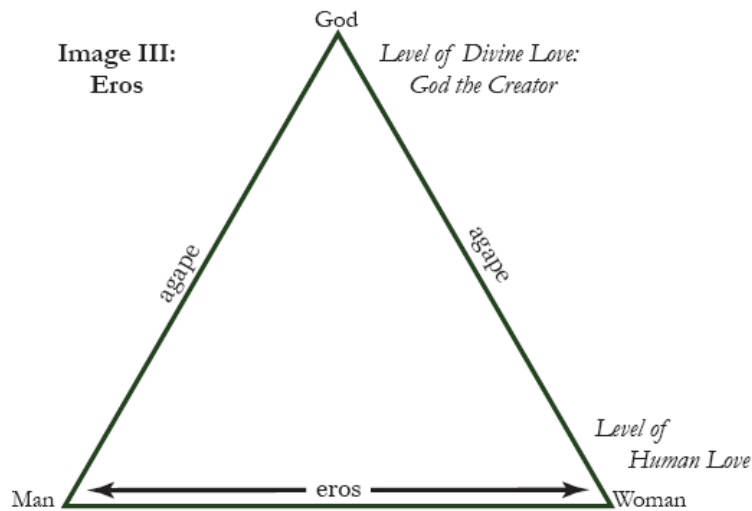
4. *Friends of God*, St. Josemaría Escrivá., n. 231, Scepter Publishers, London, 1981.

5. Cfr. *Antropología*, I, 1992.

6. *Deus caritas est*, Benedict XVI, December 25, 2005, number 17.

In fact it is the highest kind of love possible, the source of all love. It is interesting to note that in God, both the external hierarchy and the internal hierarchy of love are one. It is with this, “the noble love of God,” that all other relationships of love must be divinely inspired, with the gift of divine intimacy.

With *agape* at heart, with divine love in our beings, we turn to the other loves at the level of human love. (Image III: Eros).



As Benedict XVI says in his encyclical on love, usually another kind of love “imposes itself”⁷ upon a man or woman. This is *eros*; “a love that is inflamed in the face of the corporally beautiful committing the vital forces of a subject and its passion, but immediately ascending to forms more pure than beautiful, arriving to the contemplation of the divine”. This is usually referred to as human intimacy, but unfortunately it is often the victim of reduction, limited to just the merely physical sense of touch⁸. In other words, *eros* can be provoked from below as a merely sensual-emotional love alone, possibly remaining in the Flatlands⁹, without a vertical dimension. It would not be the purest, most intimate form of *eros*, that aspiring to a more spiritual “contemplation of the divine”. Of course the highest love is founded in the divine, in *agape*. But after man and woman become “accustomed” to *eros*, as is often the case, the role of *agape* and *philia* will need to play a greater part

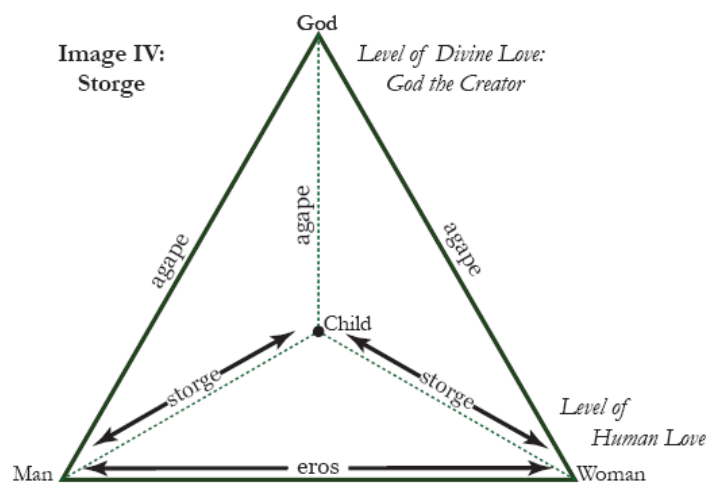
7. *Deus caritas est*, Benedict XVI, December 25, 2005, number 3.1.

8. *Symposium* by Plato.

9. *Flatlands*, a book describing the world as it would appear if it were only two-dimensional.

in a relationship, such that *eros* always attains a more profound or elevated level of inspiration from *philia* and *agape*. Hopefully man and woman become lovers and friends in God's love, filled with divine and human intimacy, loving each other sacrificially with their spirits through their bodies. The *Theology of the Body* must always prefer a higher plane, teaching spouses more about how the spirit loves through the body, safeguarding divine and human intimacy as one love.

And what of *storge*? (Image IV: *Storge*).

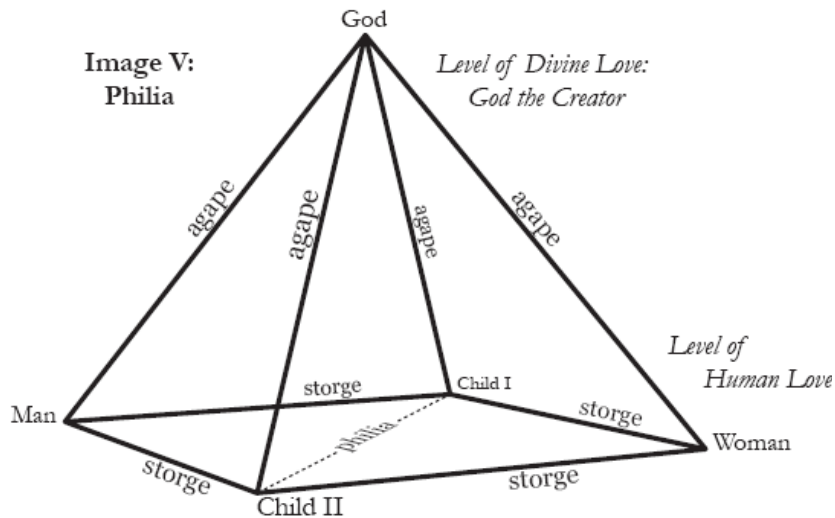


It is defined as paternal affection, that special kind of love between parent and offspring usually resulting from a co-creating act of *eros*. The reciprocal is true as well, filial affection, the love between offspring and parent. With this third person, we form a family and the triangle becomes a pyramid for the edification of society. This kind of affection also needs to be transformed by *philia* and *agape*. It cannot just be a purely sensual kind of affection, but must necessarily pass through the heart of *agape* and *philia*.

If we add another child to the external structure of loving relationships, we can observe *philia* (Image V: *Philia*), the “horizontal love,” or love of friendship between the children of human love: brothers, sisters and others. Friendship is not the focus of this discussion, which does not mean to say that this is not an important part of establishing the New Civilization of Love. Perhaps this is how a love between a man and a woman commences or ought to begin; they are friends, loving each other as “another self”¹⁰. Starting with *philia*, or a love of friendship between a man and a woman that is more spiritual than sensual, would be ideal; nevertheless, what characterizes

10. The Old Testament description of the love of friendship between David and Johnathan.

the love between man and woman is *eros*. Of course, the majority of married life would be characterized more as friendship or *philia*. Is it possible that the friendship between a man and a woman remain just as *philia*? So many young people face this question as they search for the love of their life; husbands and wives know the “exclusive” answer to this question.



Having presented the external hierarchy of love, it is appropriate now to immerse our selves into the internal hierarchy of love between all human beings.

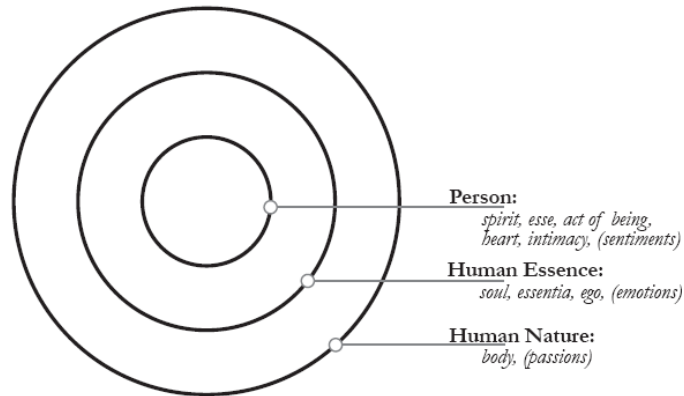
4. The Internal Hierarchy of Relationships of Love

Human beings are complex and multi-layered creatures, fascinating in all their facets, with a common set of features, yet personally and utterly unique at the same time. There is no human being who is exactly like any other human being in the past, present or future. Uniqueness is evident.

For the sake of this discussion on the internal hierarchy of love, I would like to use the *Anthropology* of Leonardo Polo since it seems he has a vision of the human being that contemplates these complexities in a way that is intriguing and nuanced in a special manner.

The human being for Polo is comprised of three dimensions: the human *person*, the human *essence* and the human *nature*. (Image VI: The Three Levels of Human Existence).

Image VI:
The Three Levels of
Human Existence



The equivalents are the following:

1. *Person*: spirit, *esse*, act of being, heart, intimacy. He would say this is the “life given” by God.
2. *Human Essence*: soul, *essentia*, ego. He would say this is the “life added” by our actions.
3. *Human Nature*: body, *trace*. He would say this is the “life received” from our parents.

With respect to the different Greek words for love we could say that the love between two personal human beings is clearly all three ranging from the most spiritual which is *agape* to the most physical, which is *eros*. But we would have to clarify that loving relationships between a divine being or angelic being would be purely spiritual or *agape*. We could say that *agape*, a primarily spiritual love, is at the level of the person, at the very heart of a being, between the divine person and the human person. The loving relationship between man and woman is mostly characterized by *eros*, which is more of a love at the level of the body and human essence than at the level of the person. *Philia* would be that love between friends that is more at the level of the human person and human essence than at the level of the human nature or body. Finally, *storge* is a love that is more at the level of the human person and human essence as it originates from an act of *eros* between parents who give life to a child. Of course all four loves could be possible for each human being given the loving relationships they are involved in, but one love should always be considered in every relationship which is *agape* so often forgotten as shown above in the external hierarchy of love.

This is a complex presentation, but the human person is complex and dynamic. Love has many manifestations at each level and by way of many powers, faculties, and feelings. Polo describes different levels of feelings

based upon the three levels of the human being. For the sake of brevity, the three levels of human feelings according to the three dimensions are listed.

1. *Person*: spirit, *esse*, act of being, heart, intimacy. He would say this is the “life given” by God. This is the level of *sentiments*, primarily spiritual reactions.

2. *Human Essence*: soul, *essentia*, ego. He would say this is the “life added” by our actions. This is the level of *emotions*, primarily psychological reactions.

3. *Human Nature*: body. He would say this is the “life received” from our parents. This is the level of the *passions*, or primarily physical reactions.

Each human being can love another being whether it be a divine, angelic or human being from the highest levels to the lowest levels. These are the manifestations of love at different levels of the human being, starting with the most profoundly spiritual love of *agape* also seen as the most intimate, to the more superficial and physical love or *eros*.

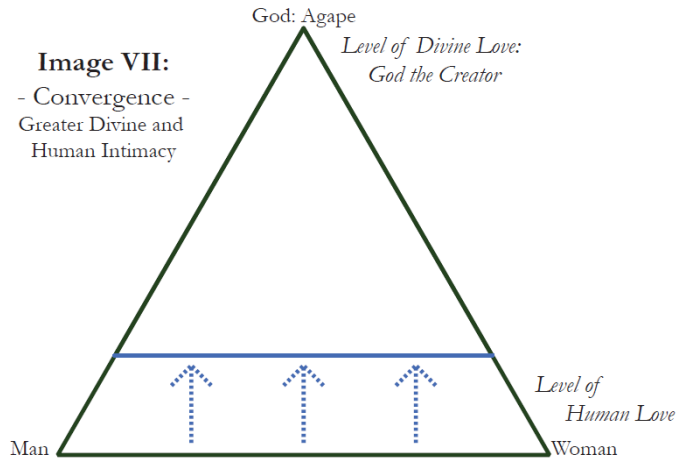
Now it is the proper moment to speak about the word “intimacy.” In many people’s minds, this word brings forth the idea of purely physical sexual relations or 1000 other physical gyrations of touch. And certainly it can be described in this way as much as it can be acted out in this way. But this is precisely the problem. Most people do not realize, do not recognize the depths of love that they fail to fathom; I am referring to intimacy, which Polo speaks of as the “person” or heart or spirit. So many people are enslaved to their passions and emotions. They never or rarely reach the level of *agape* or sentiments of love, intimacy, regardless of the kind of loving relationship.

This leads us to the final and most important point. What is true intimacy and how is it discovered?

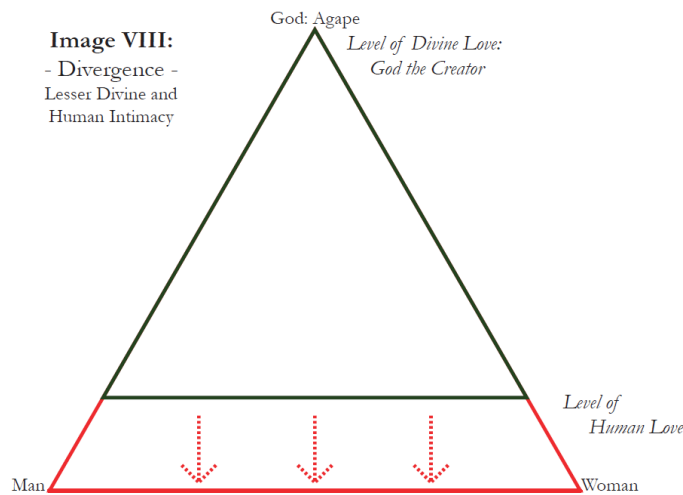
5. The Quest for Intimacy, both Human and Divine

God is the pinnacle of all love, which is *Agape*. There are only two ways to move in relation to God and others in a loving relationship: convergence or divergent. In order to converge toward God, the baseline, the level of human love, must be elevated toward God, divine love, *Agape*, by means

of the mutual gift of self, via sacrifice, or purification as Benedict XVI communicates in *Deus Caritas est*¹¹ (Image VII: Convergence).



This insures that both human love and divine love simultaneously grow closer and closer toward each other. On the other hand, if someone lowers the baseline of human love or lessens the gift of self, simultaneously, there is a divergence of both human and divine love. (Image VIII: Divergence).



Often people are searching for love, but cannot find it, precisely because they are steeped in and reduced to a pre-eminently physical love. They are

11. In *Deus caritas est*, Benedict XVI mentions the idea of purification, renunciation, or elevation sixteen times.

so often left wanting because they are unaware of the ultimate quality of love: intimacy, both divine and human. So many human beings refer euphemistically to love between man and woman as “intimacy.” Yet, “intimacy” is really defined as “closeness, inmost union”¹². When we consider the idea of closeness, we certainly might think of the reality of physical closeness; the highest level of intimacy is personal, spiritual, at the heart of the person. This is precisely where we need to “raise the bar” of human intimacy to the level of divine intimacy. It is impossible to have true human intimacy without divine intimacy, and vice versa: in order to have true divine intimacy, an authentic human intimacy must be properly established.

The pathway to divine and human intimacy is the sacrifice of self for God and others, the gift of self. This quality of intimacy, closeness, is precisely what leads us to the highest levels of the internal hierarchy of love, of communion by way of, “by dint of sacrifice”¹³. In a word, St. Josemaría would define love as “sacrifice.” “Love is sacrifice.” Benedict XVI in *Deus caritas est* highlights this idea using two Hebrew words in the Old Testament for love: *ahaba* and *dodim*.

“What does this path of ascent and purification entail if love is to fully realize its human and divine promise? The *Song of Songs* in the *Old Testament*, originally love poems, can give us an important indication. Two Hebrew words are used to express “love.” The first, *dodim*, suggests a love that is insecure and searching. This is replaced by *ahabà*, which the *Old Testament* translates as *agape*. The search is completed by discovery of the other. Love passes from self-seeking to care for the beloved, ready for renunciation and sacrifice¹⁴.

The effect of this purification is the unity and dissolubility of marriage raised to the level of the divine so eloquently stated upon continuation of the same point of *Deus caritas est*, number 6:

Love moves to a higher level of purification in a twofold sense: It becomes exclusive (this particular person) and endless (forever). It comes to embrace the whole of existence. Love is indeed “ecstasy,” not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather of a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the inward-looking self to its liberation in self-giving, and eventually the discovery of God.”

12. See *Oxford English-Latin Dictionary*, Oxford University Press.

13. *The Way of the Cross, Tenth Station, Points for Meditation*, 3, St. Josemaría Escrivá, Scepter Publishers, London, 1995.

14. *Deus caritas est*, Benedict XVI, December 25, 2005, number 6.

6. Conclusion

As a way of summarizing, the external hierarchy of love defined primarily by divine and human love and particularly by the four loves distributed throughout the triangle of love give us a simple method to reflect on the different qualities of the one source of love in our own lives. This helps us to see where to perfect it, raising it to the highest levels of both divine and human intimacy at all levels of the human being from the body to the soul and to the person. Manifest is the internal hierarchy of human love, mirroring the unity of the one love of the divine, intimacy, union. These are the pieces with which to build the triangles and pyramids of love for marriage and the family in the establishment of the New Civilization of Love.

Mark Mannion
PHD. in Philosophy (USA)
e.mail: frmannion@gmail.com