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Love and Friendship in Toy Story 3

Abstract

This is a review of *Toy Story 3* (2010).

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). Christian moral theologians have extolled sacrificial love as normative and virtuous. They reason that because human beings are interdependent and bear the image of God, an ethic of agapic love is required for achieving the common good. Agapic love, as represented in the Johannine biblical corpus, serves as an appropriate lens to examine Pixar’s *Toy Story 3*.

Johannine theology establishes that love has its origins in community. We learn to love because God first loved us. God loves human beings to the point that God offers Christ as a sacrifice for the sake of humanity. Christ, in turn, offers his life out of love. John points out that we can only love God by loving our neighbor and enemy. Agapic love suggests loving in community. Agapic love, because it is communal, provides a superior ethical motivation than an ethos based on personal or individualistic motives. This sense of love is illustrated by the toys in *Toy Story 3* as they continually resign themselves to their fate in confidence by committing themselves to one another.

Toy Story chronicles the life and adventures of a tight knit group of toys and their owner Andy. Friendship has always been a central theme in these movies, but *Toy Story 3* elevates this leitmotif to new heights. *Toy Story* also highlights related virtues, and explores the fear of abandonment.

Throughout the first two films we have seen Andy grow, while the toys struggled with the reality that their owner would eventually outgrow them. Andy is 17 years old and preparing for college when the third film opens. His mother has given him the task of sifting through the toys. He has been given three options: to throw out the toys he doesn't want; to store the toys he wants to keep in the attic; and, to donate the remaining toys to Sunnyside Day Care. After surviving an encounter with a garbage truck, a horrific experience at Sunnyside Daycare, and a near death experience at the garbage dump, the toys arrive home safely. The movie concludes with Andy donating his toys to the gentle daughter of a Day Care employee.

Johannine theology establishes that love is not a sentiment but an attitude. Love is inseparably bound with virtuous dispositions such as loyalty, responsibility, self-sacrifice, and courage. Christ's concrete actions, made manifest in his suffering for the sake of another, allows us to understand what love is. Christ's love is not arbitrary or capricious; it is self-sacrificial. Christ's example is then required of us. Throughout the film we find Woody, along with Andy's other toys placing the needs of others over their own. This courageous attitude is rewarded repeatedly, as their kindness and concern is reciprocated by others. This sacrificial outlook is illustrated by the most poignant scene of the movie. As the toys are trapped on a conveyor belt leading to a fiery furnace, the friends resign themselves to their fate,

hold hands and await their inevitable demise together. Their loyalty to one another is exemplary, but one is also surprised by their sense of responsibility to one another. They feel compelled to assuage fear by sharing their burdens. Andy's toys are rescued by the Pizza Planet alien trio at the last moment. The aliens had earlier been saved by Woody's sacrificial action in a dumpster.

Throughout the trilogy Pixar manages to masterfully exploit the theme of abandonment and maturation. Johannine theology establishes that human beings are estranged and suffer disunion with God and their neighbors. It is only through the reconciliatory love of Christ that humans are eased of this angst. Through love our wounds are healed and we achieve peace. Jesse, Lotso and Big Baby are the characters that struggle the most with abandonment in *Toy Story 3*. In the second *Toy Story* movie, Jesse opened herself to friendship and love. In *Toy Story 3* we find a confident, mature and trusting Jesse. She has come to terms with the reality that Andy will outgrow toys, but is at peace thanks to the friends she has made. On the other hand Lotso and Big Baby have grown cynical, cruel and callous. In their pain they have lashed out against the world. By the end of the movie Lotso's despair leads to his estrangement, while Big Baby is reconciled by opening his heart to friendship and love.

Pixar's *Toy Story* trilogy tells a compelling, consistent and comprehensive story that both entertains and challenges. It is a story of friendship and love. In the

end it teaches a valuable life lesson.; Growth and maturation are natural, fear of the unknown is terrifying, but friendship and love conquers all. Most importantly, it teaches that love is both a means to an end, and an end in itself.