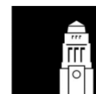

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‘And so she returned to the Eternal Source’: Continuing Bonds and the Figure of Dante’s Beatrice in C.S. Lewis’ *A Grief Observed*

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Abstract

A significant theme in A Grief Observed, the diary Lewis kept following the death of his wife, is anxiety that he will never see her again in any meaningful way – that is, in all her (and his) particularity. Lewis ends the diary with an easily overlooked quotation in Italian from Dante; in English: ‘and so she returned to the eternal source’. In so doing, Lewis draws a parallel between his wife, and the figure of Beatrice, whom Dante is (paradoxically) most fully united with precisely when he lets her return to God. This relates to important themes in Aquinas and Augustine about the relationship between love of creatures and love of God.

We explore the relevance of this quotation of Dante for understanding the evolution of Lewis’ thinking about how to relate to his deceased wife. We draw on insights from continuing bonds literature, a strand of grief theory according to which continuing bonds with the deceased can be a healthy aspect of bereavement. We also draw out some implications for continuing bonds: continuing bonds theorists sometimes claim that, within Western Christianity, there is a tension between union with God and continuing bonds with the deceased, and so they look elsewhere for signs of continuing bonds within religions. We argue that this is a misreading of Western Christian thought and practice.

Key words: theology, love, union with God, afterlife, Christianity

In memory of David Efird

"All are one in Thee, for all are Thine"

Originally published pseudonymously, C.S. Lewis' *A Grief Observed* is an edited version of a diary Lewis kept following the death of his wife, referred to in the text as 'H'. The first half of *A Grief Observed* is characterised by Lewis' feeling of God's absence, his angry questioning of God, anxiety about H.'s post-mortem destination, and, in particular, a concern that he will never see H. again in any meaningful sense - that is, in all her (and his) particularity. While not marked by a clear break, the second half of the book moves towards a sense of peace in which Lewis' feelings of anger (towards God) and anxiety (about H.) are resolved. By the end of the book, Lewis has begun both to regain his sense of God's presence, and to lose his fear of H. no longer being 'a fact' in his life.

Lewis concludes the book with an easily overlooked quotation in Italian - in English this can be rendered, 'And so she returned to the eternal source'. This quotation is taken from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and refers to Beatrice returning once again to God (the eternal source), having shown Dante the way through Paradise. Crucially, it is by allowing Beatrice to return to God that Dante (though on the face of it allowing himself to be separated from her) is ultimately united with her in a more intimate way than would be possible if he clung to her rather than allowing her to return to God. This in turn reflects ideas about the relationship between love of God and love of creatures found both (albeit differently) in the thought of St Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine of Hippo.

In this paper, we want to explore the thought that Lewis' choice of ending is important: that, although he doesn't explicitly develop the idea, it is in entrusting H. to God that he believes he both will be, and that he is in the present, ultimately and intimately united with her. This, we think, has implications for how we should re-read the earlier part of *A Grief Observed*, particularly in relation to assertions Lewis makes at that time about how a 'properly' Christian view of the afterlife precludes the idea that we will meet our loved ones again in all their (and our) particularity.

This exploration of Lewis and Dante will inform and be informed by one strand of grief theory called 'continuing bonds theory'. It will be informed by continuing bonds theory, because much of what Lewis describes later on – for example, of something like a 'meeting' with H. – is shown to be a very common and usually healthy experience in grief in the continuing bonds theory literature. Our study will also inform continuing bonds theory, since it is sometimes maintained by major proponents of continuing bonds theory that, in Western history, 'bonds to the ancestral dead have been in competition and tension with the individual's bond to God alone'. (Klass and Goss, 1999, p. 557). They argue that, for Western Christian thinkers such as Augustine, the resolution of grief takes place through bonding with God, not continuing bonds with the deceased. (Klass and Goss, 1999, p. 559). On this view, the Protestant rejection of purgatory was only the 'logical extreme' of the Western Christian 'rejection of human bonds that continued after death'. (Klass and Goss, 1999, p. 560)

We argue that this is a mistaken characterisation of Western Christianity. According to the distinctively Christian framework in which Lewis expresses the idea of continuing bonds with the deceased, and which has roots in other Western Christian thinkers such as Augustine, Aquinas and Dante, continuing bonds with the deceased cannot be separated from the person's relationship with God. It is no coincidence that the sense of God's presence

returns to Lewis at the same time as he 'meets' H. and ceases to believe that he will never encounter her again in a meaningful way.

We will proceed in the following way. First, we will give an overview of Lewis' *A Grief Observed.* Second, we will introduce continuing bonds theory, and show how it resonates with aspects of Lewis' experience, thoughts and feelings. Third, we will discuss the implicit use by Lewis of the figure of Beatrice in Dante, and (in relation to this) the way in which Dante, Aquinas and Augustine relate love of God and love of (particular) creatures, exploring what this means for how we interpret *A Grief Observed*. Fourth, we will return to continuing bonds theory, exploring how this analysis might form a corrective to certain perceptions of Christian faith continuing bonds. Fifth, we will note some therapeutic and pastoral implications of all of this.

A Grief Observed

Lewis begins by reporting some typical features of grief: he feels distant; unable to take in what people say, but unhappy to be alone; unmotivated to do things such as shave. He confesses a particular fear of mis-remembering his wife by indulging a sentimental mood: 'Give that mood its head and in a few minutes I shall have substituted for the real woman a mere doll to be blubbered over'. (Lewis, 1961, p. 6).

The relationship between grief and religious belief is a theme from the outset. Lewis reports feeling a sense of God's absence when he needs God most:

> Meanwhile, where is God? […] go to him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face; […] after that, silence. [….] Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble? (Lewis, 1961, p. 7, 8)

At the same time, Lewis longs for reassurance about his wife's continued existence, but doesn't find it:

> After the death of a friend, years ago, I had for some time a most vivid feeling of certainty about his continued life. I have begged to be given even one hundredth part of the same assurance about H. There is no answer. Only the locked door, the iron curtain, the vacuum, absolute zero. (Lewis, 1961, p. 9)

Related to his fear of mis-remembering his wife, Lewis finds the idea that immortality resides in others' memories particularly unhelpful:

> What pitiable cant to say 'she will live forever in my memory!' *Live?* That is exactly what she won't do [….] As if I wanted to fall in love with my memory of her, an image in my own mind! (Lewis, 1961, p. 18 – 19)

Lewis also finds what, at this point, he takes to be more Christian theological commitments about the afterlife discomforting. This is because the kind of afterlife he believes in does not in any way fulfil the desire he has to see his wife again in all her particularity, and to live again the life that they shared. He expresses this particularly vividly when he says:

> Kind people have said to me 'She is with God'. [….] But I find that this […] is not after all very important in relation to grief. Suppose that the earthly lives she and I shared for a few years are in reality only the basis for, or prelude to, or earthly appearance of, two unimaginable, super-cosmic, eternal somethings. […. But our earthly lives together] are the very thing I am mourning for, homesick for, famished for. You tell me 'she goes on'. But my heart and body are crying out, come back, come back. [….] But I know this is impossible. I know that the thing I want is exactly the thing I can never get. The old life, the jokes, the drinks, the arguments, the lovemaking, the tiny, heartbreaking commonplace.

He continues:

> Unless, of course, you can literally believe all that stuff about family reunions 'on the further shore', pictured in entirely earthly terms. But that is all unscriptural, all out of bad hymns and lithographs. (Lewis, 1961, pp. 22 – 23)

For this reason, at this point, Lewis is adamant that Christian belief is in no way a consolation in grief:

> Talk to me about the truth of religion and I'll listen gladly. Talk to me about the duty of religion and I'll listen submissively. But don't come talking to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect that you don't understand. (Lewis, 1961, p. 23)

Lewis is also haunted by the possibility that God is in fact a Cosmic Sadist. Later he thinks this was 'not so much the expression of thought as of hatred' since he gained from it 'the only pleasure a man in anguish can get; the pleasure of hitting back' (Lewis, 1961, p.35).

Nonetheless, Lewis' theodicy, which is a kind of soul-making theodicy and which is developed in *The Problem of Pain,* is also of no comfort to him (Lewis, 1940; see Hick, 1966). As he puts it, 'The more we believe that God only hurts to heal, the less we can believe that there is any use in begging for tenderness' (Lewis, 1961, p. 37). In particular, he worries about the implications of soul-making theodicy for his wife's post-mortem existence. Being told that his wife is now in God's hands is no relief. She was in God's hands all along - but God's hands do not seem to be kind or gentle, so why should we think they are after death and not before? (Lewis, 1961, pp. 24 – 25). The idea of non-existence doesn't frighten Lewis – what frightens him is the possibility that afterlife existence does not differ markedly from this life in the methods God uses for soul-making – namely, suffering.

It is at around this point in the book that there is something of a shift in Lewis' experience of grief, and the introduction of a sense of peace – though Lewis notes that at times the former agony comes back and that in grief when one emerges from a phase it always recurs (Lewis, 1961, p. 48). What Lewis reports of this sense of peace is that the 'door', or access to God, 'is no longer shut and bolted' (Lewis, 1961, p. 40). He suggests that his prior sense of God's absence was due to his passionate grief, which had temporarily destroyed his capacity to receive God. He begins to reconstruct a soul-making theodicy, writing that it was only through his grief that God could make him realise that the faith he had had had only been 'a pack of cards' (Lewis, 1961, p. 45). When he lays his theological quandaries before God, he still receives no answer, but rather than the locked door, the 'no answer' is more like 'a silent, certainly not uncompassionate, gaze' (Lewis, 1961, p. 58).

This renewed sense of the presence and love of God occurs at the same time as he experiences a sense of his wife's presence. Lewis describes this sense as her 'seeming to meet me everywhere', though he goes on to say that 'meet' is too strong a word (Lewis, 1961, p. 44). These quasi-meetings provide him with a sense of certainty 'That H. is still a fact' (Lewis, 1961, p. 47). Later he describes these not as 'meetings' but as 'impressions'. On one occasion he says:

> It's the *quality* of last night's experience […] that makes it worth putting down. It was quite incredibly unemotional. […] Not at all like a rapturous re-union of lovers. Much more like getting a telephone call or a wire from her about some practical arrangement. (Lewis, 1961, pp. 61 – 62)

This sense of his wife's presence occurs around the same time as Lewis starts to speak about their marriage continuing after death. As he puts it:

> We were one flesh. Now that it has been cut in two, we don't want to pretend that it is whole and complete. We will be still married, still in love […]. And the more joy there can be in the marriage between dead and living, the better. (Lewis, 1961, p. 47)

This is related for Lewis to the possibility that the dead also feel the pains of separation from those they love, and that this is part of their purgatorial suffering (Lewis, 1961, p. 43). In that case, the death of one's spouse is not the 'truncation' of their marriage but 'one of its phases' (Lewis, 1961, p. 43).

It is also around this point that Lewis' fear of misremembering his wife becomes less acute, and things that were of huge concern to him – that all the photos of her are bad and his memory of her imperfect – become less important. Significantly, Lewis compares this to the eucharist, and so to the way in which Christians relate and are united to post-death-and-resurrection person of Christ:

> Tomorrow morning a priest will give me a little round, thin, cold, tasteless wafer. Is it a disadvantage – is it not in some ways an advantage – that it can't pretend the least *resemblance* to that with which it unites me?
>
> I need Christ, not something that resembles Him. I want H., not something that is like her. A really good photograph might become in the end a snare, a horror, and an obstacle. (Lewis, 1961, p. 55)

Images, then, can be misleading. With respect to both God and H., Lewis says that 'I must stretch out the arms and hands of love - its eyes cannot be used here' (Lewis, 1961, p. 56). 'In that respect', he says, 'H. and all the dead are like God' (Lewis, 1961, p. 56).

At this time, Lewis also returns to the theme of the 'bad lithographs' of people being reunited 'on the furthest shore'. This time he says that what is wrong with them is not the idea that people meet again in all their particularity, but that God is treated as a means to an

end - that of reunification with people one loves - rather than God being an end in Godself (Lewis, 1961, pp. 57 - 58).

At the end of the book, Lewis calls to mind the moment at which H. died, which he marks with a quotation, in Italian, from Dante's *Paradiso:* in English, 'and then she returned to the eternal source'. Here Dante is referring to Beatrice, his beloved who had died, and who guides him through Paradise (where Virgil, his guide until this point, cannot go), before Dante is led by St Bernard to the vision of God's glory. Dante then returns without Beatrice to live his life on earth.

Crucial to Lewis' journey through grief is a renewed sense of the presence of God combined with a certain coming to be at peace with his wife, recognising both her real absence and yet her ongoing reality. We want to explore the suggestion that the passage Lewis, a literary scholar with a keen sense of the significance of texts, quotes from the *Paradiso* is a key to interpreting Lewis' own change of perspective on his own grief.

But first we want to introduce a strand of grief theory, called *continuing bonds theory*, which we think sheds some light on Lewis' experience of grief and especially his sense of a continued relationship with his wife.

Continuing Bonds Theory

The term 'continuing bonds' was coined in 1996 to refer to a new emphasis in grief theory (Klass, Silverman and Nickman, 1996). Whereas previous grief theory since Freud had tended to emphasise breaking the griever's psychological bonds with the deceased or 'letting go' as the endpoint of a successful grieving process, continuing bonds theory maintains that continuing bonds with the deceased is a common experience, and can be a healthy way of responding to loss (Klass, 2006). Continuing bonds theory draws on research into religious traditions such as ancestor veneration in Japanese traditional religion, and explores the many

different ways in which grievers maintain bonds with the deceased – whether through ancestor veneration, experiences involving sensing (or seeming to sense) the presence of the dead, visiting the person's grave and talking to them, looking through family photo albums, or maintaining Facebook pages on behalf of the deceased (see e.g. Balk and Varga, 2018; Irwin, 2018). Study of religious practice has been important to continuing bonds theory, and (as we shall see) some scholars interested in continuing bonds have suggested that non-Christian religious traditions are the primary loci of continuing bonds (Klass and Goss, 1999; Walter, 2018). Continuing bonds, on this view, happen despite, rather than in a way that is consonant with or supported by, Christian practice and belief.

Continuing bonds literature often draws attention to experiences in which people sense (or seem to sense) the presence of the deceased in grief, and these experiences seem germane to the discussion of Lewis' sense of 'meeting' (or quasi-meeting) H. Sensing the presence of the dead might involve seeming to see or hear or smell the person who has died, or might simply involve a general sense of their presence. Often the experience of sensing the deceased is pleasant or comforting, though in complicated grief it may be less so (Steffen and Coyle, 2012, p. 11). A fairly typical case is reported by a psychologist as follows:

> May is in her seventies. She had a long and contented marriage to Owen, but he died from a heart attack six months ago. May has been feeling very low, but she is slowly taking more interest in her church activities, in her grandchildren, some of whom live near by, and in her gardening. About two weeks after Owen died, she saw him standing in the hallway, as she was making her way upstairs to bed. 'Goodnight love,' he said. May was startled, and when she looked again, he had gone. Since then she has seen and heard him several times, always fleeting, and always affectionate. The experiences seem to be getting less frequent. She did mention this to her minister, who said it was certainly nothing to worry about, and was something that often happened. She feels that

> wherever Owen is he is still her husband and loves her. She finds the experiences comforting, though she would not mention them to her friends and family. (Loewenthal, 2007, p. 16)

Sensing the presence of the dead is thought to be common especially in the context of grief, and (even when it is sensory) it is not regarded as pathological by psychiatrists (though it is much more likely to be considered pathological by the general population) (Teeple *et al.,* 2009). Likewise, although we don't know of any quantitative studies of clergy attitudes, anecdotal evidence suggests that clergy tend not to regard people reporting a sense of the deceased person's presence as worrying. For example, when the biblical scholar J.B. Phillips reported that C.S. Lewis, shortly after own Lewis' death, had appeared and spoken a few important words to him, a retired bishop replied, 'My dear J. this sort of thing is happening all the time' (Davies, 2002, p. 171). What seems common to both sensory and non-sensory experiences of the presence of a loved person who has died is the sense of the dead person's continuing reality and relatedness to the person left living (Ratcliffe, forthcoming).

The idea of continuing bonds and of sensing the presence of the dead is relevant to the case of Lewis. The thought that death means breaking bonds with H. is at the heart of Lewis' anguish towards the first half of the book, while feeling that he is 'meeting' (or quasi-meeting) H. is part-and-parcel of the increasing sense of peace that emerges. We don't hear whether Lewis' experience involves a sensory modality, but he doesn't seem to think it important if it does. What is important is their continuing relationship. By the end of the book, Lewis is talking about still being married to H.: death, he concludes, is not something that separates them in an ultimate way.

As this suggests, continuing bonds theory can shed some light on Lewis' experience of grief. What Lewis describes are common, and *(ceteris paribus)* healthy, experiences, thoughts and feelings in grief. Later in this paper, we will also suggest that our account of Lewis (understood in relation to Dante) can contribute to continuing bonds theory by highlighting some distinctive aspects of continuing bonds in a Christian framework and form a corrective against some perceptions about Western Christianity within continuing bonds theory. Before that, we will turn to a discussion of the figure of Beatrice in Dante's *Paradiso,* and to the way in which the inclusion of the quotation by Dante in Lewis might inform how we understand Lewis' theology – and, in particular, how he sees the relationship between union with God and bonds with the deceased by the end of *A Grief Observed.*

Beatrice's return

The passage from the *Paradiso* quoted by Lewis begins with Dante praying to Beatrice:

> Thou hast led me, a slave, to liberty,
>
> By every path, and using every means
>
> Which to fulfil this task were granted thee.
>
> Keep turned towards me thy munificence
>
> So that my soul which thou hast remedied
>
> May please thee when it quits the realm of sense.
>
> Such was my prayer and she, so distant fled,
>
> It seemed, did smile and look on me once more,

Then to the eternal fountain turned her head.

(*Paradiso* XXXI)

Beatrice has indeed led Dante to the liberty of Paradise in the most literal sense: she has been his guide up until this point since Virgil left him. Moreover, Virgil himself was sent by Beatrice to guide Dante through Hell and Purgatory, after he became lost. Early in the *Inferno* Virgil reports Beatrice as saying:

A friend of mine, who is not Fortune's friend,

Is hard beset upon this shadowy course;

Terrors and snares his fearful steps attend.

[…]

But thou – go thou! Lift up thy voice of gold;

Try every needful means to find and reach

And free him, that my heart may rest consoled.

(*Inferno* II)

The help of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Lucy is invoked in sending Virgil on his mission. Yet it is of Beatrice that Dante says:

O blessed she that stooped to take my part!

O courteous thou, to obey her true-discerning,

Speech, and thus promptly to my rescue start!

> Fired by thy words, my spirit now is burning
>
> So to go on, and see this venture through.
>
> I find my former stout resolve returning.
>
> (*Inferno* II)

Dante genuinely loves Beatrice, but his affection for her is inordinate, as is apparent in these stanzas where he effectively substitutes her for Mary in his understanding of the help that has been given him. The intensity of Dante's praise for Beatrice throughout the *Comedy* reinforces the point. The point is subtly and importantly different from the one made by Lewis in the early parts of *A Grief Observed*. It is not desire for union with the dead that is a problem, but specifically concupiscent desire, desire not aligned to proper love of God and of one's fellows, which frustrates the working out of God's plan (or, at least, threatens to). In clinging affectively to Beatrice, Dante fails to see that in enjoying the Beatific Vision she will flourish perfectly, and that love therefore consists in 'letting her go' . Moreover, once he has been able to affirm her return to 'the eternal fountain', Dante will in fact be more perfectly united with Beatrice, through her union with God.

Barbara Reynolds' commentary on *Paradiso* XXXI captures the point well:

> In the literal sense, Beatrice on her departure is more than ever herself, the person whom Dante loves and to whom, in his farewell, he pours out his deepest gratitude, entreating her still to extend towards him her beneficence. (Paradiso, p. 331)

Beatrice returns to the eternal fountain of her being, the God who created and redeemed her, and through her union with God is intimately united with God's creatures, Dante included,

knowing them through the God who, in Augustine's words, is closer to me than my innermost part (*Confessions* 3.6.11). In letting Beatrice go, and abandoning his disordered affection for her, Dante is closer to her than he could otherwise have been.

We might reasonably surmise that, in his appeal to Dante, Lewis is reporting something similar about his own grief. It too involved an arrival at a deeper union with his wife through a reconciliation to the loss, and thereby to the reality of her ongoing life with God. And if this is right, then the sense of peace Lewis reports brings with it a qualification, perhaps an outright rejection, of some of the sentiments he reports earlier in his grief. That his wife is 'with God' is, it turns out, important, since it is through her being with God that she remains united to Lewis. Nor is talk of union with the dead simply the stuff of 'bad hymns and lithographs', rather it resonates with a medieval tradition of thought concerning the Beatific Vision.

The person enjoying the Beatific Vision, for Aquinas (a major theological influence on Dante) shares in the vision of the divine nature. As such they know the one who knows all things (STh I, q14), indeed whose knowledge brings them into being. 'No beatified intellect', writes Thomas, 'fails to know in the Word whatever pertains to itself' (STh III, q10, a2). Far then from union with God, the Beatific Vision, being at the expense of creaturely loves, they find their proper fulfilment as the person is united with the God who knows all things intimately as their creator. Here, within the context of Christian faith, we have a theological basis for a continuing bonds approach.

The relationship between union with God and union with the deceased also connects, albeit differently, to the thought of St Augustine of Hippo. Augustine is sometimes depicted in the continuing bonds literature as someone who exemplifies the idea that union with God and bonds with the deceased are in tension. For example, Robert Goss and Dennis Klass – the

latter being one of the main pioneers of continuing bonds theory - cite Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang's characterisation of Augustine in their sweeping historical survey, *Heaven: A History*:

> Since in the city of God there will be no special friendships, there will be no strangers. All special attachments will be absorbed into one comprehensive and undifferentiated community of love. (McDannell and Lang, 1988, 64, cited Goss and Klass, 1999, p. 559).

Goss and Klass arrive at this conclusion on the basis that, in Augustine's earlier writings, the human community offers solace in this world, but (citing McDannell and Lang again), that 'God would provide all happiness in the next' (McDannell and Lang, 1988, p. 558). This stands in partial contrast to Augustine's later writings, where Augustine thinks that people will have 'spiritual bodies' and will meet their loved ones in heaven, but that these spiritual bodies will have their defects taken away so that 'human relationships would be very different from the degenerated relationships on earth' (Goss and Klass, 1999, p. 559). In support of this view of the later Augustine, they again quote McDannell and Lang, who paraphrase Augustine saying that in heaven there will be female parts, which will not arose lust (since there will be no lust); rather, these will have a new beauty and will inspire praise of the wisdom and goodness of God (Goss and Klass, 1999, p. 559; McDannell and Lang, 1988, pp. 62 – 63).

This characterisation of Augustine is misleading but not entirely inaccurate. For example, it is correct that the younger, immediately post-conversion Augustine, had still not yet recognised some of the tensions between Christianity and the teachings of the Platonists, according to which the soul returns to God as (in Plotinus' words) 'the alone to the Alone' (Ennead 6.9.11.50, cited Rist, 2000, p. 149). Coming from Platonism, the newly-converted

Augustine tended to 'see that love of neighbour as a means towards, or a condition for, the best 'philosophical' life', but continued to 'find difficulty in treating [...love of neighbour] as an integral and constitutive part of the 'highest' reaches of religion' (Rist, 2000, p. 149). Signs of a more unified conception of love of God and love of neighbour occur around four years later in *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae.* Here, Augustine replaces the Stoic emphasis on all virtue as a form of right *reason,* with the idea that all virtue is a form of right *love* - specifically, he thinks, virtuous acts towards other creatures are all rooted in love of God. God, according to Augustine at this time, can be loved 'through' other creatures or 'in the person of' other creatures. Love of God, and love of fellow humans, then, become more intrinsically linked.

In the slightly later *De Doctrina Christiana,* Augustine says that God only should be 'enjoyed' *(frui)* while creatures should be 'used' *(uti)*, where 'used' implies 'treated' rather than 'being used as a means to an end' (see Rist, 2000, 164). The point Augustine is making through this distinction is that it is only possible to love others rightly if we love them 'because of God', as creatures who are created in God's image. If we do not do this, we can either love others idolatrously, as though they are God rather than creatures, or (as he later explains in *De Civitate Dei)* according to worldly valuations such as market valuations, according to which 'more is often given for a horse than a slave, for a jewel than for a maid' (see *De Civitate Dei,* 11.16). Being 'used' in the way Augustine means it ironically means being loved in the way in which we might want to be loved - with awareness of our creatureliness, limits and vulnerabilities, and as made in God's image rather than as having the worth that would be placed on one by a society whose values are corrupt. Later, Augustine expresses the same thought, utilising the language of 'enjoying' others 'in God' (e.g. *De Civitate Dei* 19.13.1; *De Trinitate* 9.8.13). Here, and especially in *De Trinitate,* we can see the collapse of any separation of love of neighbour and love of God; he says: 'He

who loves his brother, loves God; because he loves love itself, which is of God, and is God' (*De Trinitate* 8). The idea that there is a tension between love of God and love of particular others suggests a sort of comparing 'like-with-like', with God and particular others on the same playing field and competing for our affections. In fact this is not the case, Augustine says, because love is God - we do not love God any less when we love particular others.

Loving people because of their God- rather than market-derived value - the kind of love Augustine calls *caritas* rather than *cupiditas* - is relevant when it comes to thinking about why there might be women's parts but no lust in heaven. While men are often valued by society in terms of market value (think of the language of someone, often a powerful man, being 'worth' so many million), for women value has often been defined in terms of sexual attractiveness. Lust as Augustine speaks of it is not synonymous with just any sexual desire; it is forgetting the value of a person as someone created in the image of God and treating them instead as valuable as a means for one's own sexual pleasure - in modern terms, it is objectification (see *Confessions* 3.1.1; 4.2.2; 6.15.25). This is a particularly acute issue for Augustine given the way he speaks of his early relationships with women being tainted both by a certain kind of sexual desire ('befouling' 'the spring of friendship' [*Confessions* 3.1.1]), and also by male peer pressure to act in certain ways and boast about it. Of the latter he laments that in front of his peers he was 'ashamed to be less shameless', and 'made [himself] out worse than [he] was', in order not to be seen of less esteem 'for being more chaste' (*Confessions* 2.3.7). This helps make sense of passages such as those mentioned by Klass and Goss following McDannell and Lang in which Augustine speaks of there being bodies but no lust in heaven. After the Fall, sex is always at least potentially lustful and so exploitative (*Letter* 6. 5 - 8, cited Rist, 2000, p.). It seems reasonable to hope that human relationships will be transformed from the degenerate human relationships currently found on earth. Thus, Klass and Goss are right that the later Augustine thinks there will be a reunification of loved

ones in heaven, but wrong to imply that the particularity of relationships will be lessened by the relationships being transformed and no longer characterised by lust.

The later Augustine, then, has a social eschatology, and he also sees love of God and love of humanity as part and parcel of the same thing, rather than in tension with one another.

Relevance to Continuing Bonds Theory

What is the relevance of the ways Lewis, Dante, Aquinas and Augustine relate love of God and love of particular others, including particular others who have died, for continuing bonds theory? Klass and Goss are not alone among continuing bonds theorists in thinking of western Christianity as involving a tension between a person's bond with God and with the deceased, or in thinking that a Christian conception of heaven involves 'a place where the triviality of human relationships is replaced with communion with God alone' (Klass and Goss, p. 557). For example, in the context of discussing monotheism, Tony Walter says that 'The CB [continuing bond] that unites many across the globe is not with family ancestors but rather with their religious founder' (Walter, 2018, p. 46). He continues, 'Though Christian theology speaks of the resurrected Christ dwelling within the believer, it discourages believers from contacting the spirits of the family dead; Christ is the only deceased human spirit [sic] believers are supposed to entwine with' (Walter, 2018, p. 47). Where very obvious examples of continuing bonds do occur in Christian contexts - for example, the Mexican *Dia de Muertos* - these are interpreted as a product of syncretism and as 'vernacular' rather than official religion (e.g. Walter, 2018, pp. 46 - 47).

This has sometimes led to a focus on the way that continuing bonds are maintained outside of formal religious practices in predominantly Christian cultures, or else on their place in non-Christian religious traditions (such as Japanese ancestor veneration). But, we suggest, this overlooks the existence of continuing bonds within the mainstream western

Christian tradition. In addition to the disservice this does to the Christian tradition, we also worry that this outlook might lead to an orientalist or exoticising approach to non-Christian, and especially non-Western, religious traditions.

We think our discussion may have therapeutic and pastoral implications for bereavement counselling of Christians. Christian experience of grief is unlikely to be homogenous, and so it should not be assumed that someone else's grief will be similar to Lewis'. Nevertheless, it may be that, for people who are in Christian traditions, bereavement will involve renegotiating a relationship with God as well as with the person who has died. Where this is the case, it should not be assumed that there will be a tension between the person's relationship with God, and their relationship with the deceased, or, if there is, that this tension is the end of the story. At worst, assuming this may cause the person to come to the conclusion that this is part of what being a Christian involves, and so lessen their faith in God, or their capacity for continuing bonds with the deceased, or both.

Conclusion

According to a prevalent picture of God, God competes for 'metaphysical space' with creatures (McCabe, 1987). Thus if God acts, to that extent a creature fails to act. And, crucially, to the extent that one stands in a relationship of union with God, one does not stand in that kind of relation with a creature. This picture has clear implications for religious thought about grief, encouraging the thought that union with God is at the expense of union with one's deceased loved ones. But the picture is not compulsory, and through talking through Lewis' account of his grief and its historic antecedents, we have shown how things might look if we do not buy into it.

We think that this is important for continuing bonds theory and for therapeutic practice. We think that continuing bonds has got it right about grief - but that some

significant continuing bonds literature needs to be more nuanced when it comes to understanding religious traditions. In particular, we think that continuing bonds literature wrongly tends to see love of God and love of creatures as in competition, whereas in some significant theological thinkers we have considered - C.S. Lewis, Dante, Aquinas, Augustine - the opposite is in fact the case. This is important for therapeutic practice since sometimes people's religious beliefs are influenced by non-religious perceptions about what the religious tradition involves; faulty perceptions of the Christian tradition may cause people to believe their relationship with God and with their loved ones (and especially their loved ones who have died) are in tension when (according to much Christian theology) they are not. Even if this is not the case, this view of Christianity may cause people to overlook valuable resources in their own tradition for continuing bonds.[1]

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