

Preface

This collection of thematically organized original studies presents and discusses perceptions on the notion of love in ancient philosophy and early Christian theology. The notion of love is discussed firstly in two critical readings of Anders Nygren's study *Agape and Eros* (1930–36). Nygren's distinction of *eros*, on the one hand, as an egocentric, human love and *agape*, on the other hand, as Christian, theocentric and divine love, has long been received almost as a dogmatic truth and prevented a more nuanced understanding. The metaphysics and ethics of love are further discussed in relation to Platonic, Neoplatonic, biblical and early Christian – especially Eastern Christian – thinking. Related questions such as “Is all love essentially divine?” and “Is unselfish love possible?” and themes such as love as a unifying force, and ascetical love, are also presented and discussed.

The papers are representative of the interests of the participants of the colloquy and therefore mainly deal with the Eastern Christian tradition, less with the Western. Their common focus is the notion of love. The two readings of Nygren may be seen as an introduction to the following papers, which are examples of how *eros* and *agape* are used in an ancient context. One is concerned with the biblical notion, another discusses the Neoplatonic Proclus's ideas of love, three of them deal with ideas of love in the Eastern Christian thinkers Diadochus of Photiki, Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor, and the last is concerned with the French mystic Marguerite Porete.

This volume is the result of an international research seminar, The Metochi Seminar, at the University of Agder's study centre in Greece (the Metochi Study Centre), on the island of Lesbos, in May 2015. We, the editors, would like to thank all the contributors, and we would also like to thank the University of Agder for its financial support. This volume is

dedicated to the late professor Egil A. Wyller. His work on the Platonic tradition, especially regarding the notion of love, has been an inspiration along our way.

The editors