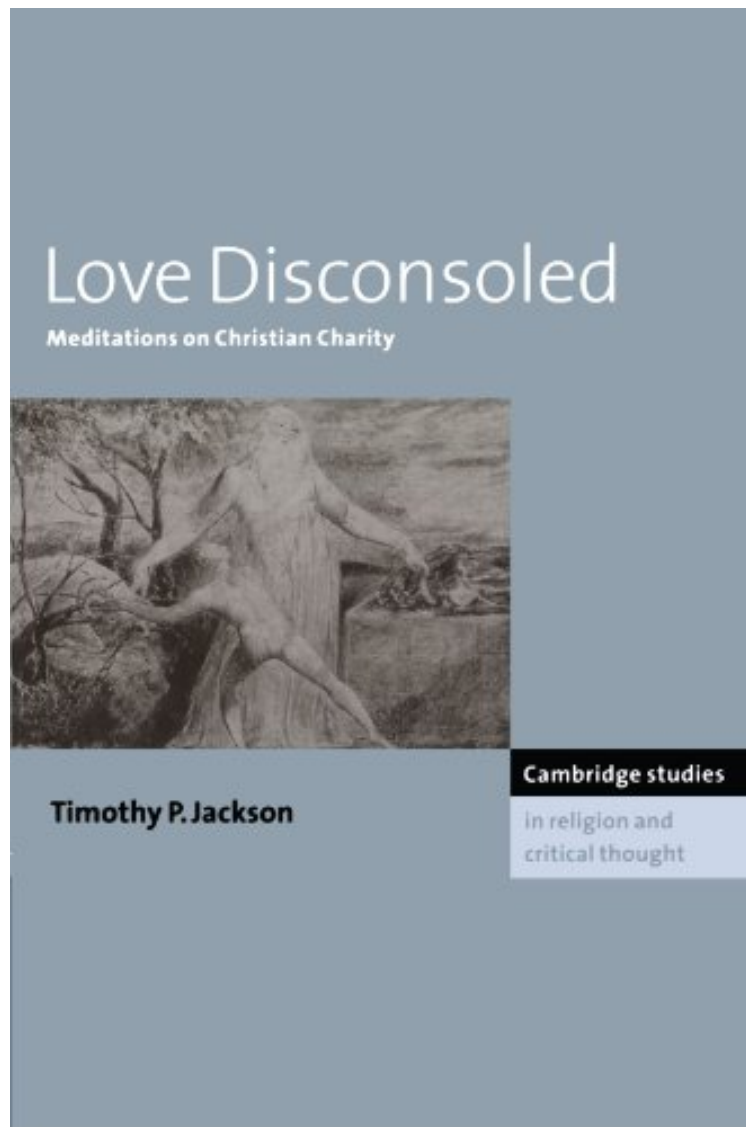


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## Love Disconsoled: Meditations on Christian Charity (Cambridge Studies in Religion and Critical Thought)

*Timothy P. Jackson*

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**Timothy P. Jackson : Love Disconsoled: Meditations on Christian Charity (Cambridge Studies in Religion and Critical Thought)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Love Disconsoled: Meditations on Christian Charity (Cambridge Studies in Religion and Critical Thought):

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Sophisticated Theological Essays on Love By Thomas J.

Oord Jackson's book is comprised of fairly divergent essays addressing the role of agape love as he construes it in relation to various issues and texts. Chapter one, "Biblical Keys to Love," reveals that his theology of love is based primarily upon his interpretation of agape in the New Testament. The story of Jesus Christ provides the key to understanding love in the Bible and also the content and rationale for Christian charity. Jackson defines agape as the New Testament Greek word for the steadfast love that God has for human beings, as well as the neighbor-love humans are to have for one another (11). "Only because God first loves us gratuitously," says Jackson, "are we commanded and enabled to love God unreservedly and to love fellow human beings as we ought to love ourselves" (12). Agape as found in scripture is characterized by three interpersonal features: "(1), unconditional commitment to the good of others; (2), equal regard for the well-being of others; and (3), passionate service open to self-sacrifice for the sake of others" (15). Jackson stresses that agape, as he understands it, does not make self-sacrifice essential. However, openness to self-sacrifice, under the right circumstances, is definitive of the virtue of agape. Jackson distinguishes between what he calls "strong agape" and "weak agape." By strong agape, he means love as the primary human source and end that is indispensable for moral insight and power. Strong agape is a metavalue by which he both individual integrity and social civility turn on a commitment to care for something larger than oneself or one's tribe. In contrast, weak agape understands love as a moral virtue or value among equals with which it competes. When addressing eros and philia, Jackson argues both are dependent upon agape for their beginning and their ordered continuing. With regard to ethical theory, Jackson argues that agape is like a duty in that it is not merely an optional good deed. However, agape is more than a duty in that it is not merely obligation among others. Rather, agape is what Jackson calls "primal goodness, the impetus behind all ethical actions and principles" (28). Strong agape between human beings involves three dimensions of the moral life: traits of character, forms of action, and concrete social consequences. The ethic of strong agape insists "that we are always called to do the loving thing, but it does not deny the relevance of agent-character or action-consequence" (214). In chapter two, Jackson uses novels written by Ernest Hemmingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald to wrestle with the question of whether agape should be understood as an instance of prudence or an instance of self-sacrifice. He concludes that neither view is adequate for the long-suffering love of agape as understood in the Christian gospel. Chapter three's discussion addresses agape, eros, philia and self-love by looking at the works of Augustine, Sigmund Freud, Simone Weil, and Edward Vacek. Neither Freud nor Augustine have an adequate conception of Christian charity because, as he sees it, eros, philia, and self-love grow out of agape as its proper fruits and are secondary goods in comparison with the priority of agape itself. Agape wills the good of others for their own sakes, but, in willing that good, agape may require sacrifice that outstrips the demand of strict justice and natural preference. In the chapter from which the book takes its title, Jackson examines how Christianity's putting charity first among the theological virtues compares to a consoling, Boethian view of ethics. A chastened view of charity best serves Christian epistemology and ethics, but a denial of foundationalism in epistemology does not require the loss of moral realism. Christian theology's priority of love rises above the question of immortality as endless life. "Putting charity first implies that immortality is not the greatest good, nor probably a necessary means to the greatest good" (170). Jackson concludes the book with thoughts on how love is expressed through the cross of Christ. Love must be weaned away from traditional claims to certainty, invulnerability, immortality, and irresistible grace. The strong agapist stands for the priority of love among genuine values and the steadfastness of love among real doubts. Thomas Jay Oord

Few concepts are more central to ethics than love, but none is more subject to varying interpretation. This book explores several theological, philosophical, and literary accounts of love, focusing on how it relates to matters such as freedom and duty. Timothy Jackson also examines two concepts that are fundamental to Biblical ethical discourse--abomination and liberation--and relates these extremes to love, freedom and duty. Throughout this book he defends the moral priority of a distinctive type of love ("agape"), and argues for a realistic ethic of love.