

A Humble Approach

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IS ULTIMATE REALITY UNLIMITED LOVE?

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The question mark in the title of this book about Sir John Templeton is no accident. With his humble approach, Sir John was not one to make grand claims but rather to ask significant questions to invite deep reflection. This is one of the most profound questions that one can ask. In a scientific sense it might seem implausible, but mystics from every tradition affirm the ultimate reality of the divine as love on the basis of their own experience. This book demonstrates the centrality of unlimited love in Sir John's life and documents his role in helping set up The Institute for Unlimited Love run by the author. The three parts explain why this idea meant so much to him, three primary evidences of his thesis, and statements from family members, associates and scholarly friends. The reader is left in no doubt that Sir John's answer to the question in the title is a resounding affirmative, which he demonstrated extensively throughout his life. Indeed, he emerges from the book as much as a spiritual leader as a leader in business and philanthropy. For example, there his moving prayer quoted early in the book, and his statement about the nature of love is comprehensive and moving. I will come back to this at the end of the review. His hope was that the world's great spiritual traditions might converge around this matrix of Unlimited Love.

An important formative influence was the work of Charles Fillmore, who was a leader in the New Thought Movement. This came out in his use of spiritual affirmations and also in the central thought that the human mind is a microcosm or image of the universal Divine Mind. As Thomas Troward put it, our innermost centre is the divine within us. Importantly, this makes us co-creators with God and instruments or radiators of his love in the world. He also agreed with the proposition by Marcus Aurelius that your life becomes what you think about, and placed special emphasis on cultivating the garden of the mind with positive and uplifting thoughts. He often used to say that when you rule your mind, you will rule your world. As indicated in the title of this review, Sir John was a humble man in spite of his remarkable achievements. He writes that most great people are humble as they realise that a higher power is working through them - this was also emphatically true of Walter Russell. Hence the true meaning of humility is knowing that the personal self is a vehicle for a higher power.

A special feature of the book is its extensive quotations from Sir John's own writing and letters. In 2005 he wrote asking for the author's views on a number of significant ideas. He writes that 'often people seek love to become happy. But really, happiness comes from giving unlimited love. The more love you can give the more you have left to give' - a wise and true

observation. He remarks that life is always a vast mystery, but that enlightenment can come from enthusiasm to give unlimited love. He ends the letter with 'God bless you.' He himself exemplified what he writes about, urging us to centre our minds on truth and love. The work I am currently doing with thousands of young people around the world through my Inspire>Aspire programme is directly inspired by Sir John's own work on laws of life and is generously supported by his Foundation. I encourage them to realise that everything begins with the nature of their thinking, that 'thoughts are things' and that their lives should be lived from the inside out.

A sense of purpose was very important to Sir John. Stephen writes that for him life was all about growth, becoming, process, change, resurrections and transformations. If purpose is the key human spiritual problem, then Unlimited Love is the answer and joy is a by-product of this love. The happiest people are the most grateful - another quality highly prized by Sir John - and those who radiate love for everyone. One of the important books republished by the Foundation in 2002 was *The Ways and Power of Love* by Pitirim Sorokin, and Sir John drew on some of his central concepts in developing his own philosophy of love, in particular that of extensivity, extending love to the whole of mankind.

The second part examines the propositions that people widely self-report spiritual experiences of unlimited love and an associated enhancement of benevolence, that people who love God and their neighbours as themselves generally live healthier and more joyful lives, and that it is eminently plausible that there is an underlying ground of being or ultimate reality that constantly creates and sustains the universe. Stephen brings forward a good deal of evidence to support these hypotheses, also drawing on physics and cosmology. The third part is derived from an invitation by the author to offer their thoughts on what Sir John meant by unlimited love as ultimate reality. Contributors include Owen Gingerich, George Ellis, Robert John Russell, Russell Stannard, Ian Barbour and Harold Koenig. I found Ellis' discussion of foundational levels in the sciences illuminating in the priority it gives to the metaphysics of cosmology in terms of morality, telos and meaning. Ian Barbour writes that we should put more emphasis on immanence than transcendence today, which is consistent with views of emergence.

A separate chapter describes ways in which Sir John tried to live a life of love by members of his family, and his special qualities come across very strongly - his granddaughter writes about the quality of his hugs, his reassurances of love and his support for her development. He wished for all his children and grandchildren a richness of the spirit. After some quotations for reflection, there are facsimiles of letters to and from him and the author, including his own entry on the love-scale questionnaire. As I mentioned above, his accompanying statement is a very powerful one and includes the words: 'Love is the most powerful dynamic in our lives and in the universe, and the more we learn about it and practise it, the better of the future will be... Love is helping people to grow in creativity and discovery and vision.. Love is the power that binds the universe, that harmonises, that creates

without destroying, and then enhances every aspect of a person's life. And loved blesses not just those who receive, but perhaps even more, those who give. That is what I have lived by.' This is an inspiring motto from an inspiring book, and one to which we can all aspire.