

What is the Difference Between Agape and Charity?

It is currently stylish in Catholic circles to refer to God's love as *agape* instead of using the traditional term of *charity*. *Charity* is discussed in detail in the Catechism of the Catholic Church; *agape* is not. In general, there is no authoritative definition of the word *agape*. People seeking to understand *agape* will only find non-authoritative sources and may be led to the simple explanation that *agape* is sacrificial or unconditional. Usually, discussions of *agape* do not emphasize that it originates from God and is based on love of God. This makes sense because the Church only speaks about *charity* and the Bible does not limit the use of the word *agape* to love that originates in love of God. For instance, Luke 6:32 states, "If you love (agapaō) those who love (agapaō) you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love (agapaō) those who love (agapaō) them." As we see in this passage, sinners can possess *agape*, but they do not possess the love of enemies that God is calling His disciples to. That love of enemies, the love for those whose actions have no positive value, is only because they were made in the image and likeness of God. That love is called *charity*.

People who hate God or are indifferent to Him can love others sacrificially. A mother does not need to be in a state of grace to be willing to die for her child, BUT she does not love that child with *charity* because if she is not in a state of grace she does not have *charity*.

A mother's love might be a good measure of her capacity for sacrificial love, but it would not be a good measure of her *charity*. A better measure would be her love for a stranger or an enemy.

How does the heresy of modernism come in?

Modernism denies or reduces God's presence or action <[link](#)>. By focusing on the beautiful sacrificial aspect of instances of human love and calling it *agape* instead of focusing on the theological virtue of *charity* we make general sacrificial love "God-like" while leaving God out of the mix. Catholics will wrongly conclude that since unbelievers have sacrificial love for others they must be OK with God. How could they have *agape* in their hearts if they were damned?

What does true *charity* for our neighbor look like?

We would recognize that the neighbor (even the stranger) is made in the image and likeness of God and that he has great value for that fact alone. If we have *charity* it will compel us to seek his salvation (primarily) as well as fulfillment of his material needs (secondarily).

If the neighbor is baptized we would recognize him as a child of God and our brother. We would welcome relationship with him. If we recognized that this

neighbor was exceptionally holy (such as a canonized saint) we would admire that holiness and it would further draw us to him.

God loves all human beings enough to keep them in existence forever, even the damned. God loves those living on earth enough to offer them salvation and to provide for their material needs. God is even willing to suffer and die for their sake. Those who have become his children have a life with Him and those who died in His grace have a close, everlasting life with Him. Our love for others should be like God's love. That would be *charity*.