

WORKS OF LOVE

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if one really possesses them, be as one who does not possess them; on the contrary, if one is such, then one simply does not possess them. If someone believes that he has faith and yet is indifferent to his possession, neither cold nor warm, then he can be sure that he does not have faith. If someone believes that he is a Christian and yet is indifferent to the fact that he is, then he truly is not a Christian. Or what would we think about a man who protested that he was in love, and also stated that it was a matter of indifference to him?

So therefore let us not forget, as little now as on some other occasion when we speak about Christianity, let us not forget its beginning, that is, that it did not originate in any human heart; let us not forget to mention it along with the origin of faith, which never, when it is present in a man, believes because others have believed, but because *this* man, too, has been gripped by that which has gripped countless multitudes before him, but certainly not therefore less primitively. For a tool that a handworker uses becomes blunted through years of use, a spring loses its elasticity and is weakened; but that which has the elasticity of eternity retains it through the ages absolutely unchanged. When a dynamometer has been used a long time, at last even a weak man can pass the test; but the dynamometer of eternity, on which every man must be tested as to whether he has faith or not, remains through all the ages absolutely unchanged.

When Christ said: "Beware of men," I wonder if that warning did not also imply this: "Beware lest through men, that is, through perpetual comparison with other men, through habit and externalities, you allow yourself to be defrauded of the supreme good." For the artfulness of a deceiver is not so dangerous, besides one more easily perceives it; but to hold the supreme good in a sort of common fellowship, in the indolence of habit, moreover in the indolence of a habit which even wishes to posit the race instead of the individual, wishes to make the race the receiver, and the individual a participant as a matter of course by virtue of his belonging to the race: this is truly the terrible thing. Certainly the highest must not be mere plunder; you must not have it for yourself in a selfish sense, for what you merely have for yourself alone is never the highest good; but even if you, in the most profound sense of the word, have the highest in common with everyone else (and this is precisely what makes it the highest, that you can have it in common with all others), you must still have it for yourself in such a way that you keep it, not only when everyone else has it, but so that you retain it even if all others renounce it. Beware in this respect also of men, "be as wise as serpents"—in order to preserve the secret of faith for yourself, although you hope and wish and labor to make everyone in this respect like yourself. "Be innocent as doves," for faith is

exactly this simplicity. You must not use your ingenuity for the purpose of making faith into something else, but you must use it ingeniously toward men to defend the secret of faith within yourself, guarding yourself against men. Is a password not a secret because everyone knows it individually, because it is confided to everyone and kept secret by everyone? However, the secret password is one thing today and another tomorrow. But the essence of faith consists in its being a secret, in being for the individual. If each individual does not preserve it as a secret, even when he professes it, he does not have faith. Could it be because there is something lacking in faith that it thus is and remains and must be preserved as a secret? Is this not also true of love, or is it just one of those fugitive emotions which manifest themselves immediately, and as quickly disappear, while the profound impression always preserves its secrecy? If that is so, then we are still right in saying that the love which does not make a man secretive is not really love.

That secretive love can be a symbol of faith; but the incorruptible inwardness of faith in the hidden man is life. He who wise as a serpent is on guard against men, so that harmless as a dove he may "preserve the secret of faith," has also, as the Scriptures say, "the savor in himself"; but if he is not on guard against men, then the salt loses its virtue, and how then can it be salt? And even if it happened that a secret love became the cause of a man's downfall, still faith is eternally and always the saving mystery! Behold that woman with the issue of blood; she did not press forward in order to happen to touch Christ's garment; she did not tell others what her intention was and what she believed: she said quite softly to herself: "If I only touch the hem of His garment, then am I healed." She kept the secret to herself, it was the secret of faith, which saved her both for time and eternity. This secret you may also have for yourself if you fearlessly profess faith; and when you lie helpless on a sickbed and cannot even move a limb, when you cannot even speak, you can still keep this secret with you.

But the primitiveness of faith is related to the beginning of Christianity. Extravagant descriptions of heathendom, its errors, its characteristics, are by no means needed; the signs of the Christlike are contained in Christianity itself. Make an experiment; forget for a moment Christian love, consider what you know about other love, recall what you read in the poets, what you yourself can discover, and then say whether it ever occurred to you to conceive this: Thou *shalt* love. Be honest, or, that this may not embarrass you, I shall honestly confess that many, many times in my life it has awakened all my astonishment of wonder, that it has sometimes seemed to me as if love lost everything by this comparison, although it gains everything. Be honest, confess that this is perhaps the case with many people, that when they

read the poets' glowing descriptions of love or friendship, these seem to them something far higher than the humble: "Thou shalt love."

"Thou shalt love." *Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love everlastingly secure against every change; everlastingly emancipated in blessed independence; everlastingly happy, assured against despair.*

However glad, however happy, however indescribably confident the love of impulse and inclination, the immediate love as such can be, it still feels, even in its most beautiful moment, a need to bind itself if possible even more closely. Therefore the two take an oath; they take an oath of loyalty or friendship to each other; and when we speak most solemnly, we do not say about the two, "They love one another," we say, "They swore fidelity to each other," or, "They took an oath of friendship to each other." But by what does this love swear? We do not wish to distract the attention and divert it by recalling the great distinction which the spokesmen of this love, the "poets," through their consecration know best about—for in respect to this love it is the poet who exacts a promise from the two, the poet who unites the two, the poet who dictates an oath to the two and lets them take it, in short, it is the poet who is the priest. Does this love then swear by something that is higher than itself? No, it does not. This is what exactly constitutes the beautiful, the moving, the mysterious, the poetical misunderstanding, that the two do not themselves discover it; and precisely because of this, the poet is their only, their beloved confidant, because neither does he discover it.

When this love takes an oath, it really gives itself that significance by which it swears; it is the love itself which casts a glamor over that by which it swears, so it consequently not only does not swear by anything higher but it really swears by something lower than itself. So indescribably rich is this love in its loving misunderstanding; for just because it is itself an infinite wealth, a limitless trustworthiness, it happens that when it wishes to take an oath it swears by something lower, but it does not even discover this. That is why it again happens that this oath which certainly should be and which also honestly believes itself to be supremely serious, is still the most charming jest. And neither does the mysterious friend, the poet whose perfect confidence is this love's supreme understanding, understand it. Still it is certainly easy to understand, that if one will swear in truth then one must swear by something higher; only God in heaven is truly in a position to swear by Himself. However, the poet cannot understand this, that is, the individual who is a poet can understand it, but he cannot understand it insofar as he is poet, since "the poet" cannot understand it; for the poet

can understand everything—in riddles, and can wonderfully explain everything—in riddles, but he cannot understand himself, or understand that he himself is a riddle. Should he be forced to understand that, then would he, if he did not become enraged and resentful, say sadly: "Would that no one had forced this comprehension upon me, which disturbs that which is most beautiful, which confuses my life, while I can make no use of it." And so far the poet is right, for the true understanding solves the vital question of his existence. There are in this way two riddles, the first is the love of the two, the second is the poet's explanation of it, or that the poet's explanation of it is also a riddle.

So this love takes an oath, and then the two add to the oath that they will love each other "forever." If this is not added, then the poet does not unite the two; he turns indifferently away from such a temporal love, or he turns mockingly against it, whereas he forever belongs to that eternal love. There are then really two unions, first, the two who will love each other forever, and then the poet who will forever belong to those two. And in that the poet is right, that if two men will not love each other forever, then their love is not worth talking about, and certainly not worth celebrating in verse. On the other hand, the poet does not notice the misunderstanding that the two swear *by their love* to love each other forever, instead of swearing their love to each other *by eternity*. Eternity is the higher; if one wishes to take an oath, then must one swear by the higher, but if one will swear by the eternal, then one swears by the *duty of loving*. Alas, but that favorite of lovers, the poet! Even more seldom than the two true lovers is he himself the lover for whom he longs, he who is a marvel of loveliness. He is like the affectionate child, he cannot endure hearing this "shalt"; as soon as it is said to him, he either becomes impatient, or he bursts into tears.

Hence, this immediate love contains the eternal in the form of a beautiful fantasy, but it is not consciously grounded on the eternal, and therefore it can be *changed*. Even if it does not change, it still retains the possibility of change, for it depends on good fortune. But if what is true of fortune is true about happiness, which if we think of the eternal cannot be considered without sadness, it is like saying with a shudder: "Happiness is, when it *has been*." That is, as long as it existed, or was existing, a change was possible; only when it is past can one say that it existed. "Call no man happy as long as he is living"; as long as he is living his fortune may change; only when he is dead, and happiness had not forsaken him while he lived, can one know that he—had been happy. What merely exists, what has suffered no change, always has the possibility of change outside itself. Change is always possible; even at the last moment it may come, and not until life is finished can one say:

however confident it is, there is still an anxiety, an anxiety about the possibility of change. It does not itself understand, as little as does the poet, that it is anxiety; for the anxiety is hidden, and there is only the burning desire for the expression of love, which is just the admission that anxiety lies at the bottom. How otherwise does it happen that the immediate love is so inclined to, moreover, so enamored with the idea of putting love to the test? This is just because love has not, through becoming duty, in the deepest sense undergone the "test." Hence this, which the poet would call sweet unrest, wishes more and more rashly to make the test. The lover would test the beloved, friend would test the friend; the testing no doubt is based on love, but this violently burning desire to test, this wishful craving to put love to the test, nevertheless testifies that the love itself is unconsciously insecure. Here again is a mysterious misunderstanding in the immediate love and in the explanations of the poet. The lover and the poet think that this desire to test love is simply an expression for how certain it is. But is this really true? It is absolutely true that one does not care to test what is unimportant; but from that it does not follow that wishing to test the beloved expresses confidence. The two love each other, they love each other forever, they are so certain of this that they—put it to the test. Is this the highest certainty? Is not the relation here precisely what it is when love takes an oath and yet swears by what is lower than love? So here the highest expression of the lovers for the constancy of their love is an expression of the fact that it merely has existence, for one tests that which merely has existence, one puts it to the test.

But when it is a duty to love, there no test is needed and the insulting stupidity of wishing to test is superfluous; since love is higher than any proof, it has already more than met the test, in the same sense as faith "more than conquers." The very fact of testing always conditions a possibility; it is still always possible that that which is tested may not meet the test. Hence if someone wished to test whether he has faith, or tried to get faith, then this would really mean that he will hinder himself in acquiring faith; he will become a victim of the restless craving where faith is never won, for "thou shalt believe." If a believer were to implore God to put his faith to the test, then this is not an indication of the believer's having faith to an extraordinary degree (to think that is a poetic misunderstanding, as it is also a misunderstanding to have faith to an "extraordinary" degree, since the ordinary degree of faith is the highest), but it indicates that he does not quite have faith, for "thou shalt believe." There is no higher assurance, and the repose of eternity is never found anywhere but in this "shalt." However attractive it may be, "testing" is a disquieting thought, and it is anxiety which would make you imagine that the testing constitutes a

higher assurance; for the idea of testing is in itself ingenious and inexhaustible, just as human wisdom has never been able to reckon all the chances, while, on the contrary, as earnestness so excellently says, "Faith has taken all chances into account." And if one *must*, then it is eternally decided; and if you are willing to understand that you *must* love, then is your love eternally secure.

And love is also through this "shalt" eternally secure *against every change*. For the love which merely has continuance can be changed, it can be changed *in itself*, and it can be changed *from itself*.

The immediate love can be changed in itself, it can be changed into its opposite, into *hate*. Hate is a love which has become its opposite, a love which has perished. At bottom love burns constantly, but the flame is that of hate; only when the love is burnt out is the flame of hate also quenched. As it is said about the tongue, that "out of the same mouth proceedeth both blessing and cursing," so we must also say that it is the same love which loves and hates; but just because it is the same love, precisely therefore, it is not in the eternal sense the true love, which *remains the same and unchanged*, while that immediate love, if *it is changed*, at bottom is still *the same*. The true love which underwent the change of the eternal by becoming duty, is never changed; it is simple, it loves—and never hates, never hates—the beloved. It might seem as if the immediate love were the stronger because it can do two things, because it can *both love and hate*; it might seem as if it had a quite different power over its object when it says, "If you will not love me, then I will hate you": still this is only an illusion. For is the changed really a stronger power than the unchangeable? And who is the stronger, the one who says, "If you will not love me, then I will hate you," or the one who says, "Even if you hate me I shall continue to love you"? Moreover, it is certainly terrifying and terrible that love should be changed into hate; but I wonder for whom it is really terrible; is it not for the one to whom it happened that his love was changed to hate?

The immediate love can undergo a change; it can spontaneously become *jealousy*, can change from the greatest happiness into the greatest agony. So dangerous is the heat of this immediate love, however great its desire is, so dangerous, that this heat can easily become a sickness. The immediate love is like fermentation, which is so-called just because it has still undergone no change, and therefore has not yet separated out from itself the poison which at the same time furnishes the heat of the fermentation. If love sets itself on fire through this poison, instead of separating it out, then comes jealousy; and, alas! the word itself indicates a desire to become sick, a sickness of desire [*Iver*—desire, *Sygdøm*—sickness; hence *Iversyge*, desire-sickness, or jeal-

ousy]. The jealous person does not hate the object of love, far from it, but he tortures himself with the fire of reciprocated love, which sanctifyingly ought to purify his love. The jealous lover intercepts, almost imploringly, every ray of love from the beloved, but he focuses all these rays upon his own love through the burning glass of his jealousy, and he is slowly consumed. On the other hand, the love which underwent the change of eternity through becoming duty, knows no jealousy; it loves, not only as it is loved, but it loves. Jealousy loves as it is loved; in jealous agony about whether it is loved, it is as equally jealous for its own love, whether it may not be disproportionate to the other's indifference, as it is jealous for the expression of the other's love; anxiously tortured in its self-occupation, it neither dares to believe the beloved absolutely nor to resign itself absolutely, lest it give too much, and therefore it is always burning itself, as one burns himself on that which is not hot—except to the alarmed touch. It is comparable to spontaneous combustion. It might seem as if there would be quite a different kind of fire in the immediate love, since it can become jealousy; but, alas, this fire is just the appalling thing about it. It might seem as if jealousy held its object fast in quite a different way when it watches over it with a hundred eyes, while simple love has, as it were, but a single eye for its love. But I wonder if dispersion is stronger than unity. I wonder if a heart wrenched asunder is stronger than one perfect and undivided. I wonder if a perpetually grasping anxiety holds its object closer than the united forces of simplicity! And how does that simple love assure itself against jealousy? I wonder if it is not by virtue of the fact that it does not love in a comparative way. It does not begin by immediately loving preferentially, it loves; therefore it can never love morbidly in a comparative way—it loves.

The immediate love can be changed *from itself*, it can be changed by the years, as is so often seen. Then love loses its ardor, its gladness, its desire, its primitiveness, the freshness of its life; like the river which sprang out of the rock when it later on spreads out in the sluggishness of stagnant water, so love is weakened by the lukewarmness and indifference of habit. Alas, perhaps of all enemies force of habit is the most crafty, and above all it is crafty enough never to let itself be seen, for one who sees the habit is saved from habit. Habit is not like other enemies which one sees and against which one strives to defend himself; the struggle is really with one's self in getting to see it. In its cunning it is like that familiar beast of prey, the vampire bat, which stealthily falls upon its sleeping victim; while it sucks his blood, its gently moving wings waft the coolness over him, and make his slumber even more refreshing. Such is habit—or it is even worse; for that animal seeks its prey among the sleeping, but it has no means of sooth-

ing the waking to sleep. Habit, on the contrary, has this power; it creeps soporifically upon a man, and when he has fallen asleep, then it sucks his blood, whilst it wafts the coolness over him and makes his sleep even more delicious.

So the immediate love can be changed from itself and become unrecognizable—for hate and jealousy are still perceptible in the love. So a man himself sometimes notices, as when a dream floats by and is forgotten, that habit has changed him; then he wishes to make good again, but he does not know where he can go to buy new oil to enkindle his love. Then he becomes despondent, irritated, bored by himself, bored by his love, bored by the wretchedness of things as they are, bored by the fact that he cannot change them; alas, for he had not paid attention in time to the change of eternity, and now he has even lost the power to endure the healing.

Oh, we sometimes see with sorrow the impoverishment of a man who once lived in affluence, and yet how much more distressing than this change it is to see love changed into something almost abhorrent!—If, on the contrary, love has undergone the change of eternity by becoming duty, then it does not know the force of habit, then habit can never get power over it. As it is said of the eternal life, that there is neither sighing nor weeping, so we might add that there is also no habit; and thereby we truly are not saying anything less excellent. If you wish to save your soul or your love from the perfidy of habit—moreover men believe that there are many ways of keeping themselves awake and safe, but truly there is but one: eternity's "shalt." Let the thunder of a hundred cannon three times a day remind you to resist the thralldom of habit; keep, as did that mighty Eastern emperor, a slave who daily reminds you, keep a hundred; have a friend who reminds you every time he sees you, have a wife who reminds you early and late in love: but watch yourself lest this too becomes a habit! For you can become accustomed to the thunder of a hundred cannon, so that you can sit at table and hear the most insignificant remark more clearly than the roar of the hundred cannon you are—in the habit of hearing. And you can become accustomed to having a hundred slaves remind you every day, so that you no longer listen, because through habit you have developed an ear wherewith you hear and yet do not hear. No, only the "thou shalt" of eternity—and the listening ear which will hear this "thou shalt," can save you from the thralldom of habit. Habit is the most distressing change, and, on the other hand, one can accustom one's self to every change; only the eternal, and consequently that which underwent the change of eternity through becoming duty, are the unchangeable, but the unchangeable can never become habit. However firmly a habit is fixed, it never becomes unchangeable, even if a man remains

incorrigible; for habit is constantly that which *should be changed*; the unchangeable, on the contrary, is that which neither *can* nor *should* be changed. But the eternal never becomes old and never becomes habit.

Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love everlastingly free in blessed independence. But is, then, that immediate love not free; does not the lover enjoy freedom in his love? And, on the other hand, could it be the intention of the discourse to recommend the desolate independence of self-love, which became independent because it did not have the courage to bind itself, and hence became dependent on its cowardice; the desolate independence which vacillates because it found no place of refuge, and is like "the one who wanders hither and thither, an armed brigand, who puts up wherever evening finds him"; the desolate independence which independently will not endure fetters—at least not visible ones? Oh, far from it; on the contrary, we have in the preceding discourse reminded you that the expression for the greatest wealth is to have a need; and this is also the true expression of freedom, that it is a need in the free. He in whom love is a necessity certainly feels free in his love; and just the one who feels himself so dependent on his love that he would lose everything in losing the beloved, just he is independent. Yet on one condition, that he does not confuse love with the possession of the beloved. If one were to say, "Either love or die," and thereby meant that a life without love was not worth living, then we should admit that he was absolutely right. But if by this he meant possessing the beloved, and consequently meant, either possess the beloved or die, either gain this friend or die, then we must say that such a love is dependent in a false sense. When love does not make the same demands upon itself as it makes on the object of its love, while it is still dependent on that love, then it is dependent in a false sense; the law of its existence lies outside itself, and hence it is dependent in the corruptible, earthly, temporal sense. But the love which underwent the change of eternity by becoming duty, and loves because it *must* love, it is independent; it has the law of its existence in the relation of love itself to the eternal. This love can never become in a false sense dependent, for the only one it is dependent upon is duty, and duty is the only emancipating power. Immediate love makes a man free one moment, and in the next moment dependent. It is like a man's coming into existence; by existing, by becoming a "self," he becomes free, but in the next moment he is dependent on this self. Duty, on the other hand, makes a man dependent and at the same time eternally independent. "Only the law can give freedom." Alas, we often think that freedom exists, and that it is the law which restricts freedom. However, it is just the other way; without law freedom simply does not exist, and it is the law which gives freedom. We think, too, that it is the law which makes distinctions, because

law & freedom?

where there is no law there are no distinctions. Still it is the other way; when it is the law which makes the distinction, then it is exactly the law which makes everyone equal before the law.

Thus this "shalt" sets love free in blessed independence; such a love stands and falls not by some accidental circumstance of its object, it stands and falls by the law of eternity—but then it never falls; such a love does not depend upon this or that, it depends only on—the one liberating force, consequently it is eternally independent. There is nothing comparable to this independence. Sometimes the world praises the proud independence which believes it feels no need of being loved, although it also thinks that it "needs other men, not to be loved by them, but in order to love, in order to have someone to love." Oh, how false is not this independence! It feels no *need* to be loved, and yet it *needs* someone to love; consequently it needs another man—in order to be able to satisfy its proud self-esteem. Is not this as when vanity believes that it can dispense with the world, and yet needs the world, that is, it needs that the world should become conscious of the fact that its vanity does not need the world! But the love which underwent the change of eternity by becoming duty, certainly feels a need of being loved, and this need together with this "shalt" is therefore an eternally harmonious concord; but it can do without this love, if so it *must* be, while it still continues to love: is this not independence? This independence is dependent only on love itself through the "shalt" of eternity; it is not dependent on anything else, and therefore it is not dependent on love's object as soon as this appears to be something else. However, this does not indicate that the independent love then ceased, transformed itself into a proud self-satisfaction; that is dependence. No, love abides, it is independence. The unchangeableness is the true independence; every change, be it the swoon of weakness or the arrogance of pride, the sighing or the self-satisfied, is dependence. If one man, when another man says to him, "I can no longer love you," proudly answers, "Then I can also stop loving you": is this independence? Alas, it is only dependence, for the fact as to whether he will continue to love or not depends on whether the other will love. But the one who answers, "Then I *will* still continue to love you," his love is everlastingly free in blessed independence. He does not say it proudly—dependent on his pride; no, he says it humbly, humbling himself under the "shalt" of eternity, and just for that reason he is independent.

Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love everlastingly secured against despair. Immediate love can become unhappy, can come to despair. Again, it might seem an expression for the strength of love, that it has the energy of despair, but this is only an appearance; for the energy of despair, however much it is recommended, is still impotence,

its highest possibility is just its own destruction. Still, the fact that the immediate love can reach despair, shows that it is despairing, that even when it is happy, it loves with the energy of despair—loves another man “better than himself, better than God.” About despair it must be said: only he can despair who is desperate. When immediate love despairs over unhappiness, then it merely becomes evident that it was—desperate, that in its happiness it had also been desperate. Despair consists in laying hold on an individual with infinite passion; for unless one is desperate, one can lay hold only on the eternal with infinite passion. Immediate love is thus desperate; but when it becomes happy, as we say, it is hidden from it that it is desperate, when it becomes unhappy it becomes evident that it—was desperate. On the other hand, the love which underwent the change of eternity by becoming duty, can never despair, just because it is not desperate. Despair is, namely, not something which may happen to a man, an event like fortune and misfortune. Despair is a disproportion in his inmost being—so far down, so deep, that neither fate nor events can encroach upon it, but can only reveal the fact that the disproportion—was there. Therefore there is only one assurance against despair: to undergo the change of eternity by the “shalt” of duty; anyone who has not understood this change is desperate; fortune and prosperity may conceal it; misfortune and adversity, on the contrary, do not, as he thinks, make him desperate, but they reveal the fact that he—was desperate. Insofar as we speak otherwise, it is because we frivolously confuse the highest concepts. That which really makes a man despair is not misfortune, but it is the fact that he lacks the eternal; despair is to lack the eternal; despair consists in not having undergone the change of eternity by duty’s “shalt.” Consequently despair is not the loss of the beloved, that is misfortune, pain, suffering; but despair is the lack of the eternal.

How then is the love enjoined by the commandment assured against despair? Quite simply, through the commandment, through this, “Thou shalt love.” It consists first and foremost in the fact that you must not love in such a way that the loss of the beloved would reveal the fact that you were desperate, that is, that you simply must not love despairingly. Does this mean that it is forbidden to love? By no means; that would indeed be a strange speech if the commandment which says “Thou shalt love,” should by its command forbid one to love. Hence the commandment merely forbids loving in a way which is not commanded; essentially the commandment does not forbid but commands that thou shalt love. Hence the commandment of love does not assure against despair by means of weak, lukewarm grounds of comfort, that one must not take things too seriously, and all that. And truly is such a wretched wisdom, which “has ceased to sorrow,” any less despairing than the

despair of the lover, is it not rather an even worse form of despair! No, the commandment of love forbids despair—by commanding one to love. Who would have the courage to say this except eternity? Who is prepared to speak this “shalt” except eternity who, at the very moment when love would despair over its unhappiness, commands it to love? Where can this commandment arise except in eternity? For when it becomes impossible to possess the beloved in the temporal existence, then eternity says, “Thou shalt love,” that is, eternity saves love from despairing just by making it eternal. Suppose it is death which separates the two—when the one left would sink in despair: where then can he find help? Temporal consolation is an even more distressing kind of despair; but then eternity helps. When it says, “Thou shalt love,” then in saying that it says, “Thy love hath an everlasting validity.” But it does not say this consolingly, for that would not help; it says it commandingly, just because there is something wrong. And when eternity says, “Thou shalt love,” then it assumes the responsibility for guaranteeing that it can be done. Oh, what is all other consolation compared with that of eternity, what is all other deep-felt sorrow against that of eternity! If one would speak more gently and say, “Take comfort,” then the sorrowing would have objections ready; but—moreover, it is not because the eternal will proudly brook no objection—out of solicitude for the sorrowful, it commands, “Thou shalt love.” *

Wonderful consolation! Wonderful compassion! For, humanly speaking, it is indeed the strangest thing, almost like mockery, to say to the despairing that he *ought* to do that which would be his sole wish, but the impossibility of which reduces him to despair. Is there any other proof needed that the commandment of love is of divine origin? If you have tried it, or if you do try it, go to such a sorrowing one at the very moment when the loss of the beloved threatens to overwhelm him, and see then what you can find to say; confess that you wish to console him; the only thing it will not occur to you to say is, “Thou shalt love.” And, on the other hand, see if this does not, as soon as it is said, almost embitter the sorrowing, because it seems the most unsuitable thing to say on this occasion. Oh, but you who had the bitter experience, you who at the hard moment found human consolation empty and annoying—without consolation; you who with terror discovered that not even the admonition of the eternal could keep you from sinking down: you learned to love this “shalt” which saves from despair! What you perhaps have often verified in minor situations, that true edification is, strictly speaking, that which taught you in the most profound sense: that only this “shalt” forever happily saves from despair. Eternally happy—aye, for only that one is saved from despair who is *eternally* saved from despair. The love which underwent the change of eternity by becoming duty, is *

not exempt from unhappiness, but it is saved from despair, in fortune and misfortune, equally saved from despair.

Lo, passion excites, earthly wisdom cools, but neither this heat nor this coolness, nor the blending of the heat and coolness is the pure air of the eternal. There is in this heat something ardent, and in this coolness something sharp, and in the blending of the two something indefinite, or an unconscious deceitfulness, as in the hazardous season of spring. But this "Thou *shalt* love" takes away all the unsoundness and preserves the soundness for eternity. Thus it is everywhere; this "shalt" of eternity is the saving, the purifying, the ennobling. Sit with one who is in deep sorrow; you may soothe for a moment if you have the ability to give expression to the passion of despair as not even the sorrowing is able to do; but it is still false comfort. It may for a moment tempt refreshingly, if you have the wisdom and the experience to afford a temporary outlook where the sorrowing sees none; but it is still false comfort. On the other hand, this "Thou shalt sorrow" is both true and beautiful. I have no right to harden my heart against the pain of life, for I *must* sorrow; but neither have I the right to despair, for I *must* sorrow; and yet neither have I the right to cease to sorrow, for I *must* sorrow. So also with love. You have no right to harden yourself against this emotion, for thou *shalt* love; but neither have you the right to love despairingly for thou *shalt* love; and just as little have you the right to corrupt this feeling in you, for thou *shalt* love. You must preserve the love and you must preserve yourself, and in preserving yourself preserve your love. There where the purely human would rush forth, the commandment retards; there where the purely human would lose courage, the commandment strengthens; there where the purely human would become weary and prudent, the commandment enkindles and gives wisdom. The commandment consumes and burns up the unsoundness in your love, but through the commandment you will again be able to enkindle it, when humanly speaking it would cease. There where you think yourself easily able to advise, there you must take the commandment for counsel; there where you despairingly would direct yourself, there you must take the commandment for your counselor; but there where you do not know how to advise, there will the commandment give counsel, so that all is well.

II

B. THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

IT IS the Christian love which discovers and knows that the neighbor exists, and, what amounts to the same thing, that everyone is a neighbor. If it were not a duty to love, then the concept of neighbor would not exist; but only when one loves one's neighbor, only then is the selfish partiality eradicated, and the equality of the eternal preserved.

The objection is frequently raised against Christianity, although in various ways and moods and with varying passions and purposes, that it supplants earthly love and friendship. Then again, some have wished to defend Christianity, and for this purpose have appealed to its teaching that one must love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. If the dispute is carried on in this way, it becomes fairly indifferent whether one disputes or agrees, inasmuch as a battle in the air and an agreement in the air are equally insignificant. Rather one must see how to make the issue really clear, in order to admit in its defense with all calmness, that Christianity has pushed earthly love and friendship from the throne, the impulsive and the preferential love, the partiality, in order to set spiritual love in its place, the love to one's neighbor, a love which in earnestness and truth and inwardness is more tender than any earthly love—in the union, and more faithfully sincere than the most celebrated friendship—in concord. Rather one must see, to make it really clear, that the praise of earthly love and friendship belongs to paganism, that "the poet" really belongs to paganism, since his task belongs there—in order then by the steadfast spirit of conviction to give Christianity what belongs to Christianity, love for the neighbor, of which love paganism had no conception. Rather one must see how rightly to make the division, in order, if possible, to give the individual occasion to choose, rather than to confuse and jumble, thereby hindering the individual from getting a definite impression of which is which. And, above all, one must have done with defending Christianity rather than consciously or unconsciously wishing to maintain everything—including the non-Christian.

Everyone who considers this matter with earnestness and insight will readily see that the point at issue must be posited thus: shall earthly love and friendship be love's highest expression, or shall this love be set aside? Earthly love and friendship are related to passion; but all passion, whether it attacks or defends itself, fights only in one way: either-or: "Either I exist and am the highest, or I do not exist at all, either all or nothing." The bungler and the confused (whom paganism and the poet are just as much against as is Christianity) advance the

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defense |
idea, when it comes to defense, that Christianity doubtless teaches a higher love, but that it *also* recommends earthly love and friendship. To speak in this way betrays the double-mindedness: that the speaker has neither the soul of a poet nor the spirit of Christianity. Concerning the spiritual relation one cannot—if he wishes to avoid speaking foolishly—talk like a shopkeeper who has a best quality of goods, but also an intermediate quality which he *also* ventures to recommend as very good, as almost equally good. No, if it is certain that Christianity teaches that love to God and the neighbor is the true love, then it is also certain that He who has put down “all high things which exalted themselves against the knowledge of God, and has taken every thought captive in obedience,” has also thrust down earthly love and friendship. Would it not be strange if Christianity were as bungling and confused a teaching as many a defense wishes to make it, very frequently worse than any attack? Would it not be strange that there is nowhere found in the New Testament a single word about love in the sense in which the poet sings it and paganism idolized it? Would it not be strange that nowhere in the New Testament is there found a single word about friendship used in the sense in which the poet celebrates it and paganism exalted it? Or let the poet who recognizes himself as being a poet, go through what the New Testament teaches about earthly love, and he will be brought to the point of despair because he will not find one single word which might inspire him—and if any so-called poet still found a word which he might use, then is this a mendacious use, a dishonest use, because instead of reverencing Christianity, he steals a precious word and perverts its use. Let the poet search through the New Testament to find a word concerning friendship which may please him, and he will search in vain to the point of despair. But let a Christian, who wishes to love his neighbor, seek; truly he will not search in vain, he will find each word stronger and more authoritative than the other, useful to him in enkindling this love and preserving him in this love.

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The poet will seek in vain. But is the poet then not a Christian? We have certainly not said that, nor do we say it; we only say that insofar as he is poet, he is not Christian. Still there must be a distinction made, for there are also godly poets. But these do not sing of earthly love and friendship; their songs are to the glory of God, about faith and hope and love. Those poets do not sing of love in the same sense as the poet sings of earthly love, for the love to one's neighbor is not sung, it is acted. Even if there were nothing else which prevented the poet from celebrating the love for one's neighbor in poetry, this is still sufficient to hinder him, that by the side of every word in the Sacred Book there stands before him in invisible writing a disturbing note, for it says:

"Go thou and do likewise"—does this sound like a poetic appeal, inviting him to sing?

Hence with the religious poet it is an individual matter, but of the worldly poet it holds good that insofar as he is poet, he is not Christian. And yet it is the worldly poets of whom we think when we speak of the poet in general. That the poet lives in Christendom makes no difference. Whether *he* is a Christian is not incumbent on us to decide, but insofar as he is poet he is not Christian. It might certainly seem that since Christianity has now existed so long, it must by now have penetrated every relationship—and all of us. But this is an illusion. And because Christianity has existed so long, that is certainly not saying that we have lived as long, or have so long been Christian. The poet's existence in Christendom and the position which is conceded him (for rudeness and envious assaults upon him are certainly not *Christian* objections or arguments against his existence) are an earnest reminder about how much was received earlier, and about how easily we are tempted to imagine ourselves to be far in advance of ourselves. Alas! for while the Christian preaching is sometimes scarcely listened to, all listen to the poet, admire him, learn from him, are charmed by him. Alas! while one swiftly forgets what the preacher has said, how accurately and for how long a time does not one remember what the poet has said, especially when he has enlisted the aid of an actor! These remarks in no way suggest that the poet should be done away with, perhaps by force; for thereby we should only gain a new illusion. What would it avail to have no poets, if there were still so many in Christendom who were satisfied with the understanding of existence which the poet commands; so many who long for the poet! Nor is it asked of the Christian that in blind and doubtful zeal he should carry it to the point that he could no longer bear to read a poet—any more than it is required of the Christian that he should not eat the food customary for others, or that he should live apart from other men in a separate enclosure. No, but the Christian must understand everything in a different way from the non-Christian; he must understand himself in knowing how to make distinctions. A man would no more be able to live exclusively according to the highest Christian concepts all the time than he would be able to live by eating only at the Lord's table. Therefore, let the poet exist, let the individual poet be admired as he deserves, if he really is a poet, but also let the individual in Christendom prove his Christian conviction by means of this test: how he regards the poet, what he thinks about him, how he reads him, how he admires him. However, there is rarely anything said about such matters in these times.

To many, unfortunately, these reflections will perhaps seem neither sufficiently Christian nor sufficiently earnest, just because they deal with

those things which, it is well to note, occupy men so much six days of the week, and even on the seventh day absorb more hours than do godly matters. However, we trust—both because we have been instructed and trained in Christianity from childhood, and also because in our mature years we dedicated our days and our best efforts to this service, although, as we have repeatedly said, our speech is “without authority”—we trust that we know what should be said in these times and how to say it. We have all been baptized and instructed in Christianity, consequently there is nothing to say about disseminating it. Far be it from us, on the other hand, to judge that anyone who says he is a Christian, is not; hence there is nothing to say about the professing Christian in contradistinction to the non-Christian. On the contrary, it is very profitable and necessary that the individual should carefully and conscientiously give heed to himself, and if possible help others (insofar as one man can help another, for God is the true helper) to a more and more profound understanding of what it means to become a Christian. The word “Christendom” as a general appellation for an entire people is a superscription which may easily say too much, and therefore may easily cause the individual to believe too much about himself. It is customary, at least in other places, to place signposts on the highway to indicate where the road leads. Perhaps at the very moment a man sets out on a journey he sees a signpost that says that this road leads to that distant place which is his own destination: has he therefore reached that place? So is it, too, with this guidepost, Christianity. It indicates the direction, but has one therefore reached the goal, or is one always merely—on the way? Or is it really progressing on the road if, for a single hour once a week, a man walks along this way, while the other six days he lives in absolutely different conceptions, and meanwhile makes no effort himself to understand how this can be consistent?

And is this really earnestness: to keep silent about the true state of the case and the conditions, in order to speak with extreme earnestness about the more earnest matters, which nevertheless might well be omitted in the confusion, whose relation to this earnestness one—from sheer earnestness—does not explain? Who then has the more difficult task, the teacher who lectures on earnestness as something at a meteoric distance from daily affairs, or the disciple who wishes to make an application of this explanation? Is only that a deception: the keeping silent about what is earnest? Is it not an equally dangerous deception to mention it—but under circumstances, and to present it—but in a light totally different from the daily life of actuality? If it is true that the entire worldly life, its splendors, its diversions, its enchantments, can captivate and ensnare a man in so many ways, which then is earnestness: either, out of—sheer earnestness to keep silent in church about worldly matters, or to speak seriously about them in order, if possible, to strengthen men

takes their place is *neither* poetic *nor* Christian. Passion always has this unconditional characteristic, that it excludes the third party, that is, the third party makes for confusion. To love without passion is an impossibility; but the distinction between earthly and Christian love lies therefore in the one possible eternal difference of passion. Any other difference between earthly and Christian love cannot well be imagined. If a man, therefore, were to think that he could at one and the same time understand his life by the aid of the poet and by the help of Christian explanations, were to believe that he could understand these two explanations jointly—and in such a way that they gave meaning to his life—then he is in error. The poetic and the Christian explanations are exact opposites; the poet idolizes earthly affection, and therefore he is absolutely right in saying, since he constantly thinks only of earthly love, that to command one to love is the greatest of follies and the most absurd saying; as Christianity is always thinking only of the Christian love, it is also absolutely right when it pushes earthly love from the throne and sets this “shalt” in its place.

The poet and Christianity present exactly opposing explanations, or more exactly expressed, the poet really explains nothing, for he explains earthly love and friendship—in riddles; he explains earthly love and friendship as riddles, but Christianity explains love eternally. From this again we see that it is an impossibility to live at one time according to both explanations, for the greatest possible contradiction between two explanations is certainly that the one is no explanation, and the other is an explanation. Earthly love and friendship, therefore, as the poet understands them, involve no moral problem. Love and friendship are a matter of chance; it is fortunate, poetically understood (and certainly the poet has an excellent understanding of good fortune), the highest good fortune, to fall in love, to find the one and only beloved; it is good fortune, almost equally as great a good fortune, to find the one and only friend. At most, the moral task lies only in being duly thankful for one's good fortune. On the other hand, the task is never that one *must* find the beloved, or find this friend; this cannot be done, as the poet very well understands. The problem consequently depends on whether fortune will furnish one with a task; but this is precisely the same as saying that morally understood there is no task.

If, on the other hand, one *must* love his neighbor, then the task is the moral task, which is again the source of all tasks. Just because Christian morality is the true morality, it knows how to cut short extensive reflections, to cut off the voluminous preambles, to do away with temporary delays, and to prevent wasting time. The Christian is immediately close to his task because he has it in himself. There is a great dispute in the world as to what is to be called the highest. But

whatever is called so, whatever the demarcation is: it is incredible that there should be so many complications connected with apprehending it.

On the other hand, Christianity at once teaches a man the shortest way to find the supreme good: "Shut thy door and pray to God"—for God is certainly the highest. And if a man will go out into the world, then he may perhaps go far—and go in vain, travel around the world—and in vain, in order to find the beloved or the friend. But Christianity never suffers a man to take even a single step in vain; for the door you closed in order to pray to God, when you open it again and go out, then the first man you meet is your neighbor whom you *must* love. Wonderful!

Perhaps a maiden tries curiously and superstitiously to learn her future fate, to see her future lover; and a fraudulent wisdom makes her imagine that when she has done something so and so, then she will know him because he will be the first one she will meet on such and such a day. I wonder if it would also be so difficult to get to see one's neighbor—if one did not prevent himself from seeing him; for Christianity has made it eternally impossible to be mistaken about him; there is not in the whole world any single man who is so certainly and so easily recognizable as the neighbor. You can never confuse him with any other man, for all men are the neighbor. If you confuse another man with your neighbor, then in the last analysis there is no mistake, for the other man is also your neighbor. It is your fault if you will not understand who your neighbor is. If under cover of darkness you save a man's life, believing that you are saving your friend's life—but instead it turned out to be your neighbor, then this is not a fault; alas, on the other hand, it becomes precisely a fault if you were only willing to save your friend. If your friend complains over the fact that you, as he believes, through an error did for your neighbor what he thought you would do only for him, then rest assured it is your friend who is wrong.

The point at issue between the poet and Christianity can be quite accurately defined in this way: *Earthly love and friendship are partiality and the passion of partiality*; Christian love is self-denying love, therefore it vouches for this "shalt." To exhaust these passions is bewildering. But the extreme passionate limits of partiality lie in exclusiveness, in loving only one; the extreme limits of self-denial lie in self-sacrifice, in not excluding a single one.

In other times when a man had made an earnest effort to understand Christianity, he believed that Christianity had something against earthly love because it is based on impulse; he believed that Christianity which, as spirit, has set dissension between flesh and spirit, hated earthly love as being sensual. But this was a misunderstanding, an overstraining of

the spiritual. In addition, it can easily be shown that Christianity is very far from irrationally wishing to excite the sensual in a man by teaching him eccentricity; does not Paul say that it is better to marry than to burn! No, just because Christianity is in truth spirit, therefore it understands by the sensual something different from what one naturally calls the sensual; and just as little as it has wished to forbid men to eat and drink, just so little has it taken offense at a natural impulse, which a man certainly did not give himself. By the sensual Christianity means the carnal, the selfish; there can be no imaginable dispute between spirit and flesh unless there is a rebellious spirit on the part of the flesh, with which the spirit then strives; thus there can be no imaginable conflict between the spirit and a stone, or between the spirit and a tree. Consequently the sensual is selfishness. And it is just because of this that Christianity harbors a suspicion about earthly love and friendship, because partiality in passion, or passionate partiality, is really another form of selfishness.

Lo, this too is something paganism never dreamed of. Because paganism has never had any idea of self-denying love for the neighbor whom one "must" love, therefore it classified it thus: selfishness is abominable because it is selfishness; but love and friendship, which are passionate partiality, are love. But Christianity, which has made manifest what love is, classifies it in a different way: selfishness and passionate partiality are essentially one; but love to the neighbor is love. "To love the beloved," says Christianity, "is that to love?" And it adds, "Do not even the heathen the same?" "To love one's friend, is that to love?" says Christianity. "Do not even the heathen the same?" If therefore someone were to believe that the distinction between heathendom and Christianity lies in the fact that the beloved and the friend in Christianity are loved with a wholly different loyalty and tenderness than in heathendom, then this is a misunderstanding. Does not paganism also show examples of love and friendship so perfect that the apprentice poet goes back to them? But no one in heathendom loved his neighbor. No one suspected that he existed. What heathendom, then, called love, as distinguished from selfishness, was partiality. But a passionate partiality is essentially another form of selfishness; so here again one sees the truth of the saying of the venerable Fathers: "that the virtues of heathendom are shining vices."

That passionate partiality is another form of selfishness will now be demonstrated, together with its converse, that self-denying love loves the neighbor as one *should* love. As selfishly as self-love closes about this only "self," whereby it becomes selfishness, equally selfishly the passionate partiality of love closes about this only beloved, and the passionate partiality of friendship about this one friend. The beloved and

the friend are therefore called, remarkably and profoundly enough, the other self, the other I—for the neighbor is the other you, or, to be quite accurate, the third person in the equilateral. The other self, the other I. But wherein lies the selfishness? It lies in the I, in the self. Would not then selfishness also stick at loving the other I, the other self? Truly one does not need to be any great judge of character in order, by the help of this clue, to make discoveries serious for others and humiliating to one's self, about earthly love and friendship. The fire which exists in selfishness is spontaneous, the I ignites itself by itself; but in earthly love and friendship, poetically understood, there is also spontaneous ignition. True enough, as we say, it is only at times, and then morbidly, that jealousy *shows* itself; but from that it by no means follows that it is not at bottom always *present* in earthly love and friendship. Test it: introduce between the lover and the beloved the neighbor as the intermediate person one must love: interpose the neighbor between friend and friend as the intermediate person that one must love: and you will instantly see the jealousy. But nevertheless the concept of neighbor is precisely the middle term of self-abnegation, which enters between the I and I of selfishness, but also between the I and the other I of earthly love and friendship. That it is selfishness when a faithless lover wishes to get rid of the beloved, wishes to leave a friend in the lurch, paganism also realized, and the poet sees it. But only Christianity sees that the devotion with which the lover gives himself up to this one, with which, moreover, he clings to him, is selfishness. But can *devotion* and *limitless submission* still be *selfishness*? Surely yes, when the devotion is to the other I, the other self.

Let a poet describe how earthly love must exist in a man so that he can call it love; he will mention much which we do not stop for here, but then he will add: "and then there must be admiration, the lover must admire the beloved." The neighbor, on the contrary, is never mentioned as an object of admiration; Christianity has never taught that one should admire the neighbor—but one must love him. Hence there must be admiration in earthly love, and the stronger, the more intense the admiration is, the better, says the poet. Now to admire another man is certainly not selfishness. But to be loved by the only one admired, would not this relationship selfishly come back to the I who loves—his other I? And so too with friendship. To admire another man is certainly not selfishness, but to be the only friend of this only admired friend—would not this relationship in a serious way revert to the I from which it started? Is this not plainly the danger of selfishness, that when one has but a single object of admiration, that then the one admired reciprocally makes the admirer the sole object of his love or of his friendship?

To love the neighbor, on the contrary, is self-denying love and drives out all partiality, just as it drives out all selfishness—otherwise the self-abnegation would also make distinctions and feel partiality for partiality. Even if passionate partiality had no other selfishness in it, it still has this, that there is, consciously or unconsciously, willfulness in it, unconsciously insofar as it is subject to natural laws, consciously insofar as it unrestrainedly abandons itself to and assents to the power of this law. However secret, however unconscious the self-will is in its passionate devotion to its "sole object," this arbitrariness is everywhere manifest. That sole object was not found through obedience to that royal law, "Thou shalt love," but through choosing, moreover by unconditionally choosing, that one single individual—for Christian love, too, has but one single object, the neighbor, but the concept of neighbor is as far as possible removed from being one single man, infinitely far from that, for the neighbor is all men. When the lover or the friend, as the poet delights to hear, can love only this one man in the whole world, then there is in this prodigious devotion a prodigious willfulness, and in this impetuous, boundless devotion, which is really devotion to himself, the lover is really selfish. Self-abnegation wishes to root out this selfishness, this willfulness, through the "thou shalt" of eternity. And the self-abnegation which in judgment enters in to test the selfishness is two-edged, so that it cuts equally both ways. We know very well that there is a selfishness which one may call faithless selfishness, but we know too equally well that there is a selfishness which may be called devoted selfishness. The task of self-abnegation is therefore twofold: to distinguish between these two forms. As regards the faithless selfishness which wishes to evade, the task is: sacrifice yourself; with respect to the devoted selfishness, the task is: renounce this sacrifice. And that which pleases the poet immeasurably, that the lover should say: "I cannot love anyone else, I cannot get along without love, I cannot give up this love, it would be my death, I should die of love," does not please the self-abnegation at all; it simply cannot bear to have such devotion honored by the name of love, since it is selfishness. Self-abnegation first passes its judgment, and then sets the task: love thy neighbor, him thou *shalt* love.

Everywhere where Christianity exists there is also self-abnegation, which is Christianity's essential form. In order to live as a Christian, one must first and foremost become sober; but self-abnegation is exactly the transition through which a man, in the meaning of the eternal, becomes sober. On the other hand, wherever Christianity does not exist, the intoxication of self-esteem reaches its maximum, and this intoxicated exaltation is what is admired. But earthly love and friendship are the highest expression of self-esteem; they are the I intoxicated in the

other I. The more closely the two I's cling together to form one I, the more this united self selfishly excludes all others. At the supreme apex of earthly love and friendship the two actually become one self, one I. This is explicable only because partiality contains a natural force (impulse—inclination) and a selfishness which can selfishly unite the two in a new selfish self.

Spiritual love, on the contrary, takes away from myself all natural impulses and all selfishness, and therefore love for my neighbor cannot make me into one with my neighbor in a united self. Love for the neighbor is love between two beings, each eternally determined as spirit. Love to the neighbor is spiritual love, but two spirits can never become one self in a selfish sense. In earthly love and friendship the two love each other by virtue of their dissimilarities, or by virtue of their similarities which underlie the differences (as when two friends love each other because of a similarity in morals, character, occupations, training and so on, consequently because of the similarity by which they differ from other men, or by which they resemble each other in being different from other men), therefore the two can in a selfish sense become one self; neither of them is yet himself the spiritual determination of "self," neither of them has as yet learned to love himself in the Christian sense of the word. In earthly love the ego is sensually-psychically-spiritually determined, the beloved a sensual-psychical-spiritual determination; in friendship the ego is psycho-spiritually defined, the friend a psycho-spiritual determination. Only in love to one's neighbor is the self which loves, purely spiritually defined as spirit, and the neighbor a purely spiritual qualification. Therefore what we said at the beginning of this discourse by no means applies to earthly love and friendship, that only one man is needed who is recognized as neighbor, in order to cure a man of selfishness, if in this one man he loves his neighbor. For in the beloved and the friend the neighbor is not loved, but the other I, or the first I, once more, even better. It is frequently as if a man, although selfishness is predominant, does not have the strength to be selfish alone, so that his selfishness does not really appear until his other ego is found, and the two egos in this union find strength for the selfish self-esteem.

If anyone thinks that a man by falling in love or by having found a friend, has learned to know the Christian love, then he is seriously mistaken. No, if anyone is in love and in such a way that the poet would say about him that "he really is in love," then the commandment of love may be changed a little when it is said to him, and yet say the same thing. The commandment of love may say to him: "Love your neighbor as you love your sweetheart." And yet, since he does not love his sweetheart "as himself," what does the commandment which speaks about

the neighbor command? Certainly he loves, but the beloved he loves "as himself" is not the neighbor, the beloved is the other I. Whether we are speaking about the first I or about the other I, we do not thereby come a step nearer to the neighbor; for the neighbor is the first you. In its strictest sense selfishness at bottom loves the other I, for the other I is himself. And yet this is certainly selfishness. But in the same sense it is selfishness to love the other I, who is the beloved or the friend. And as selfishness in the strictest sense has been described as self-worship, so earthly love and friendship (as the poet understands them, and on his understanding this love stands or falls) are idolatry. For ultimately love to God is the decisive thing; from it stems love to the neighbor, but paganism never suspected this. They left God out; they made earthly love and friendship into love, and abominated selfishness. But the Christian commandment of love commands men to love God above all else, and next to love the neighbor. In earthly love and friendship partiality is the middle term. In love to the neighbor, God is the middle term; if you love God above all else, then you also love your neighbor and in your neighbor every man. Only by loving God above all else can one love his neighbor in the other man. The other man, this is the neighbor who is the other man in the sense that the other man is every other man. Consequently, thus understood, the discourse was right when in the beginning it said that if a man loves his neighbor in one single other man, then he loves all men.

Love to the neighbor is therefore the eternal equality in loving, but the eternal equality is the opposite of partiality. This needs no extensive discussion. Equality precisely consists in not making distinctions, and eternal equality is unconditionally not to make the least distinction, unqualifiedly not to make the least distinction; partiality, on the other hand, consists in making a distinction, a passionate distinction, in making an unlimited distinction.

But has not Christianity then, when by its "Thou shalt love" it pushed earthly love and friendship from the throne, set something far higher in their place? Something far higher—however, let us speak with caution, the caution of orthodoxy. People have confused Christianity in many ways, but among others also, in that by calling it the highest, the most profound, they made it appear that the purely human is related to the Christian as the high or the higher is to the most high and to the supreme. Alas, but this is a deceptive way of speaking which falsely and indecently allows Christianity officiously to wish to ingratiate itself with human inquisitiveness or curiosity. Is there really anything of which humanity as such, anything of which the natural man is more desirous than of the highest! If but a newsmonger trumpets that his most recent news is of the highest importance, then he succeeds

famously in attracting those worldly followers who from time immemorial have had an indescribable predilection for and have felt a deep need of—being deceived. No, the Christian is certainly the highest and the supreme category, but it is well to note too that to the natural man it is an offense. He who in qualifying the Christian as the highest category, omits the intermediate qualification of offense, sins against it; he perpetrates an audacity more abominable even than if a modest wife were to array herself like a ballet dancer; even more terrible than if that austere judge, John the Baptist, were to dress like a dandy. The Christian category is in itself too heavy, too serious in its movements to whisk about like a dancer in the triviality of such easygoing speeches about the higher, the highest, the all-highest. The Christian Way is the way of offense. This is not to say that the approach to the Christian Way should be by giving offense: this would certainly hinder one self in another way from apprehending Christianity; but offense guards the approach to the Christian way. Blessed is he who is not offended by it.

Now also as to this command about loving the neighbor. Only admit, or if it is embarrassing to you to speak in this way, then I shall admit, that many times it has offended me, and that I am still very far from imagining that I have fulfilled this commandment, which to flesh and blood is an offense, and to wisdom foolishness. If you, my hearer, are perhaps what we call an educated man, well, I too am educated. But if I think by the help of "education" to come nearer this highest, then I am greatly in error. And the error lies just here; for we all wish for education, and education constantly has "the highest" on its lips; moreover, no bird that has learned one single word repeats this word more incessantly, and no crow repeats its own name more uninterruptedly, than the educated constantly harp on "the highest." But the Christian "highest" is by no means the "highest" of the educated, and the Christian "highest" disciplines precisely through the repulsion of offense. You will readily see this; for truly, has your education, or do you believe that any man's enthusiasm for an education, has taught him to love his neighbor? Alas, has not education and the zeal for acquiring it rather developed a new kind of difference, the difference between the educated and the uneducated? Only listen to what is said among the educated about earthly love and friendship, what equality in education a friend must have, how a girl must be educated and just in what way. Read the poets who scarcely know how to preserve their independence as over against the powerful dominance of the educated classes; scarcely dare to believe in the power of love to break the chain of distinctions—does it seem to you that this speech, this poem, or that a life which is consistent with this speech and this poem, bring a man any nearer to loving his neighbor? Lo, here again the signs of the offense stand out.

II

C. THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

SO then go out and practice it; forget the diversities and their like, so that you can love your neighbor. Do away with the distinctions of partiality, so that you can love your neighbor. This will not lead you to cease to love the beloved, oh, far from it! For in that case, the word "neighbor" would be the greatest deception ever invented, if, in order to love your neighbor, you must start by giving up your love for those for whom you feel affection. What is more, it would also be a contradiction, for since the concept "neighbor" embraces all men, certainly no one can be excluded—shall we say, least of all the beloved? No, for that is the language of partiality. Consequently if it is only partiality which must be taken away—and this does not also in turn apply to the neighbor, then you would love your neighbor with an extravagant partiality in contrast to the beloved.

No, as one says to the solitary, "Take care that you do not become ensnared in selfishness," so we may say to the two lovers: "Take care that your love does not ensnare you in selfishness." For the more decisively and exclusively partiality encloses one single man, the further he is from loving his neighbor. You, husband, do not subject your wife to the temptation arising from her love for you, of forgetting to love her neighbor; you, wife, do not subject your husband to this temptation! The lovers certainly believe that in their earthly love they have the highest possible. Oh, but it is not so, for in it they have not yet secured the eternal through the eternal.

It is true the poet promises the lovers immortality, if they are truly lovers; but who is the poet who gives them this promise? One who cannot even vouch for himself. The "royal law," on the contrary, the commandment of love, promises life, eternal life, and this commandment simply says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor." And as this commandment wishes to teach every man how he ought to love himself, so it also wishes to teach love and friendship the right kind of love: preserve in loving yourself your love for your neighbor; preserve in your earthly love and friendship your love for your neighbor. This idea will perhaps repel you—then you will know that the signs of offense are always present to the Christian. But, nevertheless, believe this; believe that the Teacher who would not quench any smoking flax, will not extinguish any noble fire within a man; believe that He who was love, simply wishes to teach every man to love; believe that if all the poets united in one song in praise of earthly love and friendship, all they had to say would be as nothing in comparison with the commandment, "Thou

shalt love, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself!" Do not cease to believe because the commandment almost offends you, because the discourse does not sound as flattering as that of the poets who by their songs insinuate themselves into your happiness, but sounds repulsive and terrifying, as if it would snatch you out of your beloved retreat of partiality—do not therefore cease to believe it; consider that just because the commandment is thus and the discourse thus, just because of this, its object can be the object of faith! Do not indulge yourself in the conceit that you might be able to bargain, that by loving some men, friends and relatives, you would be loving your neighbor—for this would be giving up the poetic without apprehending the Christian, and it was for the sake of preventing this bargaining that the discourse attempted to place you between the pride of the poet, who disdains all bargaining, and the divine majesty of the royal law, which makes all bargaining an offense. No, love your beloved faithfully and tenderly, but let the love for your neighbor be the more sacred in the covenant of your union with God! Love your friend sincerely and devotedly, but let your love for your neighbor be what you learn from each other in the confidence of friendship with God! Behold, death levels all differences, but partiality always retains the difference, yet the way to life and to the eternal is through death, and through the leveling of differences: therefore only the love to the neighbor truly leads to life.

As the joyous message of Christianity is contained in the teaching about mankind's kinship with God, so is its problem man's likeness to God. But God is love, therefore we can resemble God only in loving, as we also, according to the Apostle's word, can only be "God's fellow-laborers in—love." Just because you love your beloved, you do not resemble God, for with God there is no partiality, as you many times in your humility, but also many times in your self-satisfaction, have considered. Insofar as you love your friend you do not resemble God, for before God there is no difference. But when you love your neighbor, then you resemble God.

So, then, go out and act accordingly; forget the differences so that you can love your neighbor. Alas, perhaps it is not even necessary to say this to you, perhaps you found no one in the world to love, no friend on the way, so that your way lay in solitude. Or perhaps God took from your side and gave you a beloved, but death took and took her from your side; he took again and took your friend, but gave you no one in his place, so that now you walk alone, so that you have no beloved one to protect your weak side and no friend at your right hand. Or perhaps life separated you even if you continued unchanged—in the loneliness of separation. Perhaps change separated you, so that you

had and has himself forfeited! That is why the happiness of eternity can only be preached to him as consolation. As the human eye cannot stand looking at the rays of the sun except through a dark glass, so a man cannot endure the joy of eternity except through the dimness which comes from its being preached as consolation.

Consequently whatever your fortune was in love or friendship, whatever your need was, whatever your loss, whatever the despondency of your life in your confidence in the poet: the highest still remains—love your neighbor! Him you can easily find, that is certain; you can unconditionally always find him, that is certain; you can never lose him. For the beloved can behave toward you in such a way that he is lost, and you can lose a friend; but however your neighbor treats you, you can never lose him. It is true that you may continue to love the beloved and the friend, however they treat you, but you cannot continue truly to call them the beloved and the friend when they, so much the worse, have in truth changed. On the other hand, no change can take your neighbor from you, for it is not the neighbor who holds you fast, but it is your love which holds the neighbor fast; if your love for your neighbor remains unchanged, then the neighbor also remains unchanged just by the fact of existing. And death cannot deprive you of your neighbor, for if it takes one, then life at once gives you another. Death can deprive you of a friend, because in loving your friend you are really united with the friend; but in loving your neighbor you are united with God, and therefore death cannot deprive you of your neighbor. If you have therefore lost everything in love and friendship, if you have never enjoyed any of this happiness: you still have the best left in loving your neighbor.

Love to the neighbor has, namely, the perfections of eternity. And is it really a perfection in love to have as its object the superior, the extraordinary, the unique? I thought that would be a perfection in the object, and this perfection of the object like a subtle misgiving against the perfection of love. Does it indicate a superior quality in your love if it can love *only* the extraordinary, the rare? I should think it would be an advantage to the extraordinary and the rare that it is extraordinary and rare, but not to love. And are you not also of the same opinion? For have you never thought about God's love? If it were to love's advantage to love the extraordinary, then, if I dare say so, God would be embarrassed, for the extraordinary simply does not exist for Him. The advantage of being able to love *only* the extraordinary is hence rather an accusation, not against the extraordinary, or against love, but against the love which can love *only* the extraordinary. Or is it an advantage to a man's sensitive well-being that he can feel well *only* in one single place in the whole world, surrounded by every favorable circum-

stance? If you *see* a man who has thus arranged his life, what is it then you praise? Of course, the convenience of his arrangements. But have you never noticed that it is actually true that every word you utter in your panegyric over this magnificence really sounds like ridicule of the poor man who can live *only* in this magnificent environment?

Consequently the perfection of its object is not the perfection of love. And just because the neighbor has none of those perfections which the beloved, the friend, the admired, the cultured, the rare, the extraordinary man has to so high a degree, just for that reason the love for the neighbor has all those perfections which the love for the beloved, the friend, the cultured, the admired, the rare, the extraordinary man, does not have. Let the world dispute as much as it will about which object of love is the most perfect: there can never be any dispute about the fact that love to the neighbor is the most perfect love. And therefore all other love has the imperfection that concerning it there are two questions and consequently some ambiguity: there is first the question about the object and then about the love, or both questions are about the object and the love. But as to love for one's neighbor, there is only one question, that about love, and there is only the single answer of eternity: this is love. For this love to one's neighbor is not like the relation of one kind of love to other kinds of love. Earthly love is qualified by its object, friendship is qualified by its object, love to one's neighbor alone is qualified by love. When the neighbor is every man, unconditionally every man, then are all the distinctions taken away from the object and consequently this love is recognizable by the fact that its object is without any closer qualifications of difference, that is to say, that this love is recognizable only by love. Is not this the highest perfection? For insofar as love can and may be recognizable in some other way, then this other way, by that very fact, makes this love suspect, in that it is not comprehensive enough, and hence not in an eternal sense infinite; this other love is a love which is even unconsciously predisposed to morbidity. In this suspicion, therefore, there dwells concealed the apprehension which makes love and friendship dependent on their object, the apprehension which is able to inflame jealousy, the apprehension which can drive one to despair. But love for one's neighbor is without suspicion in the relationship, and therefore cannot become suspiciousness in the lover. Nevertheless, this love is not proudly independent of its object, its equality does not arise from the fact that love proudly withdraws into itself, indifferent to its object; no, the equality arises from the fact that love humbly turns out toward its object, embracing everyone, and yet loving each one individually, but no one in particular.

Let us consider here what we developed in the preceding chapter,

that love in a man is a necessity to him, is an expression of his wealth. Hence the deeper this need is, the greater his wealth; if the need is infinite, then, too, is his wealth. When a man's need for love is satisfied with loving only one, then we must nevertheless, although admitting that this need is wealth, say concerning it, that he really needs that man. On the other hand, when a man's need of love consists in loving every-one, then it is a need, and it is so powerful that it is almost as if it must be able to produce its own object. In the first case the emphasis lies on the particular object of love, in the second case on the essentiality of the need, and only in the latter sense is the need an expression of wealth; and only in the latter case are the need and the object in an infinite sense related to one another on equal terms, for to the first man every man is the neighbor, or there is in a *special* sense no object, while in an infinite sense every man is the object. If one feels a need to talk with a certain particular man, then he really needs this man; but if his need for talking is so great that he must talk even if he is placed on a desert isle or in solitary confinement; if his need is so great that any man is the one he wishes to talk to, then his need is wealth. And he who loves his neighbor, his love is a need, the deepest need; he does not need men in order to have some one to love him; but he needs to love men. Still there is no pride or arrogance in this wealth, for God is the middle term, and the "shalt" of eternity binds and directs this powerful need so that it does not go astray and become pride. But there are no limitations in the object, for the neighbor is all men, unconditionally every man.

The man who truly loves his neighbor, therefore loves also his enemy. This distinction, "friend or enemy," is a difference in the object of love, but love for one's neighbor truly has an object which is without discrimination; the neighbor is the absolutely indistinguishable difference between man and man, or it is the eternal resemblance before God—and the enemy also has this resemblance. We think that it is impossible for a man to love his enemy, alas! for enemies can hardly bear to look at each other. Oh, well, then close your eyes—then the enemy absolutely resembles your neighbor; close your eyes and remember the commandment that *thou shalt love*, then you love—your enemy? No, then you love your neighbor, for you do not see that he is your enemy. That is, if you close your eyes, then you do not see the earthly difference; but enmity is also one of the earthly differences. And when you close your eyes, then your mind is not distracted and diverted at the very moment when you should listen to the word of the commandment. Then when your mind is not distracted and diverted by looking at the object of your love and at the difference in the object, then you become merely an ear for hearing the word of the commandment which said to you,

and to you alone, that "thou" shalt love thy neighbor. Lo, then are you on the way of perfection toward loving your neighbor, when your eye is closed and you are become only an ear for hearing the commandment.

And it is true (as we have already explained where we showed that the idea of neighbor is a purely spiritual determination) that one sees the neighbor only with the eye closed, or by looking *away from* the differences. The sensual eye always looks *at* the differences. Therefore earthly prudence always cries early and late: "Look out, whom you love!" Alas, if one truly loves his neighbor, then it is better not to look out for everything; for this prudence, when it comes to testing the object, will actually bring it about so that you never get to see your neighbor because he is every man, any man taken quite blindly. The poet despises this seeing blindness of prudence which teaches that one should take care as to whom one loves; the poet teaches that love is blind; according to the poet, the lover will find his object in a mysterious, inexplicable manner, or fall in love and so become—blind from love, blind to every fault, every imperfection in the beloved, blind to everything except this beloved—but yet not blind to the fact that this is the only beloved in the whole world. When this is so, then certainly earthly love makes a man blind, but it also makes him very particular not to confuse any other man with this one beloved; hence it makes him blind as regards the beloved, by teaching him to make a tremendous distinction between this one beloved and all other men. But love for one's neighbor makes a man blind in the deepest and noblest and most blessed sense, so that he blindly loves every man as the lover loves the beloved.

Love for the neighbor has the perfections of eternity—which is *perhaps the reason why it sometimes seems to fit in so little with the relations of the earthly life, with the temporal difference of worldliness; that it is so easily misunderstood and subjected to hate; that in any case it is a very unthankful task to love one's neighbor.*

Even the one who is not ordinarily inclined to praise God and Christianity, nevertheless does so when he shudderingly contemplates the terrifying facts of how in paganism the discriminations of the earthly life, or how the caste system, inhumanly separate man from man; how this ungodly wickedness inhumanly teaches one man to disavow kinship with another; teaches him presumptuously and madly to say about another man that he does not exist, that he is "not born." Then even that man praises Christianity which has saved men from this evil by deeply and forever unforgettably emphasizing the kinship between man and man, because the kinship is assured by every individual's equal kinship with and his relation to God in Christ; because the Christian teaching applies equally to every individual, and teaches him that God has created him, and that Christ has redeemed him; because that Christian teaching

calls every man aside and says to him, "Close your door and pray to God, then you have the highest a man can have; love your Saviour, then you have everything both in life and death; and disregard the differences, they neither add to nor subtract from."

And I wonder if the one who from the mountain peak sees the clouds below him, I wonder if he is disturbed by this sight; I wonder if he is disturbed by the thunder storm that rages in the region down below him. And so high has Christianity set every man, unconditionally every man—for before Christ, as little as before the face of God, there is no number, no multitude, the innumerable are numbered to Him, the multitude is made up of individuals; so high has Christianity set every man, so that he may not harm his soul by becoming arrogant, or by groaning over the discriminations of the earthly life. For Christianity has not *taken away the differences*, any more than Christ Himself would, or would ask God to *take the disciples out of the world*—and this amounts to one and the same thing. There has never lived in Christendom, any more than in heathendom, any man who has not been arrayed in or clothed upon with the differences of the earthly life. As little as the Christian lives or can live without a physical body, just as little can he live outside the differences of the earthly life to which every individual by birth, by condition, by circumstances, by education and so on, specially belongs—none of us is the pure man. Christianity is too earnest to talk nonsense about pure man, it only wishes to make all men pure. Christianity is not a fairy tale, although the happiness it promises is more glorious than that in any fairy tale; nor is it an ingenious chimera which is intended to be difficult to understand, and which also requires one single condition, an idle head and an empty brain.

Consequently Christianity has a horror of that heathendom, and has once for all overridden it; but it has not taken away the differences in the earthly life. These must continue as long as the temporal existence continues, and must continue to tempt every man who comes into the world. For by being a Christian he is not exempt from the differences, but by triumphing over the temptation of the differences, he becomes Christian. In the so-called Christendom, therefore, the earthly difference is always a temptation. Alas! perhaps it does more than tempt, so that one man becomes arrogant, the other defiantly envious. Both cases are rebellion, rebellion against the Christian. Far be it from us, in truth, to confirm anyone in the presumptuous error of assuming that only the powerful and the distinguished are guilty of this; for if the poor and the impotent man merely defiantly aspires to the advantages denied him in the earthly life, instead of humbly aspiring to the blessed equality of the Christian life, then he also harms his own soul. Christianity is not

blind, nor is it one-sided; with the calm of eternity it looks dispassionately at all the differences of the earthly life, but it does not contentiously take sides; it sees, and certainly with sadness, that earthly busyness and the false prophets of worldliness will conjure up this appearance of equality in the name of Christianity—as if it were only the powerful who are tempted by worldly differences, as if the poor would be justified in doing everything to gain equality—not merely by becoming a Christian in deed and in truth. I wonder if by that way one could come any nearer to the Christian likeness and the Christian equality.

Christianity will not take the difference away, either the difference of rank or the difference of insignificance; but on the other hand, there is no temporal difference, not the most favorable and acceptable in the eyes of the world, with which Christianity will side in partiality. Whether the temporal difference, in which a man offends by clinging fast to it in worldliness, is in the eyes of the world revolting and shocking, or innocent and honorable, simply does not interest Christianity, which makes no worldly distinctions, which does not look at that thing by which a man harms his soul, but only at the fact that he does injure his soul—is that an insignificance? Perhaps; but the fact that he does injure his soul is certainly not insignificant. Between the extremes of distinction and insignificance there lie a great many closer qualifications of worldly differences; but there are none of these closer and therefore less obvious differences of which Christianity makes an exception. The worldly differences are like a huge net in which the temporal existence is caught; the meshes in this net are of varying sizes, one man seems more bound and snared in the net of existence than another; but all these differences, the difference between difference and difference, the comparative difference, have no interest for Christianity, not the least; such an occupation and concern remains a worldly one.

Christianity and worldliness can never come to understand each other, even if for a moment—to a lesser scrupulousness, they may delusively seem to. To secure an equal place in the world with other men, to make temporal conditions as similar as possible for all men, those are certainly things that worldliness considers of extreme importance. But even in this respect, what we may venture to call the well-intentioned worldly effort never completely understands Christianity. The well-intentioned worldliness holds itself piously—if one wishes to call it that—convinced that there must be one temporal condition, one earthly difference—which one may find by the help of calculations and surveys, or in any other preferred manner—where there is equality. If this condition were to become the only one for all men, then equality would be brought about. But partly, this cannot be done, and partly, this common equality of all

arising from having the same temporal differences, is not at all Christian equality; worldly equality, even if it were possible, is not Christian equality. And to bring about a perfect worldly equality is an impossibility. The well-intentioned worldliness itself really admits it; it rejoices when it succeeds in making temporal conditions more and more equal, but it recognizes that its attempt is a pious wish, that it has set itself a tremendous task, that the chances of success are remote—if it rightly understood itself it would see that this could never be attained in the temporal existence; that even if this endeavor were carried on for a thousand years, it would never attain its goal. Christianity, on the contrary, by the help of the short cut of eternity, is immediately at the goal: it allows all the differences to continue, but it teaches the equality of eternity. It teaches everyone to *rise above* the earthly distinctions. Pay close attention to how equitably it speaks; it does not say that it is the humble who should lift himself up, while the mighty man should perhaps descend from his exalted position; ah, no, such a speech is not equitable. And the equality which is brought about by the mighty descending and the humble ascending, is not Christian equality, it is worldly equality. No, whether it was the one who stood highest, even if it were the king, he must *lift himself above* the differences of high place, and the beggar must *lift himself above* the difference of insignificance. Christianity always allows the differences of the earthly life to persist, but this equality in rising above earthly differences is implicit in the commandment of love, in the loving one's neighbor.

Because this is so, because the humble as completely as the distinguished and powerful, because every man in his own particular manner, may lose his soul by not being willing to rise above earthly differences in the Christian way, and, alas, because it happens in both and in the most diversified ways: therefore it happens that wishing to love the neighbor is frequently exposed to a double, moreover, a multiple danger. Everyone who has despairingly clung to one or another of life's earthly discriminations, so that his life is centered in it and not in God, he also demands that everyone who belongs in this same category, should ally with him—not in the good (for the good forms no union, unites neither two nor hundreds, nor all men together), but in an unholy union against the universal-human. The desperate call it treachery to wish to have fellowship with others, with all men. On the other side, those other men are again differentiated by other differences of the temporal existence, and then perhaps misunderstand it if some who do not belong to their class wish to unite with them. For as regarding the differences of the earthly life, there is strangely enough, due to misunderstanding, both strife and unity at the same time; one man wishes to do away with one difference, but he wishes to have another in its place. The difference

can, as the word says, indicate the great difference, the supreme difference; but everyone who contends against discrimination in such a way that he wishes to abolish one definite discrimination in order to substitute another, he indeed fights to maintain discriminations. Whoever, then, wishes to love his neighbor, consequently does not concern himself in abolishing this or that discrimination, or, from a worldly point of view, in doing away with all of them, but is devoutly concerned in interpenetrating his own difference with the saving thought of Christian equality: he easily becomes as one who does not fit into the earthly life, not even into the so-called Christendom; he easily becomes exposed to attack from all directions; he becomes like a lost sheep among ravening wolves. Everywhere he turns he meets natural differences (for as was said, no man is pure man, but the Christian rises above earthly differences); and those worldly ones who have clung fast to temporal differences, any of them would be like those who are ravening wolves.

Let us take some examples from the differences of the earthly life, in order to make the matter clear, and let us proceed very carefully. And may you only have the patience to read, as I devote my time and industry to writing; for since being an author is my sole occupation and my sole task, I both can and am in duty bound to employ a precise, a petty, if you will, but certainly also a rewarding carefulness which others are not able to, since in addition to being authors, they must also use their possibly longer day, their possibly richer gifts, their possibly greater skill in other ways.

It is true that the time is past when only the powerful and the distinguished were men, the others thralls and slaves. This is due to Christianity. But this does not imply that the powerful and the distinguished can no longer become a snare to a man, if he looks too long at these differences and harms his soul, forgetting what it means to love his neighbor. If this should take place, it must certainly happen in a more hidden and secret way than before, but at bottom it remains the same. Whether a man openly, enjoying his arrogance and his pride, indicates to other men that they do not exist for him, and desires for sustaining his arrogance that they should feel it when he demands the expression of slavish submission from them—or whether cunningly and secretly by avoiding every contact with them (possibly also for fear lest the manifestation of his arrogance might arouse them and become dangerous to him), he shows that they do not exist for him: at bottom these are one and the same thing. The inhuman and the un-Christlike is not determined by the way in which it is manifested, but by a man's wishing to disavow his kinship with all men, with every man unconditionally. Alas, alas, to keep one's self unspotted from the world is the problem and teaching of Christianity—God grant that we may all accomplish it! But to

clinging in worldliness to this inhumanity, as if it were the most glorious of all differences, just that is defilement. For it is not the rough labor that defiles—if it is performed in purity of heart; and it is not humble circumstances which defile—if you reverently take pride in living quietly; but silk and ermine can defile, if they cause a man to injure his soul. It is defilement if the humble so shrinks from his misery that he does not have the courage to wish to be edified by the Christian teaching; but it is also defilement when the distinguished man so swaddles himself in his distinction that he shrinks from being edified by the Christian teaching. And it is also defilement if one whose distinction consists in being as most people are, never overcomes this difference in Christian elevation.

So this distinguished depravity wishes to teach the distinguished man that he exists only for the distinguished; that he must live solely in their restricted circle, that he must not exist for other men, just as these must not exist for him. But take care, it says, he must know how to do this as easily and adroitly as possible, so that it may not provoke men, that is to say, the secret and the art consist precisely in keeping this secret to himself. The avoiding of contact with others must not seem to be intended, nor must it be done in an obvious way, which would attract attention; no, it must be done evasively, and consequently as cautiously as possible, in order to make sure that no one notices it, to say nothing of any one's taking offense at it. Therefore he must walk with downcast eyes (alas, but not in the Christian sense), when he mingles in the throngs of men; proudly—and yet stealthily, he must flee from one distinguished circle to another; he must not look at these other men—so that they will not look at him; he must conceal the interest in his eyes if he should meet a fellow creature or an even more distinguished man; his glance must waver vaguely, hesitantly, over all these men, so that no one may catch his eye to remind him of their kinship; he must never be seen among the humbler classes, at least never in their society, and if this cannot be avoided, then must he display an aristocratic condescension—yet in its lightest form—in order not to offend or excite; he must be ready to employ exaggerated courtesy toward the humbler classes, but he must never associate with them as equals for that would indicate that he was—human, but he is an—aristocrat. And if he can do this easily, skillfully, elegantly, evasively, and yet always preserve his secret (that other men do not exist for him, or he for them), then will the aristocratic snobbery vouch for him that he has—good form. Yes, the world has changed—and the form of snobbery has also changed; for it would still be overhasty if we were to believe that the world has become good because it has changed. If we imagine one of those proud, wayward figures who took pleasure in this ungodly sport of openly letting “those

men" feel their wretchedness, how astonished would he not be if he came to know how much caution had now become necessary in order to preserve this secret! Alas, but the world has changed; and gradually as the world changes, the forms of snobbish depravity become more cunning, more difficult to detect—but they truly do not become better.

Such is the aristocratic snobbery. And if there were a distinguished man whose life by birth and circumstances belonged to the same earthly classification, a distinguished man who would not consent to this conspiracy of dissension against common humanity, that is, against the neighbor; if he could not find it in his heart to consent to it, if he, perceiving very well the results of this conspiracy, still trusted to God to give him strength to endure these things, while he did not have the strength—to harden his heart: experience might well teach him what he risked. First the aristocratic snobbishness would accuse him of treason and selfishness—because he wished to love his neighbor; for maintaining his connection with snobbery would be love and loyalty and sincerity and devotion. And if then, as so often happens, the lower class, in turn, from the standpoint of their differences, misunderstood and misjudged him, him—who did not belong to their synagogue, rewarded him with mockery and insults—because he wished to love his neighbor: then, indeed, he would stand there in a twofold danger. Had he been willing to place himself at the head of the lower classes—so that by means of a rebellion he might have swept away the class distinctions: then they might possibly have loved and honored him. But he did not wish to do this; he wished only to express what to him was a Christian need, the need to love his neighbor. And this was why his lot was so dubious; the twofold danger came from this.

Then the aristocratic snobbishness might exultantly ridicule him, derisively condemn him and say it served him right. It would use his name as a bugbear to prevent inexperienced aristocratic youth from straying away—from the "good form" of snobbishness. And many of the better men among the aristocrats, under the powerful influence of the "good form" of snobbishness, would not dare to defend him; would not risk being laughed at by the "counsel of the scornful," and this ridicule would reach its maximum if anyone were bold enough to defend him. Thus we might easily imagine that an aristocrat within the inspired circle of aristocrats might eloquently defend the idea of love to one's neighbor, but when it actually came to the point, he might not be able to subject his mind in obedience to the view he had perhaps successfully defended. However, to defend an opposing view within the partition wall of the differences, to defend behind this wall a view which, in the Christian sense (not in the sense of raising a rebellion), wishes to take the differences away, that is simply to preserve the differences. In

the company of the learned, or within a circle of associates which assures and emphasizes his distinction as such, the scholar might perhaps be willing to deliver an inspired lecture on the equality of all men; but that is simply maintaining the differences. In the company of the wealthy, in surroundings which simply make the advantages of wealth obvious, a rich man might perhaps be willing to make every concession about equality between men; but this also means preserving the differences. The distinguished man who might possibly victoriously succeed in overriding all objections arising in that exclusive company out of court, would perhaps snobbishly and cowardly avoid coming in contact with real objections to the differences. "Go with God!" We use this expression as a salutation—if that better-intentioned man among the distinguished, instead of proudly avoiding men, were to go out with God among men, then he would perhaps try to hide from himself—and consequently from God, what he got to see—but what God saw that He hid. That is, if one walks with God, then one certainly walks free from danger; but one is also compelled to see, and to see in a quite peculiar manner. When you walk in company with God, then you need see but one wretched man, and you will not be able to evade what Christianity wishes to have you understand, the human equality.

Alas, but perhaps that superior man would not quite dare risk having to endure this walking in company with God—and the impression it made upon him; he would perhaps withdraw—while, nevertheless, that same evening in the exclusive society of his friends, he would again defend the Christian view of life. Moreover, this walking with God (and it is only in company with God that one discovers his "neighbor," for God is the middle term) for the sake of learning to know life and to know himself, is a serious walk. Then honor, power and glory lose their worldly glamor; in company with God you cannot take pleasure in worldliness. If you unite (for union is not always for the good) with some other men with a definite standing and position in life, even if it is only with your wife, then the worldly tempts you; even if it may not have great significance in your eyes, it tempts you comparatively in respect of persons; perhaps it tempts you for her sake. But when you walk with God, when you unite only with God, and in all that you understand, you understand that God is underneath: then you discover—shall I say to your own hurt?—then you discover your neighbor; then God compels you to love him—shall I say to your own hurt? For loving your neighbor is a thankless task.

It is one thing to let thought fight against thought; it is one thing to fight and conquer in a dispute; it is another thing to conquer one's self when one fights in the realities of life; for however closely one conflicting thought presses on the other in life, however closely one

contender presses on the other in a dispute, all this conflict is still carried on at a distance, like a battle in the air. On the other hand, this is a measure of a man's disposition, of what he is; how far it is from what he understands to what he does; how great a distance there is between his understanding and his actions. At bottom we all understand the highest things; a child, the simplest man, the wisest man, they all understand the highest things, and all understand the same things; for it is, if I dare say so, a lesson set for us all. But that which makes the difference is whether we understand it only remotely—so that we do not act accordingly; or near at hand—so that we do act accordingly, and “cannot do otherwise,” cannot refrain from doing it, like Luther, who understood quite definitely what he had to do, when he said: “God help me, I cannot do otherwise. Amen.”

At the distance of a quiet hour from all the turmoil of life and of the world, every man understands what the highest is; when he starts out, he has understood it. When life looks like fair weather to him, he still understands it: but when confusion begins, then the understanding flees, or it appears that this understanding was at a distance. To sit in a room where everything is so still that one can hear a grain of sand fall, and understand the highest, is something every man is able to do; but, speaking figuratively, for one to sit in a kettle while the coppersmith hammers upon it, and then to understand the same thing about the highest: to do this one must have his understanding in himself; otherwise it will appear that his understanding was at a distance—because he was absent-minded.

At the distance of a quiet hour from the turmoil of life, the child and the simplest man and the wisest man understand, and almost equally easily, what every man ought to do—what every man should do; but in the midst of life's confusion, when the only question is about what *he* will do, then it perhaps appears that that understanding was at a distance from him—was at the distance of humanity from him.

While a dispute is still remote from action, while the lofty resolutions are still awaiting action, while the solemn vows are unfulfilled and repentance still not proved, every man understands what the highest is. Within the habitual security of unchanged conditions, everyone can understand that a change is desirable, for this understanding is remote from the change. Is not the unchanged a tremendous distance from the change?

Alas, in the world there is perpetually the pressing question about what one can do and what one cannot do: eternity which speaks of the highest, calmly assumes that every man can achieve it, and therefore asks only whether he did so. From the height of his superior condescension, the great man understands equality between man and man. From the height of their mysterious superiority the scholar and the educated

man understand equality between man and man; granted a little advantageous concession, the man whose difference consists in being like most other people, understands equality between men—at a distance the neighbor is recognized by everyone: God alone knows how many really recognize him, that is, close by. And yet at a distance the neighbor is merely a figment of the imagination; he who is neighbor by virtue of being near by, is any man, unconditionally every man. At a distance the neighbor is a shadow who in imagination passes through every man's thought—but, alas, perhaps he did not discover that the man who at that very moment really did pass by him, was his neighbor. Everyone knows his neighbor at a distance, and yet it is impossible to see him at a distance; if you do not see him so close at hand that, before God, you see him unconditionally in every man, then you do not see him at all.

Let us now consider the differences in the lower classes. The times are past when what one calls the lower classes had no conception of themselves, or only the conception of being slaves, not merely poor men, but actually not even men. The wild rebellions, the horror which followed on horror, are perhaps also past; but I wonder if viciousness cannot therefore lie hidden in a man. If so, then the vicious inferiority complex will make the poor man imagine that he sees an enemy in the powerful and the rich, in everyone who is favored by some advantage. But caution, it says, for these enemies still have so much power that it might easily become dangerous to break with them. Therefore the hidden viciousness will not teach the poor man to raise a rebellion, or absolutely refuse every expression of deference, or let his secret become manifest; but it will teach him that the deference shall be expressed and still not expressed, expressed and yet expressed in such a way that the powerful will find no pleasure in it, while he is still not able to say that this homage is refused him. Therefore in this submission there must be a cunning defiance which secretly embitters, a reluctance which secretly says "no" to what the tongue affirms; a dissonance of suppressed envy in the jubilation which honors the powerful. There must be no force used which might become dangerous; there must be no breach which might become a source of danger; but a secret hidden bitterness, a remotely suspected, painful dejection must make the power and the honor and the distinction into a torment for the powerful, the honored, the distinguished man, who yet is not able to put his finger on any definite cause of complaint; for therein lies exactly the art and the secret of the resistance.

And if there was a poor man whose heart did not harbor this secret envy, and who was unwilling to permit this viciousness from without to get this power over him; a poor man who without being servilely submissive, without fear of man, modestly but above all gladly, gave every

thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbors: lest they also invite you again, and you receive recompense. But when thou makest a banquet, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind'; for here not only is the word 'banquet' used in this way, but at the beginning a less festal expression is used, 'the midday or the evening meal,' and not until the speech refers to inviting the poor and the crippled, is the word 'banquet' used. Does it not seem to you that it is as if Christ wished to indicate that to invite the poor and the lame is not only what we should do, but is also something far more festal than eating at midday or evening with friends and relatives and rich neighbors, which one ought not to call a banquet; for to invite the poor, that is really to give a banquet? But I perceive that our usage of words is different, for as commonly used, a list of those who are invited to a banquet is sufficient: friends, brothers, relatives, rich neighbors—who are able to reciprocate. But so scrupulous is the Christian equality and its usage, that it requires not only that you shall feed the poor, it requires that you shall call it a banquet. If, however, in actual daily life you wish to stand strictly on this usage, and do not think that in the Christian sense it is a matter of indifference under what name the meal is served to the poor, then will men laugh at you. But simply let them laugh, they laughed, too, at Tobias; for the fact of wishing to love one's neighbor is always exposed to a twofold danger, as we see from the example of Tobias. The ruler had forbidden under pain of death that he should bury the dead; but Tobias feared God more than the ruler, he loved the dead more than his own life: he buried him. This was the first danger. And then when Tobias dared this heroic deed—then 'his neighbors laughed at him.' That was the second danger. . . ." Thus spoke the man who gave the banquet. My hearer, does it not seem to you that he was right? But might there not be something else to object to in his conduct? For why so insistent on inviting *only* the halt and the poor, and, on the other hand, why take such pains, even almost defiantly, to omit to invite friends and relatives, when he might equally well have invited all? Undeniably. And if he was thus insistent, then we shall not commend him or his choice of words. But according to the words of the evangelist, the meaning is, however, that these others would not come. For that reason, too, the friend's surprise at not being invited also ceased as soon as he heard what company had been invited. Had the man, according to the friend's use of words, made a banquet and not invited him, then he would have been angry; but now he was not angry—for he would not have come anyway.

O my hearer, does it seem to you that what we have discussed here is only a dispute about the use of the word "banquet"? Or do you not see that the dispute is about loving your neighbor? For he who feeds the poor, but does not at the same time triumph over his own feelings

so that he may call this feeding a banquet, he sees in the poor and the humble only the poor and the humble; he who gives a "banquet," he sees in the poor and humble his neighbor—however laughable this may seem in the eyes of the world. Alas, for it is still not so unusual for us to hear complaints in the world against this or that man because he is not earnest; but the question is, what the world understands by earnestness, whether it does not almost understand by it the pressure of the worldly concern. And the question is whether the world through constantly confusing earnestness and vanity, is not, in spite of its earnestness, so facetious that if in the highest sense it became earnest enough to see from this that one should thereby set about it earnestly, the question is, whether the world would not quite involuntarily burst into laughter. So earnest is the world! If the many and complicated distinctions of the temporal existence did not make it equally as difficult to see whether one loves his neighbor as it is difficult to see "the man": then would the world always have cause for laughter—if there were otherwise a sufficient number of those who loved their neighbor.

To love the neighbor, while allowing the earthly difference to continue, is, as was here pointed out, essentially to wish to exist equally for every man unconditionally. Manifestly, merely wishing to exist for other men in proportion to the advantages provided by earthly distinctions, is pride and presumption; but the clever idea of not being willing to exist at all for others, in order secretly to enjoy the advantage of distinction in union with equals, is cowardly pride. In both cases there is dissension; but he who loves his neighbor is calm. He is calm through being satisfied with the conditions of the earthly life assigned to him, be they those of distinction or of poverty, and for the rest, he allows every earthly distinction to retain its power, and to pass for what it is and ought to be here in this life. For you shall not covet that which is your neighbor's, not his wife, nor his ass, and hence not that advantageous position vouchsafed to him in life. If it is denied you, then you should still be glad that it was granted to him. In this way one who loves his neighbor is reassured; he does not servilely avoid the more influential men, but he loves his neighbor; nor is he supercilious to the humble, but he loves his neighbor, and wishes essentially to live equally for all men, whether he is actually known by many or not. It is undeniably a considerable wing-stretch, but it is not a proud flight which soars above the world; it is the humble and difficult flight of self-denial near the earth. It is far easier and far more comfortable to creep through life by living in more aristocratic seclusion, if one is a distinguished man, or in inconspicuous privacy if one is poor; moreover, one may, however strange it is, even seem to accomplish more by this surreptitious mode of life, simply because one exposes himself to much less opposi-

tion. But even if it is so pleasant for flesh and blood to avoid opposition, I wonder if it is also consoling in the hour of death? In the hour of death the only adequate consolation is that one has not evaded life, but has endured it. What a man shall accomplish or not accomplish, does not lie in his power to decide; he is not the One who will guide the world; he has only to obey. Everyone has, therefore, first and foremost (instead of asking which place is most comfortable for him, which connection is the most advantageous to him), to assure himself on the question of where Providence can use him, if it so pleases Providence. The point consists precisely in loving his neighbor, or, what is essentially the same thing, in living equally for every man. Every other point of view is a contentious one, however advantageous and comfortable and apparently significant this position may be. Providence cannot use one who has placed himself there, for he is plainly in rebellion against Providence. But he who duly took that overlooked, that despised and disdained place, without insisting on his earthly rights, without attaching himself to just one single man, essentially existing equally for all men, he will, even though he apparently achieves nothing, even if he becomes exposed to the derision of the poor, or to the ridicule of his superiors, or to both insult and ridicule, yet in the hour of death, he will confidently dare say to his soul: "I have done my best; whether I have accomplished anything, I do not know; whether I have helped anyone, I do not know; but that I have lived for them, that I do know, I know it from the fact that they insulted me. And this is my consolation, that I shall not have to take the secret with me to the grave, that I, in order to have good and undisturbed and comfortable days in life, have denied my kinship to other men, kinship with the poor, in order to live in aristocratic seclusion, or with the distinguished, in order to live in secret obscurity."

So let the one who, by the help of his associations and by not living for all men, accomplished so much, look well to it that death does not alter his life for him when it reminds him of his responsibility. For he who did his best to make men attentive, the humble or the distinguished, he who in his teaching, acting, striving, lived equally for all, he is not responsible if men, by persecuting him, showed—that they had become attentive. He has no responsibility, no, he has even benefited, for the condition through which one might derive benefit is always, first and foremost, that one become attentive. But the one who in cowardice would only exist within the partition wall of associations where he would accomplish so very much and gain so many advantages; the one who in cowardice dared not attract the attention of men, the poor or the rich, because he suspected that the attention of men was a dubious good—if one has something true to communicate; the one who in cowardice car-

ried on his famous activities within the security of respect for persons: he bears the responsibility—that he did not love his neighbor. If such a one were to say: "Well, what good does it do to plan one's life according to such a standard?" then I should answer: "How do you think this excuse will help you in eternity?"

For the command of eternity is infinitely higher than any clever excuse. I wonder, too, if a single one of those whom Providence has used as instruments in the service of truth (and let us not forget that every man should and ought to be so used, at least he ought to plan his life so that he might become an instrument) has ever planned his life in any other way than for existing equally for every man. No such man has ever joined himself in alliance with the poor or with the distinguished, but has lived equally for the distinguished and the humblest. Truly, only through loving one's neighbor can a man accomplish the highest; for the highest consists in being capable of being used as an instrument in the hand of Providence. But as was said, everyone who has placed himself at some other point, everyone who forms parties and factions, or joins such, he steers on his own responsibility, and all his achievement, even if it were the transformation of the world, is a delusion. Nor will he have great joy from it in eternity, for it is certainly possible that Providence might make use of it, but, alas, it would not have used him as an instrument; he was a self-willed, a conceited man, and Providence also uses the efforts of such a man by accepting his difficult labor and letting him lose the reward.

However laughable, however slow, however inexpedient, loving one's neighbor may seem to the world, it is still the highest act a man is able to accomplish. But *the highest* has never quite fitted into the relations of the earthly life, *it is both too little and too much.*

Look sometime at the world which lies before you in all its diversified manifestations; it is as when you look at a stage, except that the variety is far, far greater. Every individual of this innumerable multitude is someone in particular through his difference from others; he represents something definite, but essentially he is something different. However, you do not get to see this in life; here you see only what the individual represents and how he does it. It is as it is in a play. But when the curtain falls on the stage, then the one who played the king and the one who played the beggar, and so on severally, they are all much alike, all one and the same: actors. And when in death the curtain has fallen on the stage of reality (for this is an ambiguous expression, if we speak about the curtain being rolled up on the stage of eternity in the moment of death, for eternity is not a stage, it is truth), then they too are all one, they are men, they are all what they essentially were, which you did not see because of their differences; you see that

they are men. The professional theater is an enchanted world; but imagine some evening that through a general absent-mindedness, the players all became confused so that they believed they actually were what they represented: would this not be what we might call, in contrast to the artistic enchantment, the enchantment of an evil spirit, a black art? And so too if in the enchantment of reality (for we are all under this spell through being fascinated by its differences) our fundamental ideas became confused, then would we believe that we essentially are what we represent. Alas, but is this not exactly the case? That the differences of life are only like the player's costumes, or like a traveling cloak which everyone ought to take care of and see that the strings with which this overgarment is fastened are loosely tied, and particularly not in hard knots, so that when the time comes to change, it may easily be thrown off: this seems to be forgotten. And yet we all have artistic understanding enough to be critical, if at the moment when he should cast off his outer garment, the player has to run off the stage to get the strings untied. Alas, but in actual life one fastens the upper garment of his difference so tightly that it completely conceals the fact that this difference is an outer garment, because the inner glory of the likeness to others never or so very infrequently shines through, as it nevertheless should and ought to do. For the player's art is the delusive one, the art of make-believe, the art of deceiving and being deceived on an equally large scale; therefore we must not be able or wish to see the player through the costume; therefore it represents the highest art when the player becomes identical with the character he represents, because this is the supreme delusion. But the reality of life, even if it is not, like eternity, the truth, ought to be truthful, and therefore the other man, who everyone essentially is, ought always to be glimpsed through the disguise. Alas, but in actual life, the individual in his temporal growth grows together with the temporal differences; this is the opposite of the growth of eternity which grows away from the differences; every such individual is crippled, is in the sense of eternity a deformity. Alas, in real life the individual grows fast to his differences, so that at last death must use force to tear them away from him.

Nevertheless, if one is truly to love his neighbor, he must remember every moment that the difference between them is only a disguise. For, as was said, Christianity has not wished to storm forth to abolish the differences, neither those of distinction nor of humbleness, nor has it wished in a worldly sense to effect a worldly agreement between the differences; but it wants the difference to hang loosely about the individual, loosely, like the cape the king casts off to reveal himself; loosely, like the ragged cloak in which a supernatural being has concealed itself. When the difference hangs thus loosely, then that essential other is

always glimpsed in every individual, that common to all, that eternal resemblance, the equality. If it were this way, if every individual lived in this way, then would the temporal existence have attained its highest point. It cannot be like eternity; but this expectant solemnity, which, without halting the course of life, renews itself every day through the eternal and through the equality of eternity, every day saves its soul from the differences in which it still continues: this would be the reflection of eternity. Then you would indeed see the ruler in real life, gladly and respectfully offer him your homage; but you would, nevertheless, see in him the inner glory, the equality of glory which his magnificence merely conceals. You would indeed see the beggar, perhaps in your sorrow for him suffering more than he, but you would still see in him the inner glory, the equality of glory, which his shabby cloak conceals. Moreover, wherever you turned your eyes, you would see your neighbor. For there neither is nor has there ever been from the beginning of the world, a man who was a neighbor in the same sense as a king is a king, a scholar a scholar, your relative your relative, that is, in particular, or what amounts to the same thing, in the sense of discrimination; no, every man is your neighbor. In being king, beggar, scholar, rich, poor, man, woman and so on, we do not resemble one another, for just therein lie our differences; but in being a neighbor we all unconditionally resemble one another. The difference is the confusion of the temporal existence which marks every man differently, but the neighbor is the mark of the eternal—on every man. Take a number of sheets of paper; write something different on each of them so that they do not resemble each other; but then take again each individual sheet, do not be confused by the different inscriptions, hold it up to the light, and then you see a common mark in them all. And so the neighbor is the common mark, but you see it only by the light of the eternal, when it shines through the differences.

My hearer, there can certainly be no doubt that this must seem glorious to you, that it must constantly appear thus to you, whenever in quiet exaltation of spirit you allow the thought of the eternal to counsel you, and give yourself up to meditation; only then are you near this understanding. Oh, but might this not seem so glorious to you that for your part you would decide to make this agreement with God; that you wish to unite with Him in order to maintain this understanding, that is, to express in your life that with Him you will maintain this understanding as the only true understanding, whatever may befall you because of it, even if it should cost you your life; that with God you will hold it fast as your victory over all indignities and injuries. Remember that he, who in truth chose the one thing needful, wished the

truly good, he has this blessed consolation that one suffers but once, but one conquers eternally.

Lo, the poet knows how to say much about the beginning of love, about what an ennobling power loving and being loved exercises over a man; about the transfiguration which penetrates his whole being; about what a heavenly difference, according to the poet, there is between one who is in love and one who has never felt the transforming power of love. Oh, the true consecration is nevertheless the one which surrenders all claims on life, all claims to power and honor and advantage, all claims—but the happiness of love and friendship are indeed the strongest claims—hence which surrenders all claims, in order to understand what a tremendous claim God and eternity have upon one's self. He who will accept this understanding is prepared to love his neighbor. A man's life begins with the illusion that a long, long time and a whole world lie before him, and he begins with the foolish conceit that he has plenty of time for all his many claims. The poet is the eloquent, inspired advocate of this foolish but beautiful conceit. But when in the infinite transformation a man discovers the eternal so near to life that there is not a single one of its claims, not a single one of its evasions, not a single one of its excuses, not a single one of its moments at a distance from what *he must do* at this very moment, this very second, this very instant: then he is in the way of becoming a Christian. The sign of childishness is to say: "*Me wants, me—me*"; the sign of youth is to say: "*I,*"—and "*I*"—and "*I*"; the sign of maturity and the introduction to the eternal is to will to understand that this "*T*" signifies nothing if it does not become the "*thou*" to whom eternity unceasingly speaks, and says: "*Thou shalt, thou shalt, thou shalt.*" The youth wishes to be the only "*I*" in the whole world; maturity consists in understanding this "*thou*" for itself, even if it is not said to any other single man. Thou shalt, thou shalt love thy neighbor. O my hearer, it is not *you* to whom *I* speak; it is to me, to whom eternity says: "*Thou shalt.*"

III

A. LOVE IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW

Love is the fulfilling of the law.—ROMANS 13:10

TO promise is honest, but to keep it is difficult," says the proverb; but by what right? It is manifestly the keeping of a promise that is honest, and in that the proverb is right, that the keeping of a promise is honest and also difficult. But what is promising? The proverb, in the words quoted, says nothing about what a promise is; perhaps then a promise is nothing at all; perhaps it is less than nothing. Perhaps the proverb is even warning against promising, as if it would say: waste no time in promising; the keeping a promise, which is the honorable thing, is certainly difficult. And truly, the promising is certainly far from being honesty, even when the promise is by no means dishonestly intended. Should one not hesitate to give "the fact of promising" the name of honesty, hesitate in a world which deceitfully promises so much, in a generation which is only too inclined to promise and honestly deceives itself in promising? Should one not hesitate for the sake of the proverb itself, since there is another proverb which worldly men are also familiar with and know from experience, that "A penny loaned," if—according to the promise—it is repaid, "is a penny found"? One might rather go to the opposite extreme and say that promising is dishonest, assuming that the characteristic of true trustworthiness is precisely that it does not make promises, that it wastes no time in promising, does not flatter itself by promising, and then claim a twofold credit, first for promising, and then for the fulfillment of the promise. Nevertheless, one may prefer to try to center the attention exclusively and decisively upon the keeping the promise, while, as a preamble, a stimulating and authoritative reminder warns against promising.

There is a parable found in the Holy Scriptures which is but rarely referred to in the godly discourse, and which, nevertheless, is very instructive and stimulating. Let us consider it a little. There was a man "who had two sons"; therein he resembles the father of the prodigal son, who also had two sons. Moreover, the resemblance between these two fathers is even greater; for one of the sons of the father of whom we are speaking was also a prodigal son, as we shall learn from the story. The father went to the first and said: "Son, go out and work today in my vineyard." But he answered and said: "I will not"; but afterward he repented and went. And the father went to the other son and said likewise. But he answered and said, "Lord, I go," and he did not go. Which of the two did the father's will? We might also ask it in another way, "Which of these two was the prodigal son?" I wonder if

it was not the one who said "yes," the obedient one, who not only said "yes," but said, "Lord, I will," as if to show his unconditional, obedient submission to his father's will. I wonder if it was not the one who said "yes," who was secretly lost, so that no notoriety attached to him as there did to that prodigal son who wasted his substance on harlots, and ended by herding swine, but who also ended by being reformed. I wonder if the one who said "yes" does not conspicuously resemble that brother of the prodigal son whose righteousness is made suspect in the Gospel, although he regarded himself as the righteous, or the good son; so, too, this brother (we have in our language a peculiar expression which for the sake of brevity we might use about him), this "yes-brother," regarded himself as being the good son—did he not say "yes," did he not say, "Lord, I go"?—and as the proverb says, it is honest to promise! The other brother, on the contrary, said "no." Such a "no," which still implies that one will do precisely what one said "no" to, may sometimes be caused by an inexplicable peculiarity. An honesty exiled and alien to the earth sometimes hides itself in such a simulated negation, whether because the speaker is so disgusted with repeatedly hearing the "yes," which signifies that one will not do what one says, that he has accustomed himself to saying "no" where others say "yes," in order to do then what the yes-brother leaves undone; or it is because the speaker has a troubled mistrust of himself, and therefore avoids promising anything, lest he promise too much. Or is it because the speaker, in a sincere zeal for doing good, wishes to abjure the hypocritical appearance of a promise? Still, in the Gospel this "no" is not mentioned in any way except as being intended to show that it really was disobedience on the part of the son; but he repents and goes out and does his father's will.

But I wonder if what the parable wishes to emphasize is not how dangerous it is to be overprecipitate in saying "yes," even if it is intended to mean "in a moment." The yes-brother is not represented as one who was a deceiver when he said "yes," but as one who became a deceiver because he did not keep his promise, and, still more exactly, as one who just through his readiness in promising became a deceiver—that is to say, his promise became a snare. If he had not promised anything, he would perhaps have been quicker to do it. When one says "yes," or promises something, then one so easily deceives himself and also easily deceives others, as if one had already done what he had promised, or as if by promising, he had already done some part of what he had promised to do, or as if the promise in itself was something meritorious. And then if one still does not do what he promised, then the road becomes very long before he comes back to the truth again, and only makes a beginning by still doing a little of what he

had promised. Alas, what he had promised to do was perhaps complicated enough, but now, through the unfulfilled promise, he finds himself at an illusory distance from the beginning. It is now no longer as it was at the moment when he lost his way, and instead of beginning on the labor, swung about by the aid of the promise. He must traverse the whole circuitous way back before he again reaches the beginning. On the contrary, the way from having said "no," the way through repentance to making good again, is much shorter and easier to find. The "yes" of the promise is soporific, but the "no" uttered and hence heard by one's self is arousing, and repentance really not far away. He who says, "Lord, I will," immediately seems virtuous in his own eyes; he who says "no" becomes almost afraid of himself. But this difference is very significant in the first moment, and very critical in the second; yet the first moment is the judgment of the immediate, the second moment is the judgment of eternity. That is why the world is so given to making promises, for the worldly is the immediate, and a promise at first looks so good. That is precisely why eternity is suspicious of promises, as it is suspicious of everything immediate. If we assume that neither of the brothers went and did his father's will, then he who said "no" was still nearer to doing it, inasmuch as he at least realized that he was not doing his father's will. A "no" does not conceal anything, but a "yes" so easily becomes a delusion, a self-deception, which of all difficulties is perhaps the hardest to overcome.

Oh, it is only too true that the "way to perdition is paved with good intentions," and it is certain that the most dangerous thing of all is for a man to backslide by the aid of good intentions, that is, by the way of promises. It is so hard to realize that it actually is retrogression. When a man turns his back and goes away, then it is easy to see that he is going away; but if a man hits on the idea of turning his face toward that from which he is going away, hits upon the idea of going backwards, while with face and glance and voice he greets one, protesting again and again that he is coming at once, or even saying incessantly, "Here I am"—although, mind you, he is withdrawing farther and farther backward: then it is not so easy to realize it. And so, too, with the one who, rich in good intentions and swift to promise, withdraws farther and farther from the good. Aided by good intentions and promises, his direction is toward the good, he is turned toward the good, and yet with this tendency toward the good, he yet is going back farther and farther away from the good. Every time he renews his intention and his promise, it looks as if he took a step forward, and yet he does not merely remain stationary, but he actually takes a step backward.

The vain intention, the unfulfilled promise, leaves a despondency, a dejection, which perhaps soon blazes up again in an even more fiery pur-

pose, only to die away again in an even greater languor. As a drinker constantly needs stronger and stronger stimulation—to become intoxicated, so he who forfeits his promises and good intentions constantly needs greater incitement—in order to go backward. We do not commend the son who said “no,” but we endeavor to learn from the Gospel how dangerous it is to say, “Lord, I will.” A promise may be compared to the dealing with a changeling—caution is needed. Just at the moment the child is born, when the mother’s joy is greatest because her suffering is past, when just because of her joy she is perhaps less perceptive, then, as the superstitious believe, a hostile power comes and leaves a changeling in place of her child. And at the great but also dangerous moment of beginning, when one ought to begin, then comes the hostile power and slips the changeling promise into one’s hand, preventing one from actually making the beginning. Ah, how many have not been deceived in this way, deceived by the changeling promise!

That is why it is so important for a man in all his relations, in his every task, immediately to center his complete undivided attention upon the essential and the decisive. So too with love, so that it may not at any time acquire the power to seem other than it is, or the changeling appearance be able to establish itself firmly and become a snare. For love does not come to have a good time, or to amuse itself with flattering conceits, but it is immediately in line with the task and is forced to understand that every previous moment was a wasted moment and more than merely wasted time, that any other expression of it is retardation and retrogression. This is exactly expressed in the words of our text:

LOVE IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW,

and we shall now make these words the subject of our reflection.

Hence if someone asks, “What is love?”, Paul answers: “It is the fulfillment of the law,” and any further questioning is immediately halted by that answer. For the law is already a complicated matter, but to fulfill it—moreover, you yourselves perceive that if this is to be accomplished, then there is not a moment to waste. The world has certainly many times asked out of curiosity, “What is love?” and as many times there has been some idler who by answering joined himself with the curious, and these two, curiosity and idleness, liked each other so much that they almost tired each other out in asking and answering questions. But Paul pays no attention to the questioner, least of all to the difficulties; on the contrary, by his answer he catches the questioner in obedience under the law; by his answer he immediately gives the direction and gives the impetus to act accordingly. This is not only the case with this answer of Paul’s, but it is true of all Paul’s answers and

with all of Christ's answers; this method of replying, swinging far away from the direction of the question in order immediately to bring the task the questioner has to perform as near to life as possible, is simply characteristic of the Christian method.

That simple wise man of antiquity who by encouraging the pursuit of knowledge doomed paganism, he understood the art of asking questions; he knew how through his questions to ensnare in the web of their ignorance those who answered. But the Christian who does not restrict himself to knowledge alone but to action, is peculiarly able to answer and by his answer to commit everyone to the task. This was why it was so dangerous for the Pharisees and the sophists and the hairsplitters and the dialecticians to question Christ; for the questioner always received an answer, but through the answer he also learned in a certain sense far too much; he received an embarrassing answer which did not cleverly elaborate on the question, but which seized upon the questioner with divine authority and pledged him to act in accordance with it, whereas the questioner perhaps had only wished to satisfy his curiosity or his inquisitiveness or to define his own ideas, while keeping at a distance from himself and from—doing the truth. How many have not asked, "What is truth?" and have secretly hoped that it would be a long time before the truth came so close to them that it would in that very moment decide what it was their duty to do at once. When the Pharisee "in order to justify himself" asked, "Who is my neighbor?", he certainly thought that it would call for a very long investigation, that it would perhaps require a very long time, and even then perhaps would end with the admission that it would be impossible to define with absolute accuracy the concept "neighbor"—and this was exactly why he had asked the question, in order to find an excuse for wasting time, in order to justify himself. But God takes the wise in their own foolishness, and Christ took the questioner captive in the answer which included the task.

And so with every answer of Christ. He does not warn against unprofitable questions by long, tiresome speeches which only breed quarrels and evasions, for the long elaborate speech would not be much better than the one it is designed to counteract. No, as He taught, so too He answers with divine authority, for the authority simply consists in setting the task. The hypocritical questioner got the answer he deserved, but not the one he desired. He did not get an answer which would encourage curiosity, nor one he could run with, for the reply has the remarkable quality that when it is spoken it at once commits the individual to whom it is spoken unequivocally to the task. Even if someone presumptuously wished to repeat one or another of Christ's answers, merely as an anecdote, it is no good, it cannot be done; the answer catches by making the one to whom it is repeated responsible for the

task. In the case of a clever answer which appeals to human ingenuity, it is of no consequence who has said it or to whom it was said. Every answer of Christ has exactly the opposite quality, which is, however, two-edged: it is infinitely important that it is Christ who has said it, and when it is said to an individual, it is precisely to *him* that it is said, the whole eternal emphasis is on that *him*, even if in a way it is said to all individuals. Human ingenuity is introspective, and inasmuch as it is blind, it is ignorant of whether anyone looks at it or not, and whether anyone comes close enough to look at it; the divine authority, on the contrary, is like the pure eye; it first compels the accused to see with whom he is talking, and then it fixes its piercing glance upon him and with this glance it says: "It is you to whom this is said." Therefore men will readily have dealings with ingenuity and intellectuality, for one can play blindman's buff with them, but they are afraid of authority.

And this is why men will perhaps not so readily have anything to do with Paul's answer, which, as was said, is ensnaring. As soon as anything else is said in answer to the question about what love is, then there is also time, an interval, an idle moment, which then becomes a concession to curiosity and idleness and selfishness. But if love is the fulfillment of the law, then there is no time for a promise—for the fact of promising is here used as an expression for the last thing which wishes to turn love in the wrong direction away from doing, away from *immediately* beginning upon the task; the promise lies exactly at the beginning, and resembles it deceptively, yet without being the beginning. Therefore even if this promise about love were not so apt to be a momentary excitement, which in the next moment is a disappointment, an immediate blazing up which leaves a languor behind, a springing forward which leads backward, an anticipation which delayingly retards, an introduction which does not lead to the matter—even if all this were not so, the promise is still a dwelling upon love, a dreaming or gratifying or light-minded or conceited dwelling upon love, as if it must first collect itself, or consider itself, or as if it wondered at itself, or at what it was able to do; the promise is a dwelling on love, and therefore a jest, a jest which may become dangerous, for taken earnestly love is the fulfillment of the law. But the Christian love which gives everything away, has just for that reason nothing to give away, no moment and no promise. Still this love is not a busyness, least of all a worldly busyness, and worldliness and busyness are now inseparable ideas. For what does it mean to be busy? We generally think that the way in which a man occupies himself determines whether he can be called busy. But this is not so. It is only within more narrow limitations that the manner of occupation is decisive, that is, not until the object of the occupation is determined. He who occupies himself only with the eternal, uninter-

busy man

ruptedly, at every moment, if this were possible, is not busy. Hence the one who really occupies himself with the eternal is never busy. To be busy is, dividedly and distractedly (which follows from the object of the occupation) to occupy one's self with the whole manifold, in which it is absolutely impossible for a man to be undivided, undivided as a whole, and undivided in any individual part of the whole, which only the insane succeed in doing. To be busy is dividedly and distractedly to occupy one's self with that which makes a man divided and distracted. But Christian love, which is the fulfillment of the law, is completely and undividedly present in its every utterance; and yet it is perpetually active; it is, consequently, just as far from being idleness as it is from being busyness. It never takes up something in advance and gives a promise instead of acting; it never satisfies itself by making believe that it has finished the task; never lingers with enjoyment on itself; never sits idly wondering about itself. It is not that hidden, secret, mysterious feeling behind the lattice of the inexplicable which the poet wishes to lure to his window; not a mood of the soul which fondly knows no law, wishes to know none, or wishes to make its own law, and only listen for the songs: it is sheer action, and each of its deeds is sacred, for it is the fulfillment of the law. *love*

Such is the ideal Christian love; even if it does not or did not manifest itself in this way in any man (while yet every Christian by continuing in love, strives that his love may become such), it still was true in Him who was love, in our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the same apostle says about Him, that "Christ was the end of the law." What the law could not bring to pass, any more than it could save a man, that Christ could do. Whereas the law, therefore, through its demand became the destruction of everyone, because they were not able to fulfill it, and only through it learned to know sin: Christ became the destruction of the law, because He was what it demanded, its destruction, its end; for when the demand is fulfilled, the demand exists only in the fulfillment, but hence it no longer exists anywhere as demand. As thirst when it is quenched exists only in the relief which follows the refreshment, so Christ did not come to abolish the law, but to perfect it, so that from this time forth it exists in its perfection. ***

Moreover, He was love, and His love was the fullness of the law. "No one could convict Him of any sin," not even the law which knows every conscience; "there was no deceit in His mouth," but everything in Him was truth; there was in His love not the hairsbreadth of a moment, of an emotion, of an interval between His purpose and the demand of the law for its fulfillment. He did not say "no," like that one brother, or "yes," like the other brother, for His meat was to do His Father's will;

thus He was one with the Father, one with every demand of the law, so its perfecting was a necessity to Him, His sole need in life.

The love in Him was perpetually active; there was no moment, not one single instant in His whole life when His love was merely a passive feeling which seeks expression while it lets time pass; or a mood which produces a self-satisfaction and dwells on itself while the task is neglected. No, His love was expressed in perpetual activity; even when He wept, was this not redeeming the time? For not even Jerusalem knew what belonged to its peace, but He knew; if those who stood at the grave of Lazarus sorrowing did not know what was about to happen, He knew what He would do. His love was as completely present in His least as in His greatest acts; it rallied itself no more strongly in some single great moment than in the hours of daily life outside the demands of the law. It was equally present at every moment, not greater when He breathed His last upon the Cross than when He let Himself be born. It was the same love which said, "Mary has chosen the better part," and the same love which with a glance rebuked—or forgave, Peter. It was the same love when He accepted His disciples who gladly left their homes to perform miracles in His name, and the same love when He found them sleeping. There was in His love no demand upon any other man, not on another man's time or strength or assistance or reciprocal love; for what Christ demanded of him was solely the other man's good, and He demanded that only for the sake of the other man. No man lived with Him who loved Him as deeply as Christ loved him. There was in His love no bargaining, no indulgent, partial agreement with any man except the agreement which was to Him the infinite demand of the law. There was in the love of Christ no exemption demanded for Him, not the poorest, not a farthing's worth.

His love recognized no differences, not the tenderest between His mother and other men, for He pointed to His disciple and said, "This is my mother." Again His love made no difference between His disciples, for His sole wish was that everyone should become His disciple, and He wished this for their own sakes. And again His love made no difference between the disciples, for His divine-human love was exactly the same to all men, in wishing to save them all, and equally for all men, who would allow themselves to be saved.

His life was pure love, and yet this whole life was only a single working day; He did not rest *until* the night came when He *could* no longer work; His labor did not cease with the changes of day and night, for when He was not working, then He watched in prayer. Thus was He the fulfillment of the law. And for a reward He demanded nothing, for His only requirement, His only purpose throughout His whole life from birth to death, was to sacrifice Himself as an innocent victim—which

not even the law in its most extreme demand—dared to demand. Thus was He the fulfillment of the law. The only one privy to His life, as it were, who was even able to follow Him, who was attentive enough and sleepless enough to follow Him, was the law itself, which followed Him step by step, hour by hour, with its infinite demand; but He was the fulfillment of the law.

How poverty-stricken never to have loved! Oh, but the man who became richest through his love, how poor was not all his wealth of love in comparison with this fullness! And yet, not so. Let us never forget that there is an everlasting difference between Christ and every Christian; even if the law has been done away with, it still stands in power and fixes an everlasting yawning gulf between the God-man and every other man, who cannot even understand, but who can only believe what the divine law must admit, that He was the fulfillment of the law. Every Christian believes this and appropriates it in believing, but no one has known it except the law and He who was the fulfillment of the law. For what weakness in a man is present in his strongest moment, that weakness far more strongly and yet proportionately would be present at every moment—that fact a man can understand only in his strongest moment, but the next moment he cannot understand it; and that is why he must believe and cling to his faith, so that his life may not become confused through being able to understand at one moment, but not being able to understand at many other moments.

Christ was the fulfillment of the law. From Him we should learn how to understand this thought, for He was the *explanation*, and only when the explanation is what it explains, when the one who explains it is the thing explained, when the explanation is the transfiguration, only then is there the right relationship. Alas, if we are not able to explain in this way; for if we can do nothing else, we can learn from this, humility before God. The frailty of our earthly life must divide it into explaining and being explained, and this, our weakness, is an essential expression of our own attitude toward God. Let a man, humanly speaking, love God in all sincerity of heart, ah, God has first loved him, God is an eternity ahead—so far is the man behind. And so with every task of eternity. When a man finally comes to begin, what an infinite time has not already been wasted, even if for a moment we forget all the deficiencies, all the imperfections in the struggle which has finally begun! Let a man, humanly speaking, aspire first in all sincerity of heart to the kingdom of God and His righteousness, yet how long a time elapsed before he merely learned to understand this in the right way, and hence how infinitely long before he first aspired to the kingdom of God and His righteousness! And so at every point, before every human beginning, there is wasted time. We are accustomed to speak concerning worldly

conditions, about the distressing fact that in order to prepare himself for some career, a man often must run in debt; in the God-relationship, man begins with an infinite debt, even if we forget how that debt increases daily after the beginning. Only too often this is forgotten in our daily life, and why should it be unless it is because God too is forgotten? So one man measures himself by another, and the one who has understood more than the other prides himself on being something. Oh, that he might himself understand that before God he is nothing. And since men are now so anxious to be something, what wonder that they, however much they talk about God's love, are so reluctant to have anything to do with Him, just because His demand and His standards make them into nothing.

For use one tenth part of the strength that is yours when you exert it to the uttermost, then turn your back on God, compare yourself with men—and in a very short time you will be distinguished among men. But turn around, turn toward God, use ten tenth parts of your strength, torture if possible every last makeshift into your service—and you will still be as nothing, at an infinite distance from having gained anything, in an infinite debt to God! Lo, therefore we have a right to say that in a certain sense it does not help to speak to a man about the highest, because a revolution must precede it, absolutely different from that which any speech can produce. If, for instance, you wish to have good times and easily get to be something, then forget God, never really notice Him, nor allow yourself to understand clearly that it was He who created you from nothing; start with the presupposition that a man has no time to waste in considering the One to whom he infinitely and unconditionally owes everything. Nor would one man be justified in asking another about it; hence, let it be forgotten, and shout in chorus with the multitude, laugh or weep, be busy from morning to night; be loved and respected and esteemed as friend, as officer, as king, as pallbearer; above all, be a serious man through having forgotten the only serious matter, that of maintaining your relation to God by becoming nothing. Oh, but consider then—still it does no good to talk, but God grant that you may understand what you lost, so that this annihilation before God may be blessed in such a way that you again retrace your way back to this annihilation every moment more strongly, more fervently, more inwardly than the blood returns to the place from which it was forced out. But to worldly wisdom this is and must be the greatest folly. Therefore never cling to God (for we must speak so, if in so many words we would reveal the secret of the indecision which with lying words also pretends to cling to God), “never cling to God, for by clinging to Him you lose what no man who clung to the world ever lost, not even the man who lost most—you uncondi-

tionally lose everything." And this is true, for the world truly cannot take everything, simply because it cannot give everything; only God who takes everything, everything, everything—in order to give everything, who does not take piecemeal little or much, or immeasurably much, but infinitely everything, only God can do this, if you truly cling to Him. "Therefore, flee from Him! A king may certainly be dangerous to approach, if you wish to be something, the proximity of a powerfully endowed spirit is dangerous, but God is infinitely more dangerous to approach."

Still, if God is left out and forgotten, then I do not know what meaning there can be in such an expression, or what meaning other than ar-rant nonsense there could be in any talk about this expression: that love is the fulfillment of the law. So let us not in timidity and treachery to ourselves deprive ourselves of understanding these words, as if we were afraid of that which the natural man, however much he shouts about his desire for knowledge and insight, fears—of getting to know too much; for to speak of love being the fulfillment of the law is an impossibility, without at the same time recognizing one's own guilt and making every man guilty.

Love is the fulfilling of the law, for the law is, despite its many provisions, still somewhat indeterminate, but love is its fulfillment; like a powerful speaker, who despite his exertions still cannot say everything, so is the law, but love is the fulfillment of the law.

It might seem strange to say that the law is indeterminate, for its strength lies in its provisions; it owns and rules over all the provisions. And, nevertheless, it is so, and therein also lies the weakness of the law. As a shadow is weak in comparison with the powerful reality, so is the law; but as there is always something vague about a shadow, so too is there vagueness in the outline of the law, however meticulously this is executed. Therefore in the Holy Scriptures the law is called, "a shadow of things to come," for the law is not a shadow which follows the reality of love; the law is assimilated in love, but the law is the shadow of things to come. When an artist outlines a plan, a sketch for his work, however exact the sketch is, it is always somewhat indefinite. Only when the work is finished, can one say: "Now there is not the least thing indefinite, not one line, not a single indefinite point." There is, therefore, only one sketch that is absolutely definite, that is the work itself, but that is saying that no sketch is or can be absolutely and un-conditionally definite. So the law is the plan, love the fulfillment and the absolutely definite; in love the law is absolutely definite. There is only one power which can carry out the work for which the law furnishes the preliminary sketch, and that is love. Still the law and love, like the sketch and the finished work, are by one and the same artist,

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from one and the same source; they are not at variance with one another any more than the finished work of art, which completely corresponds to the sketch, is at variance with that, because it is even more clearly defined than all the outlines of the sketch.

Therefore Paul says in another place, "The end of the commandment is love." But in what sense is this said? It is said in the same sense as it is said that love is the fulfillment of the law. In another sense, it is the sum of all the individual commandments, "Thou shalt not steal," and so on. But try to see if in this way you can find the sum however long you continue to count, and you will see that this is labor in vain, because the concept of the law is inexhaustible, endless, irresistible in its provisions; every provision produces an even more exacting provision, and then from that another still more exacting, and so on interminably.

Here love stands in the same relation to the law as reason does to faith. Reason counts and counts, reckons and reckons, but it never attains the certainty which faith possesses: so too with the law, it makes provisions and more provisions, but it never reaches the end, which is love. When the sum is mentioned, the very expression seems to suggest counting; but when a man has become tired of counting, and yet is even more anxious to find the sum, then he understands that this expression must have a deeper significance. And so, too, when the law has sicked all its provisions on a man and pursued him to exhaustion, because there are provisions everywhere, and yet every provision, even the most definite, has the uncertainty of interpretation that permits it to be made even more definite (for there is perpetually a vagueness in the provisions and an anxiety caused by their numbers, which never dies): then a man becomes trained to understand that there must be something different which constitutes the fulfillment of the law. But there is no more conflict between the law and love than there is between the sum and those numbers whose sum it is; as little as there is conflict between the vain attempt to find the sum and the successful finding of it, the happy decision that it has been found.

Man groans under the law. Wherever he looks he sees only its demand, never the limitation of its demand; like one who looks out over the sea and sees wave after wave, but never an end to them; wherever he turns he meets only the severity which can always become infinitely more severe, never the boundary where it passes over into mildness. The law is starving, as it were; by its aid one does not attain fullness, for it provides simply for taking away, for imposing demands, for exhausting to the uttermost, and the vagueness constantly inherent in its multitudinous provisions is the inexorable collecting of the claims. In each of its provisions the law demands something, and yet the number of provisions is unlimited. The law is, therefore, the exact opposite of

life, but the life is the fulfillment. The law resembles death. But I wonder if life and death do not really know one and the same thing; for just as accurately as life knows everything that makes for life, just so accurately does death know everything which makes for life. There is, therefore, in a certain sense no dispute between the law and love as regards knowledge, but love gives, the law takes, or, that we may express the relationship more properly, the law demands, love grants. There is not one provision of the law, not a single one, which love wishes to abolish; on the contrary, it is love which first gives them all fulfillment and definiteness; in love all the provisions of the law are far more clearly defined than in the law. There is no more conflict between them than there is between hunger and the blessing which satisfies that hunger.

Love is the fulfillment of the law; for love is no shirker of tasks, no indulgence, which demanding immunity or making excuses, coddling or being coddled, slips in between love and the fulfillment of the law, as if love were an idle emotion, too superior to express itself in action, an exigent incapacity, which neither can nor will give satisfaction. Only folly speaks thus about love, as if there were a conflict between the law and love, as there certainly is, but *in the love there is no conflict between the law and the love which is the fulfillment of the law;* as if there were an essential difference between the demands of the law and love, as there certainly is, but *not in the love in which the fulfillment is completely one and the same with the demand.* Only folly sows dissension between the law and love, believes it speaks wisely when it whispers between them, or even maligns one of them to the other.

Fulfillment of the law—still, what law are we speaking about? Our text is the *apostolic* word, we are speaking about *Christian love*, hence this discourse can only *refer to the law of God*. In this the world (insofar as this is different from what we have called "folly") and God, worldly wisdom and Christianity, agree that there is a law which love must fulfill in order to be love, but they disagree about what the law is, and this disagreement is an infinite difference. *Worldly wisdom believes that love is a relationship between man and man; Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between man—God—man, that is, that God is the middle term.* However beautiful a love-relationship has been between two or among many, however absolutely this love has been to them the source of all their happiness and all their blessedness in mutual sacrifice and renunciation, whether all men have praised this relationship—if God and the God-relationship have been neglected, then from the Christian viewpoint it has not been love, but a mutually enchanting illusion of love.

For to love God is in truth to love one's self; to help another man

to love God is to love the other man; to be helped by another man to love God is to be loved. Worldly wisdom certainly does not believe that the one who loves will arbitrarily determine what he wishes to understand by love. Love truly means devotion and sacrifice; therefore the world thinks that the object of love (be it the beloved, or a friend, or all those loved, or a social union, or one's contemporaries, which for the sake of brevity we shall hereafter call "the beloved") must decide whether self-sacrifice and devotion are displayed, and whether the self-sacrifice and devotion displayed are love. Hence it will depend on whether the men who do the judging know how to judge correctly. If the object of love, the judge, does not before God have a true conception in himself of what it means to love himself, that it means to love God, then neither will the beloved have any true conception of what it means to be loved by another man, that it means to be helped to love God; but if this is true, then, as a result, the beloved will take a false kind of devotion and self-sacrifice for true love, and true love for false love. The merely human judgment about love is not a true judgment, for to love God constitutes the true self-love. If God, on the other hand, is the middle term in judging love, then there follows a final and twofold judgment, which still only, although the only one at bottom decisive, begins where the human judgment has finished and has decided whether it is love or not.

The judgment is this: is it really love, from the divine standpoint, to show such a devotion as that demanded by the object of love? Next, is it, from the divine standpoint, really love to demand such devotion from the object of love? Every man is a bond servant unto God; therefore he dares not belong to anyone in love unless in the same love he belongs to God, or to own *anyone in love* unless this other and he himself *in this love* belong to God: a man dares not belong to another man in such a way that this other man is everything to him; a man dares not permit another to belong to him in such a way that he is everything to the other. If there were a love-relationship between two people or among many, so happy, so perfect, that a poet must rejoice over it, moreover, so blissful that one who was not a poet must become one from wonder and joy at this sight: that by no means ends the matter. For now Christianity enters and inquires about the God-relationship, whether each individual has first established a relationship with God, and whether the love-relationship maintains itself in God. If this is not the case, then will Christianity, which is still the protector of love, or just because it *is*, not hesitate to break up this relationship in the name of God, until the lovers are willing to understand it. And if only one party is willing to understand it, then Christianity, which still is the protector of love, will not hesitate to carry him into a horrible conflict,

such as no poet has dreamed of or ventured to describe. For just as little as the poet will have anything to do with the Christian teaching of *loving one's enemy*, just as little, and even less if possible, can he accept the Christian teaching of *hating the beloved* from love and in love. Still Christianity does not hesitate in the name of God, to strain the relationship so intensively. Christianity not only does this in order, as it were, to collect the outstanding debts due to God (since God is indeed the master and owner of bound men), but He does it out of love for the lovers; for to love God is to love one's own self; to love another man like God is to deceive one's self; and to allow another man to love one like God, is to deceive that other man. To such an extreme madness, humanly speaking, can Christianity drive its demand, if love is to be the fulfillment of the law. Therefore it teaches that the Christian must, if required, be able to hate father and mother and sister and the beloved—I wonder if it really means that he should hate them! Oh, may such an abomination be far from Christianity! But certainly in that sense, love, the divinely understood, steadfast and sincere love, may be looked upon as hate by the beloved, the neighbor, the contemporaries, because these will not understand what it means to love themselves, that it means to love God, and that to be loved means to be helped by another man to love God, whether this is actually achieved or not by the lover submitting to being hated. Lo, worldly wisdom has a long list of diversified expressions for sacrifice and devotion; I wonder if among these, this is also found: hating the beloved from love; hating the beloved and insofar himself from love; hating the contemporary and insofar his own life from love. Lo, worldly wisdom knows many and highly diversified cases of unhappy love; I wonder if among all these you find the suffering that might seem to hate the beloved, that might have hate as the last and sole expression of its love, or that suffering which for a reward of its love must be hated by the beloved, because there is the infinite difference of the Christian truth between that which the one party understands by love, and that which the other understands by it.

Whatever the world before the time of Christianity had seen of unhappy love, whatever it had seen of the collision of love with appalling events, whatever it had seen of its collision with what, within the same fundamental conceptions of what love is, is the converse of love, whatever it had seen of its collision with partially divergent ideas within the common fundamental idea: before the time of Christianity the world had never seen that in loving, there was a collision possible between two conceptions between which there is an eternal difference—between the divine conception and the merely human conception. But if there is such a collision, then it is, divinely understood, precisely love to cling to the true, the eternal conception, to love by virtue of it, whereas that

one, or those, who were loved, if they had only the human conception of love, must regard it as hate. If we may be permitted to speak quite humanly about the highest, we are unfortunately easily tempted to imagine in our so-called Christendom, that one believes that which one does not even have an impression of, at least not noticeably so; if we may be permitted to speak quite humanly about the highest, yet never forgetting that the one about whom we speak is separated by an eternal distance from every other man: the life of Christ is really the only unhappy love. He was, divinely understood, love. He loved by virtue of the divine understanding of what love is; He loved the entire race; He dared not—on account of His love, give up this, His understanding, for that would precisely be to deceive the race. Therefore His whole life was a terrible collision with the purely human understanding of what love is. It was the ungodly world which crucified Him; but even His disciples did not understand Him, and constantly sought to win Him to their conception of what love was, so that even to Peter He was obliged to say, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Unfathomable suffering in the terrible collision: that the most sincere, the most faithful disciple, when he, not only meaning well—oh, but burning with love—wishes to counsel Him for the best, wishes only to express how greatly he loves the Master—that this disciple, then, because he had a false conception of love, spoke in such a way that the Master must say to him: "You do not know it, but to me your words are as if it were Satan himself who spoke!" Thus Christianity came into the world, and with Christianity came the divine explanation of what love is.

Oh, we often complain about misunderstanding, especially when it is most bitterly mixed with love; when in each one of its expressions we know that the love is unhappy, that we are certainly loved but not understood; that everything is so bitter because it is done by love through a misunderstanding: but to be misunderstood as no other man was ever misunderstood by another man, to be thus misunderstood as Christ was—and then to be love as Christ was! We pretend that it was only the ungodly who were offended at Christ. What a misunderstanding! No, the best and most kindly man, humanly speaking, who has ever lived, must be offended at Him, must misunderstand Him; for what love is, divinely understood, this the best of men could learn only from Him. The love of Christ, humanly understood, was not self-sacrificing—anything but that; He did not make Himself unhappy, in order, humanly understood, to make His disciples happy. No, He made Himself and His disciples, humanly speaking, as unhappy as possible. And He who had had it in His power to establish the kingdom of Israel and make everything so pleasant for Himself and His followers, as every contemporary could see clearly enough!

Consequently He could have done it, consequently He would not do it, consequently the fault must have lain in Him, in His heart, that He would not sacrifice His ideas and His conceptions, but cruelly preferred to sacrifice Himself and His followers, that is, to forfeit His own life and the lives of those He loved! He did not establish any kingdom on earth, or sacrifice Himself so that the apostles might inherit the established kingdom. No, humanly speaking, it was indeed madness: He sacrifices Himself—in order to make the beloved equally unhappy with Himself! Was this really love: to gather some poor, simple-minded men about Him, to win their devotion and love, as no other had ever won it, to pretend for a moment to look out for them, as now the prospect of the fulfillment of their proudest dream is revealed to them—in order suddenly to reconsider and change the plans; in order without being moved by their prayers, without paying the least attention to them, to plunge them down from this seductive height into the abyss of all dangers; in order, without resistance, to give His enemies power; in order, under mockery and insult while the world rejoiced, to be nailed to the Cross as a criminal: was this really love?

Was it really love: to be thus separated from the disciples, to leave them forsaken in a world which hated them because of Him, to drive them out as wandering sheep among ravening wolves, whose blood-thirstiness He had Himself aroused against them: was this really love! What does this Man want, what does He want of these honest, simple-hearted even if simple-minded men whom He so cruelly deceives? Why does He call His relation to them love? Why does He continue to call it love? Why does He die without confessing that He deceived them, so that He therefore dies asserting that it was, nevertheless, love—alas, while the disciples with bruised hearts, but with touching loyalty, do not venture to have any opinion of their own about His conduct, presumably because He had overborne them? Meanwhile every other man can easily see that, whatever He was to the rest of the world, perhaps excusable as a fanatic, in relation to His disciples He acted like a deceiver! And yet He was love, and He exalted love above everything, and wished to make men happy, and how? Through their relationship to God—for He was love. Yes, He was love, and He knew in Himself and in God, that it was the sacrifice of reconciliation that He brought, that He truly loved His disciples, loved the entire race of men, or at least everyone who would permit himself to be saved!

The fundamental error in the merely human apprehension of love is, that love is deprived of its relation to God, and thereby of its relation to the law to which it refers when it says, "Love is the fulfillment of the law." By a strange misunderstanding one is perhaps inclined to believe that love for a neighbor must not be without a relationship to

God, but only earthly love and friendship. As if Christianity were something halved, as if it could not penetrate every relationship, as if the teaching about love for the neighbor did not exactly count on this, and therefore transformed earthly love and friendship; while many, through a strange misunderstanding, perhaps believe that they need God's help to love their neighbor—the less lovable object, but as to earthly love and friendship, they believe that, on the contrary, they can best help themselves—alas! as if God's intervention here would even be disturbing and inconvenient!

But no love and no expression of love may, in the merely human and worldly sense, be deprived of a relationship to God. Love is a passionate emotion, but in this emotion, even before he enters into a relation with the object of his love, the man must first enter into a relationship with God, and thereby realize the claim that love is the fulfillment of the law. Love is a relation to another man or to other men, but it is by no means and dares by no means be a matrimonial, a friendly, a merely human agreement, however steadfast and tender the connection between man and man. Everyone individually before he in love enters into a relation with the beloved, with the friend, the loved ones, the contemporaries, has first to enter into a relation with God and with God's demands. As soon as one leaves out the God-relationship the questions at issue become merely human determinations of what they wish to understand by loving; what they will require of one another; and their mutual judgment because of this becomes the highest judgment. Not only the one who listens absolutely to the call of God will not belong to a woman, in order not to be delayed through wishing to please her; but also the one who in love belongs to a woman, will first and foremost belong to God; he will not seek first to please his wife, but will first endeavor to make his love pleasing unto God. Hence it is not the wife who will teach her husband how he ought to love her, or the husband the wife, or the friend the friend, or the contemporary the contemporary, but it is God who will teach every individual how he ought to love, even if his love still only lays hold on the law referred to when the apostle says, "Love is the fulfillment of the law." This makes it quite natural that the one who has only a worldly, or a merely human conception about what love is, must come to regard that as self-love and unkindness which, understood in the Christian sense, is precisely love. When, on the other hand, the God-relationship determines what love is between man and man, then love is kept from pausing in any self-deception or illusion, while certainly the demand for self-abnegation and sacrifice is again made more infinite. The love which does not lead to God, the love which does not have this as its sole goal, to lead the lovers to love God, stops at the purely human judgment as to what love and what

love's sacrifice and submission are; it stops and thereby escapes the possibility of the last and most terrifying horror of the collision: that in the love relationship there are infinite differences in the idea of what love is.

Merely humanly understood this collision can never enter, for merely humanly understood, the fundamental conception of what love is must essentially be a common conception. Only when understood in the Christian way is the collision possible, since it is the collision between the Christian and the purely human understanding. Nevertheless, Christianity knows how to steer through this difficulty, and no other doctrine has ever taught how to persevere so long in love as has Christianity. Unchanged and immovable, it teaches, precisely for the sake of the beloved, how to hold fast to the true conception of what love is, and then be willing to find the reward for its love in being hated by the beloved—for there is indeed the difference of infinity, an eternal difference in language, between what one party understands by love, and what the other party understands by it. To yield to the conception of the beloved as to what love is, that is humanly regarded as loving, and if one does it, then one is loved. But to hold out against the beloved's purely human conception of what love is by denying the wish, and insofar, also against what the lovers, from the human standpoint, must themselves wish, in order to hold fast the God-idea: that is the collision. It can never occur to the purely human apprehension of what love is, that a man through being loved as intensely as possible by another man, might be an obstacle in the way of the other man. And yet from the Christian standpoint this is exactly possible, for to be loved in this way may interfere with the God-relationship of the lovers. But what is there then to do?

That the beloved should wish to caution against this will certainly not help much, for that would only make him even more lovable—and consequently the lovers would be even more deceived. Christianity knows how to remove the collision without breaking off the love; there is required only the sacrifice (that is certainly in many cases the hardest thing possible, and always very hard): of being willing to find the reward for his love in being hated. Wherever a man is so loved, so admired by others, that he is in the way of becoming dangerous to their God-relationship, there is a collision; but where there is a collision there is also demanded the sacrifice which the merely human conception of what love is does not suspect. For the Christian conception is: truly to love one's self is to love God; truly to love another man is by every sacrifice (even to one's self being hated), to help the other man to love God or in loving God.

This is certainly very easy to understand; in the world, on the con-

quires is the requirement of the law (yet not the individual man's, for thereby we fall into the purely arbitrary, as was shown), how can the individual come to begin to act; or if it is not left to chance, where does the individual happen to begin, instead of everyone starting at the beginning? Before the individual can begin to act, he must first learn from "the others" what the law requires; but each one of the others will again as individuals have to learn from "the others." In this way, all human life transforms itself into one huge excuse—can this possibly be what we call the great, matchless, common undertaking, the great achievement of the race? The category of "the others" becomes fantastic, and the fantastically aspiring determination of what the law requires a false alarm.

And if now this inhumanly extensive effort toward a common agreement among all men were not finished in a single evening, but dragged along from generation to generation, then as a consequence it would be quite accidental as to where the individual happened to begin; it would depend, so to speak, on where he came into the game. Some would begin at the beginning, but would die before they reached the halfway mark; others would begin midway, but die without seeing the end, which no one would ever really see, for that would only come when the whole thing was past and world history ended; only then would one completely learn what the requirement of the law was. What a pity that human life should not be forced to begin until just as it is over, and in consequence have to be carried on by all men without complete knowledge of what the law required!

When of seven men who are all suspected of having committed a crime which could not have been committed by any one else, the seven each say: "It wasn't me, it was the others," then we understand that "the others" refers to the other six, and so on. But now when all seven, each severally, have said, "It was the others," what then? Is there not a phantasm conjured up which has doubled the actual seven, and which would have us believe that there were many more, although we know that there were only seven? So, too, when the whole race, each individual severally, hits upon the idea of saying "the others," then a phantasm is conjured up, as if the race had once existed before the time which marks its actual existence; but here it becomes so difficult to prove the falsity, the dazzling appearance of profundity, because the race is innumerable. Nevertheless, the situation is entirely the same as in what we might be tempted to call a fairy story about the seven and the seven others. For this is exactly the situation that arises when the purely human determination of what the law's requirement is, constitutes the law's requirement: one helps one's self up by using that romantically fantastic "the others," and down below they assist each other by forming a little

union. For certainly if there is to be a second existence of the human race, but not a fantastic one, its existence the second time must be its existence in God, or rather this is its first existence, wherein each individual learns from God the requirement of the law. The actual existence is the second existence.


But what then does that confused condition described resemble? I wonder if it is not like a mutiny. Or should we hesitate to call it by that name if at a given moment it were the whole race who became guilty of this, and we then, it is well to note, add that it is a mutiny against God? Or is the moral so subordinated to the accidental that when a great number do wrong, or we all do wrong, then this wrong becomes the right? This explanation would again be merely a repetition of the mutinous thought, or of its thoughtlessness, for if it is still, in the final analysis, men instead of God who determine what the law's requirement is, he who forgets this is not only guilty of rebellion against God on his own account, but he also assists others in becoming guilty, so the mutiny gets out of hand. For who could halt such a mutiny if it started? Should we perhaps, only in a new pattern, repeat the error of the mutiny, and everyone in particular say, "I cannot stop it, 'the others' must"? I wonder if every individual is not pledged to God to halt the mutiny, naturally not by shouting and imaginary self-importance, not by ruling and wishing to force others to obey God, but through his own unconditional obedience, his own unconditional laying hold on the God-relationship and the God-requirement, and thereby expressing for himself personally that God exists and is the only ruler, he, on the contrary, the unconditionally obedient.

* Only then is there sense and meaning and truth and reality in existence, when all of us, each one personally, if I may say so, accept our orders at one place, and then, each one personally, unconditionally obey this same order. Since it is one and the same order, then to that extent one man might be able to learn it from another—if it was certain, or at least reasonably certain, that this other man would communicate it rightly. However, there would still be a confusion everywhere, as it is in conflict with God's order, for God wishes, for the sake of certainty and equality and responsibility, that every individual should learn the law's requirement from Him. When this is so, then there is stability in existence, because the stability has God in it; there is no turbulence in it, for each individual does not begin with "the others," and consequently not with excuses and evasions, but he begins with the God-relationship, and hence he stands firmly, and thereby he also checks, as far as he can reach, the capriciousness which is the beginning of mutiny.

So, too, in relation to the law of love—when there is sense and truth and stability in existence, when we all, each one personally, learn from

God what the requirement is to which we must conform, and when, for the rest, we all, each one personally, defend ourselves against the human confusion (it goes without saying that if we all did this, there would then be no confusion), aye, if necessary, defend ourselves against the beloved, against the friend, against our nearest, who are, nevertheless, especially the objects of our love, insofar as these in some way wish to teach us a different explanation, or help us on a bypath; on the other hand, indebted to them if they wish to help us in the right direction. Let us not forget this, let us not deceive or be deceived by vague, misty conceptions of what love is, but let us heed God's explanation, indifferent as to whether the beloved, the friend, or the loved ones believe or do not believe—yet no, not indifferent, on the contrary, inwardly concerned if they disagree with us, but still calmly and unchanged continuing to love them.

There is really a conflict between what the world and what God understand by love. It is easy enough to bring about an apparent agreement (as is already apparent in the use of one and the same word, "love"); on the other hand it is more difficult really to detect the disagreement; but this difficulty is inevitable if we are to know the truth. There is a saying current in the world: "Selfishness is the wisest policy." Certainly this saying does not give one the most favorable opinion of the world; for that is scarcely a good world in which selfishness is the wisest policy or that which brings the greatest advantage. But now, even if the world regarded selfishness as the wisest policy, it by no means follows that it might not in turn regard love as the nobler quality. It does this too, only the world does not understand what love is. Again, it is easy enough to bring about a surface agreement between God and the world's interpretation of love; it is even apparent in the use of the familiar expression that "love is noble." Still, misunderstanding hides in this. What good does it do to commend love as noble, as Christianity also does, if the world understands by love something different, and hence also understands something different by the word "noble"! No, if the world will be explicit, it must say: "Not only is selfishness the wisest policy, but if you wish to be loved by the world, if you wish it to praise your love and you as noble, then you must, in the Christian sense, be selfish, for that which the world calls love is selfishness." The distinction which the world makes is, namely, this: If one wishes to be alone in being selfish, which, however, very rarely happens, then the world calls it selfishness; but if in his selfishness he unites with some other selfish people, especially with many other selfish people, then the world calls it love. The world can never get any further in determining what love is, because it has neither God nor the neighbor as the middle term. What the world honors and loves under the name



of love, is a union in selfishness. The union also demands sacrifice and devotion from the one whom it will call affectionate; it demands that he shall sacrifice a part of his own self-love in order to unite in the united selfishness; and it demands that he shall sacrifice the God-relationship so that in worldliness he may enter into the union which excludes God, or at most accepts Him for the sake of appearances. On the contrary, God understands by love sacrificial love; in the divine sense, sacrificing love, which sacrifices everything in order to secure God a place, even if the heavy sacrifice became even heavier because no one understood it, which, however, in another sense, is proper for true sacrifice; for that sacrifice, which is understood by men, truly has its reward in their approbation, and insofar is not the true sacrifice which must unconditionally be without reward. Therefore we dare not in our understanding of the apostolic word, that love is the fulfillment of the law, assent to the superficial saying that if a man really has love, then he will also be loved by men. He will far more probably be accused of selfishness, just because he will not love men in the same sense in which they selfishly love themselves. The facts are these: the highest degree of self-love, the world also calls selfishness; the self-love of the union, the world calls love; a noble, sacrificial, magnanimous, human love, which yet is not the Christian love, is ridiculed by the world as foolishness; but the Christian love is hated and abominated and persecuted by the world. And so let us not again, through a doubtful compromise, conceal irregularities by saying: "That is the way of the world, but it is otherwise with the Christian." For this is quite true, but if every baptized individual is a Christian, and a baptized Christendom sanctifies the Christian, then the "world" simply does not exist in a Christian land, which in such a case is proved by the help of the lists of the sexton and the superintendent of police.

No, there is really a conflict between what God understands by love and the world's understanding of it. Oh, but if it is inspiring to fight for home and fatherland, then it is also inspiring to strive for God, which he does who before God and in His sight, holds fast to the God-relationship, and its definition of what love is! It is true God does not need any man, any more than He needs the whole race, or everything which exists at the moment, which to Him is the nothing from which He created it; but he fights for God who fights the good fight, in order to express the fact that God exists and is the Lord, whose explanation must unconditionally be obeyed.

The God-relationship is the sign by which the love for men is recognized as genuine. As soon as the love-relationship does not lead me to God, and as soon as I in the love-relationship do not lead the other man to God, then is the love, even if it is the greatest happiness and delight

of affection, even if to the lovers it is the highest good of the earthly life, still not the true love. The world can never get this into its head, that God does not thus merely become the third party in every love-relation, but really becomes the sole object of affection, so it is not the husband who is the wife's beloved, but it is God; and it is the wife who is helped by her husband to love God, and conversely, and so on. The merely human interpretation of love can never get any further than reciprocity: the lover is the beloved, and the beloved is the lover. Christianity teaches that such a love has not yet found its right object—God. A love-relationship is threefold: the lover, the beloved, the love; but the love is God. And, therefore, to love another man is to help him to love God, and to be loved is to be helped to love God.

What the world says about love is confusing. When it is said to a youth who is going out into the world, "Love, then you will be loved," this is quite true—especially if the journey he entered upon were into the eternal, into the land of perfection. But the youth must go out into the world, and therefore it is deceitful to speak thus, without reminding him about laying hold on God in order to learn what love is, and in order to learn that the world, if it had not learned the same lesson from God (alas, for then it would have been the land of perfection the youth entered!), has a completely different conception. If Christ had not been love, and the love in Him the fulfillment of the law, I wonder if He would have been crucified! If He had abated His demand for Himself and had agreed with those who make love anything but the fulfillment of the law, divinely understood; if instead of being the world's Teacher and Saviour, He had in conformity with the world's conception, transformed His conception of what it means to love: I wonder if He then would not have been loved and praised by everyone, even idolized (oh, terrible madness!) by His followers. If the apostles had not held fast to the idea that love is the fulfillment of the law, and hence something different from the fulfillment of the human agreements and participation in the human society; if they had not held fast in this same sense to loving men without being willing to accommodate themselves to the world's conception of what it means to love: I wonder if they would have been persecuted! For what is it the world loves and calls love, what other than indecision and completely earthly union in worldliness, which from the standpoint of eternity, is precisely indecision?

I wonder if any man ever became more notorious for selfishness than the One who really held to the God-requirement, and, faithful to this, loved men, and therefore also continued to love them, although persecuted and misjudged. Is it not also natural that the world should be angry if there is One who is loved more dearly by such a man, One in love to whom such a love exists for men? When one's endeavor is exerted to gain earthly advantage, then one certainly complains unjustly about the world

if one complains about not finding friends; for at that price one can be loved enough, gain friends, have many or few with whom—one affectionately associates.

But when a man's endeavor is put forth unconditionally in a total sacrifice, in the sacrifice of everything, impoverished, despised, excluded from the synagogue, in order to unite with God in loving men: then you can, for that matter, advertise in the paper that you are looking for a friend—if only you add the conditions, and hence with special emphasis, "that it is not for the sake of advantage"; you will have trouble in finding anyone. We ourselves marvel that Christ chose such humble men for apostles, but, disregarding what was certainly intentional in the choice, the humbler the apostle was as man, the stronger the impression of that which the divine authority granted to him. I wonder if it is not almost more wonderful that Christ nevertheless got them, hence that He really succeeded in forming a union of eleven, whose purpose was to unite in their readiness to let themselves be scourged, persecuted, mocked, crucified, beheaded, and whose purpose too was not mutually to flatter one another, but, on the contrary, mutually to help one another in humility before God. I wonder if this would not sound like a terrible mockery of what the world understands by love, but I wonder if it might not besides act like a beneficial awakening, if in these times, when so many societies are being formed, someone were to advertise that he planned to establish such a union of love! For that there are a lot of people, if someone wishes to make all sacrifices, who would indolently like to take advantage of his sacrifices, that is something the world can understand; the kind of participation which is for one hundred per cent profit but less than half of that for the work, is common enough in the world. And it goes without saying that there is also true participation to be found here on earth, but where you find it, you will find it hated and persecuted by the world.

Try it. Imagine a man (and you need not even think of him as possessing the perfection which distinguished that glorious One who, repudiated by the race, became the honor of the race), imagine a man who was or became, or was and became, so unhappy that earthly goods and earthly advantage had lost their allurements for him; so unhappy that he, "weary of his groaning," as we read in the Holy Scriptures about the unhappy Sara—"so distressed she wished to hang herself" imagine that then, just in his darkest hour of need, it became quite clear to him that in spite of his unhappiness, which certainly would not be alleviated by gaining the goods of the whole world, since their possession by encouraging happy enjoyment would be to him a painful recollection of his wretchedness, and would really not be augmented by worldly adversity, which, like dark weather for the melancholy, would

harmonize with his mood; imagine that it became quite clear to him that the highest even still remained to him in wishing to love men, in wishing to serve the good, in wishing to serve the truth for the sake of truth alone, the only thing which could truly cheer his anxious heart and fill him with an eternal joy of life—imagine such a one in the world, and you will see it will go hard with him. He does not gain the love of the world, he will not be understood or loved by the world. In proportion as men belong a little more or less to the world, some will pity him, some smile at him, some will prefer to get rid of him because they would feel the sting, some will envy him and yet not envy him, some will feel attracted to him but also repelled by him; some will work against him, but yet have everything in readiness to honor him after his death. Some young women will feel themselves fascinated by him, but those only a little older will not completely understand him. But the world would simply and plainly prove his selfishness because he secured no earthly advantage either for himself or others, not for a single other man. The world is not better; the highest it recognizes and loves, when it aims highest, is: to love the good and men, but in such a way that one also secures an earthly advantage for one's self and some others. Anything more the world, even with the best of intentions—now this is of course only playing with words—cannot grasp; one step too far and you have lost the friendship and love of the world. Such is the world and its love. No scientist who tests with a hydrometer the specific gravity of a liquid, can more certainly vouch for how many degrees it registers, than I am willing to vouch for this appraisal of worldly love, which is not entirely evil, as it is sometimes passionately represented to be, or entirely sound, but to a certain degree both good and bad. But from the Christian standpoint this “to a certain degree” is evil.

Nevertheless, we do not say this in order to judge; let us not waste time on it. Reflection only seeks by the aid of thought and by the help of a little knowledge of human nature, to penetrate the illusion, or to understand that apostolic saying with respect to the daily life, where the illusion exactly belongs. Certainly no time is needed in order to be deceived; one can be deceived immediately and continue to be so for a long time; but it takes time to notice that one is deceived. It is certainly easier hastily to imagine what love is, and then satisfy one's self in the imagination; it is far easier hurriedly to get some kinds of men to associate themselves in selfishness, loved and honored by them to the last: there is after all nothing so easy and nothing so sociable as this going astray. But if this is your ultimate and highest ambition, to get life made easy and sociable, then never have anything to do with Christianity; flee from it, for it wishes exactly the opposite, wishes to make

life difficult for you, and to do it just by making you solitary before God. No earnest man therefore becomes tired of tracking down illusions; for inasfar as he is a thinker, he fears most of all being in error—however convenient the arrangement, however pleasant the company might be. And as a Christian, he fears most of all being lost without knowing it—however flattering, however brilliant the environment and the company are.

That such pretentiousness is not love seems so easy to perceive that one might believe that no one would think of supporting it. Still this is not always the case, and here is precisely an example of an illusion insofar as the merely human judgment might be decisive. If the pretentious man himself were to think of calling it love, then one would certainly raise a protest, since there was no illusion; the illusion arises only when others wish to become the object of this pretentiousness, regard it as love, praise it as love, and the pretentious man as kind. Without pretending to be any great judge of human nature, it is not difficult to point out life-relationships where a man can be so placed that there are those who, just to gain his good will, simply praise his love if in the name of love he wishes to demand everything from them. There are indeed men who really know nothing about love other than that it is petting. Such men would like to have the one they love and are fond of, be pretentious. There are men who have inhumanly forgotten that every man ought to develop himself through that divine resemblance common to all men, and that therefore, whether a human being is man or woman, poorly endowed or richly endowed, lord or bond servant, beggar or rich man, the relation between man and man should never and dare never be such that the one adores and the other is adored. This is so easy to perceive that one perhaps thinks that this abomination can originate only from the misuse of superiority, hence in the supercilious. Alas, it can also arise in the impotent, in the one who himself desires it in order thus to have some significance for the superior.

Take away the equality of eternity and its divine satisfaction, that is, assume that it is forgotten: then the weak woman in her relation to the supercilious man, the man poorly endowed who is yet vain of his relation to the mighty man, the poor man who has but a worldly concern in his relation to the "big man," the very subservient and yet worldly-minded man in his relation to his master—none of them know any other way to express this relationship except by abjectly prostrating themselves. And since they still, because they *wish* to know nothing higher, know nothing higher, therefore they themselves desire this abomination, desire it passionately. Their desire is to exist for the powerful; as power cannot be secularized, so subserviency becomes the thing desired. Is it perhaps not apparent that a girl would prefer ruthlessly to throw herself

away and worship the idolized (desiring only one thing from him, that he would ruthlessly demand everything from her, and under these circumstances she would highly praise his love), rather than to understand that before God all these human differences are a joke, are nonsense, often leading to perdition? And yet the girl would call it selfishness for the adored to try to impart this knowledge to her. Have we not seen that the man weak through forgetting God, the debased man, had but one wish, that he might cast himself in the dust before his lord—in order to exist for him; only one desire, that the lord will tread upon him so that he may joyfully praise the gracious love and goodness of his lord! Have we not seen that the vainglorious man, who had quite forgotten God, desired only some relation to the distinguished man and readily called the most debased actions a sign of his love! And if the distinguished man does not desire this, if he wishes to prevent this by helping that man to the blessed equality before God, this is called selfishness. Oh, if the eternal is taken away from a man, or is in him as if it were not present, the eternal which can at once cool the unsound passions in the relation between man and man, but which can also enkindle when the temporal existence would chill; if the eternal is taken away from a man, then there is no assurance that it will not occur to him to call the most abominable practices by the name of love, and even passionately desire to be the object of these abominable practices. One can ruthlessly wish to make himself indispensable through his power, but he can also do this through his weakness, and therefore, cringing and begging, call another man's superciliousness love.

But the demand of eternity will not excuse a man from fulfilling the law of God, even if the whole world were to excuse him, even if the whole world were to love his pretentiousness but misunderstand his love, because perhaps only through despair can the despairing learn to hold themselves to God, instead of through their importunities injuring their own souls. The demand of eternity will prevent love from lingering in any self-deception, and from being satisfied with any illusion; and it will be no excuse to say that the men themselves wished it, that they themselves called it love, and believed that being loved consisted in being the object of such pretentiousness. It is God who has implanted love in man, and it is God who must decide what in every case is love.

But then when your friend, your beloved, your loved ones, your contemporaries, notice that you wish to learn from God what it means to love, instead of learning it from them, then they will perhaps say to you: "Spare yourself; give up this overstraining; why will you make your life so hard? Lessen your demands; then we shall live a beautiful, a rich, a significant life in friendship and joy." And if you give way

to the suggestions of that false friendship, then you will be loved, be praised for your love. But if you will not do it, if you will not in loving be a traitor to God or to yourself or to the others, then you may find yourself being called selfish. For your conviction that to love yourself is in truth to love God, that loving another man is helping him to love God, this, your conviction, your friend will perhaps not trouble about. He notices indeed that your life, if it truly conforms to the God-demand, contains, even if you say nothing, a reminder, a demand upon him—this he will have nothing to do with. Your reward is, therefore, the sacrifice of your friendship and your reputation for being a friend.

In the world the worldly has, so much the worse, the upper hand to the degree that when one talks about false friendship, one immediately thinks of some deception with respect to worldly advantages, or a faithlessness regarding earthly goods. And this was certainly not your friend's intention or meaning. He only wished to defraud you of the God-relationship, and that you as his friend would be helpful to him in deceiving himself: then in the deception he would loyally unite with you for life and death. We speak about the duplicity of the world, and in so doing at once suggest that it deceives one with respect to earthly goods, disappoints one's great expectations, mocks one's bold plans. But, if in this respect it honestly fulfills its obligations almost more abundantly than it had promised, that this is just the time when it can deceive most dangerously, that this its most dangerous duplicity, one more rarely thinks about: that the world through its—sincere friendship (for false friendship would consist in its defrauding one of the temporal things), wishes to teach one to forget God. They talk about making a covenant with evil, and if one asks what advantage is offered as compensation, then people will mention power, glory, honor, the satisfaction of desires and so on. But that one can by such a covenant also win the love of men, be praised for one's love, that is something they forget to speak about and to think about. Nevertheless, this is the case—for the converse is and would indeed be the case, that they who in love to God loved men, would be hated by the world. As the world by offering power and might has wished to tempt a man to forget God, and then has treated the same man as refuse because he endured its temptation: so has the world also temptingly offered a man its friendship, and then hated him because he would not be its friend. The eternal, the God-demand for love, the world will not readily hear anything about, even more reluctantly will it see it expressed in life. But I wonder if the world therefore says about itself that it is selfish. By no means. And then what does the world do? The world says about the one who insists on maintaining his relation to God, that he is selfish. The way out is old: sacrifice one, if all the others can profit thereby.

In this God and the world agree, that love is the fulfilling of the law; the difference is that the world understands by law something it hit on itself; and he who agrees to this and observes it faithfully, he is kind. How many a man has not a maiden's love, from the divine standpoint, destroyed, just because he, defrauded of his God-relationship, remained too true to her, while she in turn was unlimited in her eulogies over his love! How many a man has not been corrupted by family and friends, while yet his corruption did not appear to be so, for now he was loved and praised for his love—by his family and friends? How many a man has not an age corrupted, the age which for compensation adored his affectionate disposition because it made him forget the God-relationship, and transformed it into something one can vociferously make a show of, rejoice over and effeminately admire without being consciously reminded of anything higher? For, in order to raise another and truly earnest question, and also in order not even to point at the highest pattern but to be content with a humbler one, which yet in the so-called Christendom unfortunately is adequate enough: why, I wonder, did that simple wise man of antiquity when, accused before the court of frivolity by the worldly and selfish, he was condemned to death, defend his life; why, I wonder, did he compare himself to a "gadfly" at the same time he called himself a divine gift; and why, I wonder, did he love the young so much? Was not the first because, as a pagan could, he had loved men in some higher sense, hence because he had really awakened, and had not in any way allowed himself to be seduced by the temporal existence, or by anything human; not by a dull or fiery union in love, in friendship, in agreement with others or with an age, but he had preferred to be the selfish, the teasingly annoying man whom no one loved! Was not the latter because he perceived that the young still had the susceptibility to the divine which is so easily lost with the years in busyness, in love and friendship, in submission to a merely human judgment and to the demands of the times? Hence, because through his concept of the eternal and through "something divine," he had prevented his love for men from halting in self-deception and illusion; hence, because through keeping himself close to the demand, he had made himself a demand on men.

If, therefore, in some way, even if in human frailty, you aspire to fulfill the apostolic saying that "Love is the fulfillment of the law," then give heed to men! Does this mean that you would be loved by them? Oh, how absurd! How then could your love become the fulfillment of the law? But give heed that it does not become more important to you that you should be esteemed for loving them than that you do love them! Take care that being loved is not more important to you than the fact of loving each other! Take care that you do not deprive your-

self of the highest, because you cannot bear to be called selfish! Do not appeal to men's opinions of you in order to prove your love; for the opinion of men has validity only insofar as it harmonizes with God's demand; otherwise men are only your accomplices! Learn also, and never forget the lesson, this sad truth of the earthly life, that no love between man and man ever can or will be perfectly happy, will ever dare to be perfectly confident! For, divinely understood, even the happiest love between man and man has still one danger which the merely human understanding of love does not consider, the danger that the earthly love might become too intense, so that the God-relationship would be interfered with; the danger that the God-relationship, when humanly speaking there is nothing but peace and no danger even in sight, may exact even this, the happiest love, as a sacrifice. And from this possibility of danger it follows that even in the happiest love-relationship, you must always anxiously watch, although this concern is not the fear that you might grow tired of the beloved or the beloved of you, but lest you should both forget God, or that the beloved might do so, or you yourself. And from the possibility of this danger it follows, recalling the introduction to these reflections, how difficult it may be in the Christian sense, to promise love, when the fact of keeping the promise may signify that you will come to be hated by the beloved. Only God, who, as we have explained, is also the only true object of love, is always happy, always blessed in loving; you must not watch in concern, but watch only in adoration.

Love is the fulfillment of the law. But the law consists of an inexhaustible multitude of provisions. How then could we be prepared to speak about them? So let us then assemble the multitude of decisions. *The demand of the law* must therefore be twofold, *partly a demand for inwardness, and partly a demand for continuity.*

What then is the required inwardness? The merely human understanding of love also requires inwardness, devotion, sacrifice, but it defines these only humanly. The devotion of inwardness is: that every sacrifice should satisfy the conception of the beloved (the object of love) as to what love is, or, on its own responsibility, venture to decide what love is. But divinely understood, inwardness believes that loving one's self is loving God, and that truly loving another man is being helpful to him for or in loving God. Hence inwardness is not here determined merely by the love-relationship, but by the God-relationship. The inwardness demanded is then the inwardness of self-abnegation, which is more closely defined, not according to the understanding of the beloved (the object of affection) about love, but with regard to helping the be-

loved to love God. It follows as a matter of course that the love-relationship may, as such, be the sacrifice which is demanded.

The inwardness of love must be sacrificial, and consequently must not demand any reward. The purely human understanding of love teaches also that love demands no reward—except that it wishes to be loved, as if that which constitutes the entire relationship, yet not within the category of the relation between man and man, were no reward. But the inwardness of Christian love is willing, as the reward of its love, to be hated by the beloved (the object of affection). This proves that this inwardness is a pure God-relationship; it has no reward, not even the reward of being loved: thus it belongs absolutely to God, or absolutely to man in God. The self-abnegation, the self-control, the self-sacrifice, which are still but media of exchange within the temporal, within the human horizon, are not truly Christian; they are as a jest in comparison with the Christian earnestness; they are like the first start toward a Christian decision. One will sacrifice this or that or everything, but one still hopes that this sacrifice will be understood and have sense and meaning for men, who then must recognize and rejoice at one's sacrifices. One is willing to forsake everything, but still one does not think that along with that his sacrifice should be forgotten in the conversation and understanding of men.

The promptings of the sacrifice then become apparent; it pretends to abandon the world, but it still remains within the world. We by no means wish to disparage this. Oh, even this merely human sacrifice is perhaps met with seldom enough. But from the Christian standpoint, we must say that it remains standing at the halfway mark. It ascends to a high place, for, humanly speaking, the sacrifice stands high; it throws everything away in order to ascend to this exalted place, whose elevation admiration discovers, while the sacrifice perceives that it is seen. But to stand upon this exalted place (for truly, sacrifice is elevation) accused, despised, hated, ridiculed almost worse than the most debased among the base; hence superhumanly taxed in attaining the lofty place, to stand there in such a way that it seems to everyone as if one stood at the lowest level of the contemptible: from the Christian standpoint this is sacrifice, and from the human point of view it is also madness. Only One sees the true connection, and He does not admire; for God in heaven does not admire any man.

On the contrary, while true sacrifice has but one single place of resort: God, so he is as if once more forsaken by God, for he understands that before God he is simply without merit. But humanly he also understands that had he but sacrificed a half of what he did sacrifice, then men would have understood him, loved and admired him, and yet, in a certain sense, that before God this partial sacrifice would have the

same significance as the true sacrifice, for before God no sacrifice, not one, has merit. This is sacrifice according to the Christian standpoint, and also, humanly understood, it is madness. This is loving from the Christian standpoint; if it is true that loving is the highest happiness, this is indeed the hardest suffering—if then the holding of one's self to God were not the highest bliss!

The other requirement of the law is for the continuation of love for the duration of time. The merely human conception of love also demands this; still from the Christian standpoint it is a different demand, since the inwardness demanded is different. The demand for the continuation in time means that the same inwardness of love shall be preserved throughout the duration of time, which insofar is in a certain sense a new expression for inwardness. As soon as you think that you have done enough in your love, or have loved long enough, and now may ask something from the other, then through that you discover that your love is prepared to become a demand, as if, however devoted and sacrificing your love is, there were still a limit where it must at bottom appear to be a demand—but love is the fulfillment of the law. For it is not some great moment of self-abnegation that we are speaking about; the law demands the same inwardness for the duration of time. The duration of time! But is not this, as it were, to do violence to one's soul, and a self-contradiction in the demand, at the same time to demand continuation in such different directions, in the direction of length and in the direction of depth? Lo, the arrow flies swiftly forward through the air, but if at the same time it ought to bore itself down into the earth and still continue to fly with the speed of an arrow: ah, what a demand! Lo, in the great moment of enthusiasm, then the eternal tarries, but then when time begins its restless activity, when it continues to pass—then not to go enthusiastically with time, but to go hurriedly with the haste of time, and yet slowly with the lingering of eternity! To lie on one's deathbed (and when a man in self-renunciation has been obliged to make the heaviest sacrifice: and for a reward of his love is hated by its object, then he is like the one who lies at the point of death), and then to have a future, a long life before one, although everything is past, hence, at once and at any moment, lying on his deathbed to have to stand erect and go forward: what a demand! To lie down is exactly the opposite of walking upright, but to lie upon one's deathbed is certainly the most decisive expression for lying down, and hence the farthest possible removed from standing erect. Have you ever seen a weary traveler bearing a heavy burden, fighting at every step in order not to sink to earth? He holds himself erect only with the greatest difficulty, he struggles in order not to sink down. But to have sunk down, to lie down, to lie upon his deathbed, and then to hasten confidently forward with the

stride of the erect: wonderful! And the demand may require this, and also require its continuance for the duration of time.

Alas! in the world of the spirit there is something fraudulent, for which there is nothing analogous found in the external world. We say for instance that a child must learn to spell before it can learn to read. Fortunately or unfortunately, this is undoubtedly a necessity. It has never happened to any child that through a phenomenon, an illusion, it had occasion to imagine that it could already read long before it could spell. But in the spiritual relation, how seductive! For here does not everything begin with the great moment of the resolve, of the purpose, of the promise—where one reads as fluently as the most accomplished reader, the one best trained in reading by book? And so, if the next comes first, what is the use of the very petty things, the plainly commonplace things, which simply do not make any strong impression, or wish to help one by the daring context? Alas! on the contrary, it is like the spelling which tears the words apart into letters, so that there are long, long hours when one cannot arrive at the meaning, and vainly waits to see the connection. To strive with one's self in self-abnegation, especially if one must conquer, is regarded as the most difficult struggle; and to strive with time, if one would completely conquer, is regarded as an impossibility.

The heaviest burden laid upon a man (for he has laid the burden of sin upon himself) is in a certain sense, time—do we not say, too, that it can be deadly long! And yet, on the other hand, how gentle, how soothing, how seductive a power time has! But this alleviation, this seductiveness, is a new danger. If a man became guilty of something—let but a little time pass, especially if he seems to have made some progress toward betterment: how much more trivial his guilt appears! But is this really so? Is it then also true that if the next moment the thoughtless has forgotten his own guilt, it is then forgotten?

Tell me then if it is possible to speak about this saying, that love is the fulfillment of the law, without judging against one's will, if one's will is merely to judge one's self! Is there any more precise way of expressing how infinitely far a man is from fulfilling the law than this, that the distance is so great that he really cannot even compute it, cannot make up his reckoning! For not only is so much neglected daily, not to speak about what is deserved, but then when some time has passed, one is not even able to state the debt exactly, as it appeared to one's self, because time changes and softens one's judgment about the past—alas! but time never changes the demand, eternity's demand: that love is the fulfillment of the law.

III

B. LOVE IS A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

Now the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.—I TIMOTHY 1:5

IF in a single word we wished to point out and indicate the victory Christianity has won over the world, or even more correctly, the victory whereby it has more than overcome the world (since Christianity has never wished to conquer in the worldly sense), that infinite change at which Christianity aims, whereby everything has in truth remained as it was and yet in an infinite sense has become new (for Christianity has never been the friend of neo-mongering)—then I know no briefer or more decisive expression than this: it has made every human relationship between men into a matter of conscience. Christianity has not wished to tumble governments from the throne in order to set itself in their place; it has never in an external sense striven for a place in the world of which it is not a part (for even if it finds a place in the heart's room, it still has no place in the world), and yet it has infinitely changed everything which it permitted and does permit to continue.

As the blood pulses in every nerve, so Christianity in the conscience-relation wishes to penetrate everything. The change is not in the external, not in the obvious, and yet the change is infinite. As if a man instead of having blood in his veins had that divine elixir of which paganism dreamed, so Christianity wishes to inspire the everlasting life, the divine in the human race. That is why someone has said that the Christians were a people of priests, and that is why, when we consider the conscience-relation, we might say that the Christians are a people of kings. For take the humblest, the most downtrodden servant, imagine what we call a really simple, poor, wretched charwoman who makes her living by the humblest kind of labor: she has, from the Christian standpoint, the right, moreover we urgently beseech her in the name of Christianity to exercise it, she has the right while she is carrying on her work, to speak with herself and with God, which in no way retards her work; she has the right to say: "I do this work for a daily wage, but that I do it as carefully as I do, that I do—for conscience's sake!" Ah, from the worldly point of view there is only one man, only one, who recognizes no other obligation than that of conscience: that is the king. And yet that poor woman, from the Christian viewpoint, has the royal right to say to herself before God: "I do it for conscience's sake!" If the woman is dissatisfied because no man will listen to this speech, then it merely proves that she is not Christ-minded. Otherwise, it seems to me that it would still be enough that God has permitted me

to speak thus with Him—covetously to desire freedom of speech in this respect would be a great folly on my part. For there are certain things, and among them particularly the mysteries of inwardness, which lose through being made public, and which are quite lost when the publicity has become the thing of supreme importance to one; moreover there are mysteries which under such circumstances are not merely lost, but straightway become altogether meaningless. Christianity's divine intention is to say in confidence to every man: "Do not worry about the changing forms of the world or about your condition, as if in order to become an example, instead of being a poor working-woman, you had to be called 'My Lady.' Oh, no, dedicate yourself to the Christian way, and then it will show you a point outside the world; by the aid of this point you will be able to move both heaven and earth, moreover, you will accomplish the even greater miracle, you will move heaven and earth so quietly, so easily, that no one notices it."

This is the miracle of Christianity, more wonderful than that one of changing the water into wine; this miracle in all stillness, without any change of rulers, moreover without a hand being moved, of making every man, divinely understood, into a king, so easily, so smoothly, so miraculously, that the world in a certain sense does not need to know it. For in the world outside, there the king will and ought to be the only one who rules according to his conscience; but to obey—for conscience's sake will be permitted everyone; moreover, no one, no one can prevent it. And there within, there far within, where the Christian dwells in the conscience-relation, there is everything changed.

Lo, the world raises a tumult just to bring about a little change; it sets heaven and earth in motion for nothing, like the mountain which brought forth a mouse: Christianity in all stillness brings about the change of the infinite as if it were nothing. It is so quiet, quiet as nothing worldly can be; as quiet as only the dead and inwardness can be; and what else is Christianity but inwardness!

Thus Christianity transforms every relation between men into a conscience-relationship, and thus also into a love-relationship. It is this we now wish to contemplate, that, according to the Christian understanding,

LOVE IS A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE.

In the apostolic words we read, there are evidently contained two premises. First, "The end of the commandment is love." In the preceding deliberation we developed this when we associated the deliberation with another expression, that "Love is the fulfillment of the law." But next there follows in our text: if love is to be the end of the commandment, then it must be from a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of an unfeigned faith. Nevertheless, we prefer to focus our attention

on the one provision, that love is a matter of conscience, in which the other two are essentially contained, and to which they essentially refer.

That a certain kind of Christian love is made a matter of conscience is familiar to everyone. We speak about marriage. Before the minister unites the two in the wedlock which has been their hearts' choice, about which, however, he does not ask them; he asks them first, each one individually: "Have you consulted with God and with your conscience?" Hence the minister refers the love to conscience, as he speaks in a manner strange to them, without using the familiar "thou"; he lays upon the hearts of the two, each one in particular, that it is a matter of conscience; he makes an affair of the heart into a matter of conscience. More clearly and definitely this cannot be expressed, and yet there is still an expression for the same consideration in the form of a question, or in that which each one is specially asked. To ask—the individual is the more general expression for the conscience-relation, and therefore it is also Christianity's essential consideration of the human race, first and foremost to consider all these countless numbers each for himself, each especially as *the* individual.

Consequently, the minister asks the two, each severally, whether he has consulted with God and his conscience. This is the infinite change which in Christianity takes place in all love. It is, like all Christian transformations, so gentle, so secret—because it belongs only to the inwardness of the hidden man, to the incorruptible essence of a soul at peace. What abominations has not the world seen in the relation between man and woman, so that she, almost an animal, was a contemptible being in comparison with the man, a being as of another kind; what a battle there has been to give woman equal rights with man in worldly matters: but Christianity brings about only the change of the infinite; and therefore in all stillness. The external remains in a manner the old; for the man must be the woman's lord, she submissive to him. But in inwardness everything is changed, transformed by the aid of this little question to the woman, as to whether she has consulted with her conscience, so that she will have this man—for lord, for otherwise she does not get him. Still the question of conscience about the matter of conscience makes her in inwardness before God absolutely equal with the man. What Christ said of His kingdom, that it was not of this world, applies to all things Christian. Like a higher order of things, it will everywhere be present, but not apprehended. As a friendly spirit everywhere surrounds those dear to it, follows their every footstep, but may not be pointed out: so will the Christian spirit be a stranger in life because it belongs to another world, a stranger in the world because it belongs to the inner man. Foolish men have foolishly busied themselves in the name of Christianity to make it evident to the world that woman

should be installed in equal rights with man: Christianity has never asked or desired this. It has done everything for women, if she will in a Christian spirit be satisfied with the Christian; if she does not wish this, then she gains only a moderate compensation, for what she loses in trifling externals she can in a worldly sense gain by threats.

So with marriage. But because Christianity through marriage has made earthly love into a matter of conscience, it still does not seem to follow that on the whole it has made love into a matter of conscience. However, there are some who are of a different opinion, in error concerning the Christian teaching. Christianity has not made earthly love, with rare exceptions, into a matter of conscience, but because it has made all love into a matter of conscience, earthly love has also been included. And besides, if any kind of love would be difficult to transform into a matter of conscience, then surely earthly love which is based on impulse and inclination. For impulse and inclination seem to be alone sufficient for the decision of the question of whether love is present or not, and insofar seem to object as strongly to the Christian as the Christian does to them. If, namely, two human beings love each other, something they themselves must know best, and there is otherwise nothing to prevent their union, then why raise difficulties, as Christianity nevertheless does, by saying: "No, they must first answer the question as to whether they have consulted with God and their conscience"? Christianity never cares to make external changes, it never wishes to abolish impulse and inclinations; it wishes only to make an infinite change in the inner man.

And the change of infinity (which is the inwardness of the secret man, which has its direction inward toward the God-relationship, and so is different from the inwardness that is directed outward) Christianity wishes everywhere to bring about; therefore it wishes also to transform all love into a matter of conscience. Therefore it is a wrong conception of Christian love that thinks it is an individual kind of love which, as a rare exception, is made a matter of conscience. After all, one cannot make any individual thing into a matter of conscience; either one must make everything so, as Christianity does, or else nothing at all. Conscience has the inward power of expansiveness, like the omnipresence of God: one cannot restrict it to a single place and say that God is omnipresent in that single place, for that is simply denying His omnipresence. And in the same way to restrict the conscience-relation to something in particular is really to deny the conscience-relation.

If we were to consider a starting point for the teaching of Christianity about love (although it is impossible to fix a starting point in a circular motion), then we cannot say that Christianity begins by making earthly love a matter of conscience, as if this matter had primarily

attracted the attention of scholars, who have something quite different to think about than getting people married. No, Christianity began with fundamentals, and therefore with spiritual teaching about what love is. In order to determine what love is, the teaching begins either with God or with the neighbor, which is the essential Christian teaching, since in order in love to find one's neighbor one must start from God, and in the love for the neighbor must find God. Starting from this fundamental principle Christianity now seizes upon every expression of love, and is zealous for itself. We can therefore just as well say that it is the teaching about man's God-relationship which has made earthly love into a matter of conscience, as to say that it is the teaching about love to one's neighbor. Both statements are equally the Christian protest against the willfulness of impulse and affection. Because man primarily belongs to God before he belongs to any other relationship, he must first be asked whether he has taken counsel with God and with his conscience. Likewise with the woman. And because man, even in relation to the beloved woman, is primarily her neighbor and she is primarily his neighbor, therefore both he and she must be asked severally whether they have consulted with their consciences. In the Christian understanding there is an equality between all men before God, and in the teaching about loving one's neighbor there is equality of all men before God. One perhaps believes that love for a neighbor is something like a castoff earthly love; alas, love for one's neighbor is the last and the highest love, and must therefore be assured a place before the first and highest moment of the lovers themselves.

This is the Christian love. The idea on the contrary, that we should first busy ourselves in finding the beloved, so that in loving the beloved we shall first love the neighbor, is very far from being Christian love. To impulse and inclination this is certainly a strangely chilling preposterousness; but still it is the Christian idea and not more chilling than the spirit is with respect to the sensual or the sensual-psychical, while for the rest it is simply a spiritual attribute to be burning without blazing. Primarily your wife must be your neighbor, the fact that she is your wife is then a closer definition of your special relation to each other. But that which is the foundation of the eternal must also lie at the bottom of every expression of the special.

If this were not so, then how could one find a place for teaching about love for one's neighbor?—and yet one quite commonly does forget it. One speaks heathenishly, without really even noticing it, about earthly love and friendship, arranges his own life in this respect as if he were a heathen, and then one adds a little of the Christian teaching about loving one's neighbor, that is, some other men. But he who does not take care to see that his wife is his neighbor before she is his wife, will

never come to love his neighbor, no matter how many men he loves; he has made his wife an exception. This exception he will now either love too ardently his whole life through, or he will at first love her too ardently and then too coldly. For certainly a wife is loved differently from the friend, and the friend differently from the neighbor, but this is not an essential difference, for the fundamental likeness lies in the category "neighbor." It is with "neighbor" as with the category "human." Every one of us is human, and is thus again the difference he especially is; but the fact of being "human" is the category. No one must look too long at the difference, so that, cowardly or arrogantly, he forgets that he is human; no man through his special dissimilarity is an exception to the fact of being human, but he is first human and then he is the specially different. So Christianity has nothing against the husband loving his wife specially, but he must never love her so specially that she is excluded from being his neighbor, which every human being is; for then he disturbs the Christian category: then his wife is not his neighbor, and therefore the rest of men are not his neighbors. If there were a single living man who by his dissimilarity was excluded from being human, then would the concept "human" be confused: the exception is not human, and neither are the other men human.

One talks about a man loving his own wife conscientiously, or his friend, or his nearest kin; but one often speaks in such a way that what he says involves a great error. Christianity teaches that you shall love every human being, therefore also your wife and your friend, conscientiously; it is a matter of conscience. When, on the contrary, one speaks about loving his wife or his friend conscientiously, then one generally means in the discriminatory sense, or, what amounts to the same thing in the sense of the context, in loving them so preferentially that one has nothing at all to do with other men. But this kind of conscientiousness is from the Christian viewpoint, unconscientiousness. We see too that it is the wife or the friend who will consequently determine whether the love manifested is conscientious. Herein lies the falsity, for it is God who by Himself and by the help of the middle term, "neighbor," looks to see whether the love for wife or friend is conscientious love. Only then is your love a matter of conscience; but still this is clear, that one can only be truly conscientious in a matter that involves the conscience, for otherwise one might speak of being conscientious in receiving stolen goods. Love must first be determined to be a matter of conscience before there can be anything said about loving conscientiously. But love is not defined as a matter of conscience until either God or the neighbor is the middle term, hence, not in earthly love and friendship as such. But if the love in the earthly love and friendship, as such, is not defined as a matter of conscience, then is the

so-called conscientiousness precisely increasingly doubtful, the more firmly established the connection is.

Christian love must not be regarded as a more precise definition of what in paganism and elsewhere has been called love, but as a fundamental change. Christianity has not come into the world in order to teach you some change or other as to how you shall *specialy* love your wife or your friend, but in order to teach you how *in common humanity* you shall love all men. And it is also this change which in a Christian way changes earthly love and friendship.

One sometimes hears it said that to ask one about his earthly love is an indiscreet question. But frequently this is not understood quite correctly. The reason it is an indiscreet question is because a man in his earthly love primarily belongs to God. Therefore no one is angry when the priest asks this, for he asks it in the name of God. But this is usually not considered; on the contrary, they only suggest that love is such a personal matter that any third person is an irrelevance, any third person—even God, which from the Christian standpoint is a lack of conscience. Still it is an indiscreet question, altogether inconceivable regarding a matter in which a man does not have a God-relationship; for a God-relationship simply means having a conscience. Therefore a man could not have anything upon his conscience if God did not exist, for the relationship between the individual and God, the God-relationship, is the conscience, and that is why it is so terrible to have even the least thing upon one's conscience, because one is immediately conscious of the infinite weight of God.

Love is a matter of conscience, and hence is not a matter of impulse and inclination; nor is it a matter of emotion, nor a matter for intellectual calculation.

Worldly or merely human reflection is familiar with many kinds of love, and is well-informed about every individual difference, and how the individual differences mutually differ from each other; worldly reflection absorbs itself in the difference of the differences, loses itself—that is, if it is ever possible to lose one's self in superficiality. In Christianity the converse is the case. It really knows only one kind of love, spiritual love, and it does not pay much attention to elaborating on the different ways in which this fundamentally common love may manifest itself. All the distinctions between the different kinds of love are essentially swept away in the Christian love.

The merely human consideration interprets love *either* merely as purely immediate love, as impulse, inclination (earthly love), as affection (friendship), as emotion and affection with one or another discriminating additions of duty, natural relations, custom and so on, *or* as something which is to be aimed at and acquired, because the reason

perceives that being loved and favored is an earthly good, just as having men one loves and favors is an earthly good. All this Christianity is not really concerned with, either with the immediate kind of love, or with the convenient kind. Christianity allows all this to have validity, to have its own significance in external matters; but at the same time it wishes through its teaching about love, which is not calculated on convenience, to let the transformation of the infinite take place inwardly.

There is something wonderful, and perhaps for many something strange, something incomprehensible, in the fact that the eternal Christian power is so indifferent to recognition in externals, something wonderful in the fact that this is precisely earnestness, that the inwardness just for the sake of earnestness thus plays "stranger" in worldliness. There have therefore been times in the course of Christianity when people have believed that it was necessary to betray the secret, and thereby secure Christianity a worldly expression in worldliness. So someone wished to abolish marriage and lived no doubt—hidden in the cloister. Nevertheless, the secret of inwardness, or the inwardness of the hidden man who "holds the mystery of faith," is a far more certain hiding place. The concealment of the cloister in the solitude of the forest, or remote on the inaccessible mountain top, and the hiding place of the quiet dweller in the cloister, were therefore childishness compared with the true Christian inwardness, a childishness like that of a child who hides itself—so that someone shall come and find it. The cloister's hidden occupant informed the world that he had hidden himself, that is, from the Christian point of view he had not seriously hidden himself, but he was playing hide-and-seek. By a similar misunderstanding of the Christian teaching, by a similar childishness, people then believed that it was Christian to betray the mystery, worldly to express the Christian indifference to friendship, to family relations, to patriotism—which nevertheless is untrue, for Christianity is not indifferent to anything secular, on the contrary, it is solely spiritually concerned for everything.

Still to express indifference in such a way that one is eager that those concerned should get to know about it, is not exactly to be indifferent. Such an indifference is as when one man goes to another and says: "I don't care about you." Whereupon the other replies: "Then why do you take the trouble to tell me so?" That, too, would be childishness, it would be a childish way of being conscious of the Christian teaching. But Christianity is too earnest to notice this. Externally it does not wish to bring about any change at all in the external; it wishes to understand the external, to purify it, to consecrate it, and so make everything new, while everything remains old. The Christian may freely marry, freely love his wife, especially as he ought to love her, freely have friends and love his fatherland; but nevertheless there ought to be

in all this a basic understanding between himself and God in the Christian sense, and this is Christianity. For God is not like a man; it is not important to God to inspect the matter, to see for Himself whether His cause triumphs or not; He sees in secret just as well. And it is far from necessary for you to help God to learn that it is He who must help you to learn whether you are weaned from the worldliness which wishes a demonstration. Had Christ felt any need of a demonstration, then would He indeed have acted, He would have summoned the twelve legions of angels. This He simply did not want; on the contrary, He rebuked the disciples who wished to act in the matter because they did not know what manner of spirit they were when they wished for a decision in the external. Christianity simply does not wish a decision in external matters (except insofar as it wishes to establish one or another symbol, which is to worldliness a sign of offense, as, for example, the sacraments); it wishes, on the contrary, in the absence of this, to test the faith of the individual, to prove whether the individual will hold and be content with the mystery of faith. The secular always presses for a decision in externals; distrustful, it does not believe that otherwise there is a decision. But the cause of this distrust is precisely the temptation in which faith must be tested. From the worldly point of view, would it not be a far more certain way to decide, and to make it absolutely certain that God exists, to have an image of Him set up—so that one might then see that He existed? or that a false god existed, which yet does not exist?

Would it not have given a far greater assurance to worldliness if Christ in an external manner, perhaps by showy processions, had tried to prove who He was, instead of assuming the humble form of a servant, yet always inconspicuously, so that He looked exactly like any other man, and from the worldly point of view utterly failed in His task? But this is just the temptation by which faith is tested. And so, too, as touching the Christian interpretation of love. Worldly misunderstanding is insistent to have it expressed in an outward way that Christian love is spiritual love—alas, but this cannot be expressed outwardly in any externality, for spiritual love is precisely inwardness. But this is an offense to worldliness, like everything Christian, and therefore, as it were, the opposite, so that Christianity makes one arbitrarily external symbol the sole decision in the external, like the water in baptism. The world is always dead against; where Christianity wishes to have inwardness, there will secular Christendom have the external; and where Christianity wishes to have the external, there secular Christendom will have inwardness, which may be explained by the fact that where the Christian is, offense stands at his side.

Nevertheless, Christianity knows only one kind of love: spiritual

love; but this can lie at the bottom of and be present in every other expression of love. How strange! For this, the Christian thought of life, has something in common with the thought of death. Imagine a man who wished to gather together all his impressions of the discriminations of life, as between men, which he had seen, and then, when he had reckoned these up, would say, "I see all these different men, but I do not see the man." It is the same with Christian love in relation to the different kinds of love; it is in them all, that is to say, it may be, but the Christian love itself you cannot point out. You know earthly love by the fact that a woman is the beloved, friendship by the friend, love for the fatherland by the object; but the Christian love you cannot even know by the fact that it loves its enemy, for this manifestation of love may also be a secret form of resentment, as if someone did it for the sake of heaping coals of fire on his head. Nor can you know it by the fact that it hates the beloved, for it is really impossible for you to see this, if you are not the one concerned, and you are in the secret with God. From God's side, what confidence, in a certain sense, in a man, and what earnestness! We men, we take care to have certain and infallible signs by which love is known. But God and Christianity have no distinguishing marks—is this not having great, moreover all possible confidence in men! When we in regard to some man waive the sign by which his love is known, then we say that we show unbounded confidence in him, that we will believe in him in spite of all appearances. But why do you think that God shows such confidence? Is it not because He sees in secret? How earnest!

But you never see, nor has any man ever seen, the Christian love, just as no one has ever seen the "human." Nevertheless, "human" is the essential category, and Christian love is the essential love, as, from the Christian viewpoint, there is only one kind of love. For, to repeat, Christianity has not changed anything in what men had formerly learned about loving the beloved, the friend, and so on; it has neither added a little to it, nor taken anything away, but it has transformed everything, has transformed all love. And only to the degree that this fundamental change is followed by a change of inwardness in love and friendship, only insofar has it changed those. And it has done this by making all love a matter of conscience, which with respect to earthly love and friendship, and so on, can just as well indicate a cooling of the passions as it indicates the inwardness of eternal life.

Love is a matter of conscience, and must therefore be of a pure heart and of an unfeigned faith.

"A pure heart." Generally we mention provisionally that a free heart is required for love or in order to give itself up in love. This heart must not belong to anyone or anything else; moreover, even the hand which

gives it away must be free; for it must not be the hand which takes the heart by force and gives it away, but on the contrary, it must be the heart which gives away the hand. And this heart, free as it is, will then find complete freedom in giving itself away—not the bird you release from your hand, not the arrow released from the bowstring, not the branch which has been bent, when it recovers its direction, nothing, nothing is as free as the free heart when it freely gives itself. For the bird is still free only because you release it, and the arrow speeds forth only because it leaves the bowstring, and the branch again grows erect because the restraint ceases; but the free heart does not become free by the cessation of resistance; it was free, it had its freedom—and yet it found its freedom. Beautiful thought, blessed freedom, which finds what it has! However I talk almost like a poet, which may also be permissible if the main point be not forgotten, if it is done precisely to illuminate this—for this is why we endeavor to speak ingratiatingly, if possible, about what it generally pleases men to hear, precisely so that it may not tempt anyone, as if it were lack of sense or ability to speak about this, which held us back from speaking about it, or from speaking exclusively of it as of the highest, forgetting the principal thing: the Christian freedom.

A pure heart is not in this sense a free heart, or it is the free heart which does not here come under consideration; for a pure heart is first and last a bound heart. Therefore it is not as pleasant to speak about it as it is to speak about the blessed self-esteem of freedom, and the blessed pleasure of the self-esteem in the boldness of renunciation. A bound heart, moreover in the most profound sense a bound heart—no ship which lies at anchor is so bound as that heart must be which will be pure—this heart must be bound to God. And no king who bound himself by the harshest charter, and no man who bound himself by the most rigorous pledge, and no day-laborer who bound himself for every day, and no private tutor who bound himself for every hour, is so bound. For everyone thus bound can still say how far he is bound, but the heart must be bound illimitably to God, if it will be pure. And no power can bind like this; for the king can die and escape his charter, and the lord can die so the pledge of the day-laborer ceases, and the time of instruction can pass—but God does not die, and the bond which binds to Him is never broken.

Thus must the heart be bound. You who burn with the desire for earthly love, or with the craving for friendship, remember that what you say about freedom has never been denied by Christianity; but yet there must first be this infinite bond, if the heart of the beloved and your own will be pure! Consequently, first the infinite binding, and then the talk about freedom may begin. There is a strange word which is

much used in philosophy, but even more in ordinary business; it is heard so often in the streets and alleys, in business circles and in the mouths of businessmen: it is the word "priority"; for philosophy talks much about God's priority, and businessmen talk about priorities. So let us use this strange word to express the thought so that it will most certainly make the right impression; let us say: Christianity teaches that God has the first priority. Philosophy does not speak quite this way about God's priority; it would rather forget what businessmen know about priorities, that a priority is a claim. God has the first priority, and everything which a man owns, is pledged as a security for this claim. If you remember this, then for the rest you may talk as much as you please about the pleasure of freedom. Oh, but if you really remember this, then this pleasure will not tempt you.

The free heart has no consideration for anything; heedless, it plunges into the pleasure of renunciation; but the heart infinitely bound to God has an infinite consideration; and not even the one who every moment must use the most manifold consideration is so bound by consideration as the heart which is infinitely bound to God. Wherever it is, in solitude by itself, or filled with the thought of others or with others, whatever an infinitely bound heart otherwise occupies itself with, it is always considerate. You who speak so beautifully about how much the beloved means to you, or you to the beloved, remember that this consideration must first be in your soul as in the beloved's, if a pure heart will be given away in love! This consideration must be the first and the last; from this consideration there can be no separation without guilt and sin.

The free heart has no history; when it renounced itself it acquired no history of its love, happy or unhappy. But the heart infinitely bound to God has a preceding history, and therefore it understands that earthly love and friendship are but an interlude, a contribution to this, the sole history of love, the first and the last. You who know how to speak so beautifully about earthly love and friendship, if you understood that these constitute only a very little section within that eternal history: how brief you would be compared with the brevity of the section! You begin your history with the beginning of love and you end with a grave. But that eternal history of love began far earlier; it began with your beginning, when you came into existence from nothing, and as truly as you do not become nothing, so truly the history does not end with the grave. For when the deathbed is prepared for you, when you have gone to bed, never more to rise, and they only wait for you to turn to the other side to die, and the stillness grows about you—when gradually the nearer friends go away, and the stillness grows because only the dearest remain, while death comes nearer you; then when the dearest

go softly away, and the stillness grows, because only your own family remain; and when then the last one has bent for the last time over you and turns away, for now you turn to the side of death: there yet remains One by that side, He the last at the deathbed, He who was the first, God, the living God—if for the rest your heart was pure, which it became only by loving Him.

There is this to be said about the pure heart and about love being a matter of conscience. If love and earthly love constitute the chief pleasures of life, so that the happy man can say with truth: "Now for the first time I live," so it is the joy of life merely to hear the lover talk about his happiness, about life, that is, about its pleasure: then must the dead speak about that conscientious love, the dead who, it is well to note, did not become tired of life, but simply won the joy of eternity. But it is a dead man who speaks, and this seems so forbidding to many that they dare not listen to his glad message, while everyone is glad to listen to one of whom we say in a superior way, "He is alive." And yet death must come, and just at the moment when his contemporaries are joyfully wishing the happy man a long life, eternity says, "Die," if otherwise your heart will be pure. For no doubt there was someone who became happy, indescribably happy, or unhappy, by loving a human being; but no man's heart ever became pure unless it became so through loving God.

"An unfeigned faith." Could there ever be any more abominable combination possible than love—and duplicity? Still such a combination is an impossibility, for to love deceitfully is to hate. And this not only holds true about duplicity, but it is impossible to associate the least lack of sincerity with the idea of loving. As soon as any sincerity is lacking, then there is always something concealed, but the selfish self-love hides itself in this concealment, and insofar as this self-love is present in a man, he does not love. In sincerity the lover offers himself to the beloved; and no mirror is so accurate in catching the least trifle as sincerity is, if it is true sincerity; or if in the lovers there is the true fidelity which is reflected in the mirror of sincerity, which love holds between them.

But now if two men are thus able to become in sincerity intelligible to each other, is it not somewhat arbitrary for Christianity to speak about an unfeigned faith in another sense, insofar as by that it means sincerity before God? Is it not exactly necessary, if two men are to love each other in an unfeigned faith, that this must be preceded by an individual sincerity toward God? For is there dissimulation only when a man consciously deceives himself or others? Is it not also dissimulation when a man does not know himself? And can such a man promise love from an unfeigned faith, or can he—keep what he promises? Aye, he

may do that, but if he cannot promise, can he then keep what he cannot even promise? And one who does not know himself cannot promise love from an unfeigned faith.

The thought of confidence contains in itself a reduplication, and it is this: the one with whom a man has the most intimate relationship, hence the relationship which best fitted him to be the object of confidences, or of confidential communications, only in him can this man really confide or trust, or open his heart to him in confidence. But thus the confidence keeps itself to itself, and thus there is, as the essential in the confidence, the unutterable, instead of a man having to believe that the confidence lay in the stating of it. Thus if, humanly speaking, a wife has her most inward relationship with her husband, she may reveal one or another thing in confidence to her parents, but this confidence is a confidence about something confidential. The wife will therefore feel that she is far from being able to confide everything to them or to confide it to them as she confides it to her husband with whom she has her most intimate relationship—but also her most confidential one, and to whom alone she can really open her heart concerning her most intimate relationship, which is her relation to him. Business affairs and unimportant external matters one cannot talk about confidentially, or at least only foolishly and irresponsibly. But see, if a wife wished to tell someone else about her most intimate concern, her relation to her husband, she would herself perceive that there was only one in whom she could completely confide, and this one was the same as the one in whom and with whom she has this relationship.

With whom now has a man his most intimate relationship, with whom can a man have his most intimate relationship? Is it not God? But hence all confidence between men finally becomes only confidence about confidence. Only God is confidence, just as He is love. When then two men sincerely pledge their faith to each other, is this then to promise faith to each other, if they first, each one severally, promise and have promised their faith to another? And yet, on the other hand, this is necessary if they, in the Christian sense, would love from an unfeigned faith. If two men absolutely confide in each other, is it absolutely confiding in each other if they first, each one individually, have confided in a third? And yet this is necessary if they wish absolutely to confide in each other, even if in each individual's confidence in God there is the unutterable, which is exactly the sign that their relation to God is the most inward, the most confidential.

How inviting, how attractive the talk sounds about the confidence of two lovers in each other, and yet there is dissimulation in this speech as in this confidence. But if love from an unfeigned faith is to be spoken about, then must the dead speak, and it sounds at first as if it wrought a

division between the two, although they will still be united in the most intimate and confident companionship. Moreover it is like a separation, and yet it is the confidence of eternity which is set between them. Many, many times two have become happy in a confidential relation to each other, but never has any man loved from an unfeigned faith except through the confidence of the separation in God, which is also God's consent to the confidence of the lovers.—Only when it becomes a matter of conscience is there love from a pure heart and from an unfeigned faith.

meaning?

IV

OUR DUTY TO LOVE THE MEN WE SEE

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar : for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?—I JOHN 4:20

HOW *deeply* is the need for love grounded in man's being! The first thing, if we may speak in this way, which was said about man, and said by the only One who in truth could say it, by God Himself, and about the first man, says just this. We read in the Holy Scriptures: "God said, it is not good for man to be alone." So woman was *taken from* the side of man and *given* to him for a companion—for love and companionship first take something from a man before they give. Therefore throughout all ages everyone who has thought more deeply about the nature of man, has therefore recognized in him this need for companionship. How often it has been said, and repeated again and again; how often has one cried woe upon the loneliness, or pictured the pain of loneliness and its wretchedness; how often has one, wearied by the vitiating, noisy, confused associations of everyday life, wandered out to the solitary place—only to learn again to hunger for companionship! For thus one always returns to that thought of God's, that first thought about man.

In the busy, teeming multitude, which as company is both too much and too little, man becomes tired of company; but the cure does not consist in discovering that God's thought was wrong, not at all; but the healing consists in learning from the very first to understand one's self in the yearning for companionship. So deeply is this need entrenched in human nature that it has remained unchanged since the creation of the first man; no new discovery has been made, but that first observation, one and the same, has been confirmed in many ways, varying from generation to generation in the form of expression, or in the way in which it was presented, or in the turn of the thought.

So deeply is this need grounded in man's nature, and *so essentially* does it belong to the fact of his being human, that even He who was One with the Father, and in community of love was One with the Father and the Holy Spirit, He who loved the whole race, our Lord Jesus Christ, still humanly felt this need to love and be loved by an individual man. He was indeed the God-Man, and so eternally different from every other man, but He was, nevertheless, also true man, tried in everything human. And, on the other side, the fact that He experienced all this, is exactly the expression for the fact that He was essentially human. He was an actual man, and can therefore have sympathy with all things human; He was not an airy form which beckoned in the

clouds, without understanding or wishing to understand what humanly befalls a man. Oh, no, He could have pity on the multitude who needed food, and that in the purely human sense, He who had Himself hungered in the wilderness.

And so too He could sympathize with men in their need to love and to be loved, sympathize in a purely human way. We find this pictured in the Gospel of John. Jesus says to Simon Peter: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" Peter answers Him: "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." How touching this is! Christ asks: "Lovest thou me *more than these*?" It is almost like a prayer for love. Thus speaks the One to whom it is all important to be the best-loved. Peter himself is conscious of this inconsonance, like that when Jesus would be baptized by John. Therefore Peter not only answers, "Yes," but he adds, "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." This reply indicates the inconsonance. For ordinarily if a man knows that he is loved, because he has heard it asserted before, then he is more than willing to hear it again, and therefore wishes to hear it again, although he knows it in many other ways than by this mere assertion, to which he once more returns, anxious to hear it again. Of course it is in another sense that Christ can be said to know that Peter loves Him. Still, Christ again a second time says to him: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Peter answers Him: "Aye, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." What else is there to answer, while the inconsonance only becomes clearer because the question is asked a second time! Christ says to him the third time: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Peter was grieved because He said a third time to him, "Lovest thou me?" and Peter said to Him: "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Peter does not carry his answer further; instead, in his reply he refers to what Christ must know from experience about Peter's feeling—"Thou knowest that I love Thee," he answers, "*Thou knowest all things*, Thou knowest that I love Thee." Hence Peter says no more, he almost shudders at the inconsonance; for a "yes" is like a real answer to a real question, whereby the questioner learns to know something or learns it more definitely than he knew it before. But One who "knows all things," how can He get to know something, or through another's assurance get to know it more certainly than He knew it before? And yet, if He cannot do this, then neither can He love quite humanly, for this is just the mystery of love, that there is no higher certainty than the beloved's renewed assurance; humanly understood it is unconditionally to be certain of being loved, not of loving, since it is superior to the relation between friend and friend. Terrible contradiction: that the One who is God, loves humanly; for to love humanly is indeed to love an individual

man and to wish to be the one best loved by this particular man. That is why Peter was grieved at the question being asked a third time! For in a similar relation of love between men, there is a new joy in the question being asked three times, and a new joy in answering three times; or else the question repeated too often grieves, because it seems to betray mistrust. But when He who knows all things asks three times, hence finds it necessary to ask three times, then must it not be because, since He knows everything, He knows that the love is not strong enough, not inward enough, not ardent enough, in the one who is questioned, the one who would also deny Him three times? Peter must certainly have thought that this was the reason the Lord found it necessary to ask the question three times—for it truly could not be because the Lord Himself felt the need to hear this "yes" three times; such a thought would be beyond man's power to imagine. Even if the thought is allowed, it is simply out of the question. Oh, but how human! He who answered not a word to the high priests who condemned Him to death, He who answered not a word to Pilate who held His life in his hands—He asks three times if He is loved; moreover, He asks if Peter loves Him—"more than these"!

So deeply is love rooted in human nature, so essentially does it belong to the human; and yet men so frequently find excuses in order to deprive themselves—of this blessedness, hence they elicit deception—in order to deceive themselves, or to make themselves unhappy. Sometimes the excuse assumes the form of sadness; one sighs over men and over his own unhappiness; one can find no one to love. For to sigh over the world and its unhappiness is always easier than to beat one's breast and sigh over one's self. Sometimes the self-deception sounds like an accusation; one accuses men of not being worthy of love—one "groans against" men; for it is always easier to be the accuser than the accused. Sometimes the self-deception lies in the proud self-satisfaction which believes that it seeks in vain for a worthy object of its love—for it is always easier to show superiority by being fastidious about others than by being strict with one's self. And yet, yet we are all agreed that this is an unfortunate attitude, and that such behavior is wrong. And what is it then that is wrong? What other than the constant seeking and rejecting by these men! Such men do not notice that their talk sounds like a mockery of themselves, because the fact of their not being able to find any worthy object for their love among men, indicates that they are themselves utterly lacking in love.

Is it really love to wish to find it outside one's self? I supposed love consisted in bringing it with one. But he who has love in himself when he is seeking an object for his love (and otherwise it is not true that he seeks an object—for his love), he will easily, and the greater his love

the more easily, find an object, and find it to be such that it is lovable.
 For the ability to love a man in spite of his weaknesses and faults and imperfections is not the perfect love, but perfect love consists in being able to find him lovable in spite of and with his weaknesses and faults and imperfections.

Let us understand each other. It is one thing to be finicky and wish to eat only the most delicate and rarest dishes, most exquisitely prepared, and even when they are of this kind, then to be finicky in finding one fault or another in them. It is quite a different matter not only to be able to eat the more modest fare, but to be able to find this simpler fare the choicest, because the problem set for him is not to develop his fastidiousness, but to transform himself and his tastes.

Or if there were two artists, and one of them were to say: "I have traveled a great deal in my time and have looked about a good bit in the world, but I have looked in vain for a man who was worth painting. I have never found a face which pictured such perfect beauty that I could decide to draw it; in every face I have always found one or another little defect, and therefore I have sought in vain." Would this be a sign that he was a great artist? On the other hand, the second artist said: "Now I do not really pretend to be an artist. I have not traveled in foreign countries, but have remained in the little circle of people who were my neighbors; among these I have not found a single face so insignificant or so irregular that I could not distinguish a more beautiful side and discover something pleasing in it. Therefore the art I practice gives me pleasure and satisfies me, without my claiming to be an artist." Would this not indicate that this man really was an artist, who by bringing a certain something with him found at home what the much-traveled artist found nowhere in the world, perhaps because he did not bring a certain something with him! Hence the second man was the artist.

Would it not be distressing if that which was intended to embellish life were only to be a curse upon it, so that "art," instead of beautifying life for us, merely fastidiously discovered that none of us was beautiful! And how much more distressing as well as confusing it would be if love should only become a curse, because its requirement alone revealed that none of us was worthy of love, instead of love being precisely recognizable by the fact that it is loving enough to find something lovable in all of us, hence loving enough to be able to love all of us.

It is a distressing absurdity, which is, however, altogether too general, always to be perpetually talking about how the object of love ought to be, in order to be worthy of love, instead of talking about how love ought to be in order to be love. It is so common, not only in daily life, but, oh, how often is it not seen, that even the one who calls himself a

poet ascribes all his merit to the refined, soft, aristocratic fastidiousness which, in contrast to loving, cold-bloodedly knows how to reject and reject; assumes it to be his task in this respect to initiate men into all the abominable mysteries of fastidiousness. Still some are inclined to do this; many are still so disposed, so inquisitive to learn this, that is, to get a knowledge which really only serves to embitter life for themselves and others! For of how much in life does it not hold true that if one had never learned it, then one would have found everything beautiful, or at least more beautiful than one does. But after one has been infected with the taint of fastidiousness, how difficult it becomes to regain what he lost, the natural gifts of good nature and love, with which God has fundamentally endowed every man!

But if no one else can or will, an apostle always knows how to lead us in the right way in this respect, the right way which both leads us to do right to others and to make ourselves happy. So we have chosen some words of the apostle John: "If any of you say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" We shall make these words the object of our reflection, as rejoicing in the task, we choose to speak about

THE DUTY OF LOVING THE MEN WE SEE.

But this is not to be understood as if the discourse were about loving all the men we see, for that is the love for the neighbor which we discussed earlier. On the contrary, let it be understood that the discourse concerns the duty of finding those in the actual world whom we might love in particular, and in loving them to love the men we see. If this is our duty, then the task does not consist in finding—the lovable object; but the task consists in finding the object already given or chosen—lovable, and in continuing to find him lovable however changed he is.

However, we shall first consider a little difficulty respecting the Gospel passage read, a difficulty which it might occur to an earthly shrewdness, perhaps conceited at its own cleverness, to raise, whether it actually does so or not. When the apostle says: "He who does not love his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" then a clever man might raise the objection that this is a deceptive turn of thought. For he had really assured himself that the brother he had seen was not worthy of love, but from this fact (that he did not love the one he regarded as undeserving of love) how could it be inferred that there was anything to prevent such a man from loving God whom he had not seen? And yet the apostle believes that there is something which prevents such a man from loving God, although by this word "brother" he certainly is not speaking about some quite definite

individual man, but chiefly about the matter of loving men. The apostle believes that it is a divine contention that is submitted against the unreliability of a man's assertion about loving the invisible, when it appears that this man does not love the visible; whereas it might seem just as visionary to say that one loves the invisible by not loving anything visible. It is a divine contention submitted against human romanticism with respect to loving God, for it is visionary, even if it is not hypocritical, thus to wish to love the invisible. The matter is quite simple. Man must begin by loving the unseen, God, for thereby he will himself learn what it means to love; but the fact that he really loves the unseen will be recognized precisely by the fact that he loves the brother he sees; the more he loves the unseen, the more he will love the men he sees. Not conversely, that the more he rejects those he sees, the more he loves the unseen. If that were true then God would be transformed into an unreal something, a figment of the imagination. Therefore only a hypocrite and a deceiver would hit upon such ideas for the sake of finding an excuse; or one who misrepresents God by making it seem as if God were jealous for Himself and for being loved, instead of the blessed God being merciful, and, as it were, constantly subordinating Himself by saying: "If you will love me, then love the men you see; what you do to them you do to me."

God is too exalted to be able simply to accept a man's love, to say nothing of His being able to find pleasure in those things in which a visionary delights. If someone says about a gift through which he would be able to help his parents, that it is "Corban," that is, that it is already dedicated to God, this is not well-pleasing to God. If you wish to show that it is dedicated to God, then give it in the name of God. If you wish to show that your life is dedicated to the service of God, then let it serve men, but always in the name of God. God is not a party to existence in such a way that He demands His share for Himself. He demands everything, but when you bring it you learn to know at once, if I may speak thus, by the endorsement on it, where it will be further negotiated; for God demands nothing for Himself, although He demands everything from you. So the apostle's words, if rightly understood, lead directly to the subject of the discourse.

When it is a duty to love the men one sees, then *must one primarily renounce all imaginative and overstrained ideas of a dream-world, where the object of love would be to seek and to find; that is, one must become sober, gain reality and truth by finding and remaining in the world of reality, as the sole appointed task.*

The most dangerous of all evasions as regards loving, is to wish to love only the invisible, or that one has not seen. This evasion is so high-flying that it soars completely above reality; it is so intoxicating

that it easily tempts and easily imagines itself to be the all-supreme and most perfect kind of love. Certainly it seldom occurs to a man shamelessly to speak derogatorily about loving; on the contrary, that deception is more general by which men defraud themselves of really beginning to love, just because they talk too enthusiastically about loving and of love. The reason for this has a far deeper ground than we might suppose; otherwise the confusion could not have established itself as firmly as it has, the confusion that arises from calling *that* a misfortune which is a fault: the fact of their not finding any object of love whereby they still further hindered themselves from finding it; for as soon as they realized that it was their own fault, then they found it. The general conception of love is that it is the opened eye of admiration which is looking for superiority and perfections. That is why one complains that one looks in vain. We shall not attempt to decide how far the individual is right or not; whether or not that lovable superiority and perfection which he seeks, are to be found; whether he has not confused his search by his fastidiousness. No, we shall not dispute in this way. We shall not dispute within the limits of this conception of love, for this whole conception is an error, since love is rather the closed eye of forbearance and mildness, which does not see the deficiencies and the imperfections.

But it is very essential that we emphasize the difference between these two conceptions, for there is a world of difference, a revolutionary difference between them. It is only the latter conception that is true, the first is an error. And it is well known that an error never halts of itself, it only leads farther and farther astray, so it becomes increasingly difficult to find the way back to truth. The way of error is easy to find, but to find the way back is so difficult—as we are told in the legend about that mountain of Venus, which must lie somewhere on earth, that no one who found his way to it could ever find his way back. So if a man with the wrong idea of what love is, goes out into the world, then he seeks, and seeks, as he believes, to find the object of love, but, as he thinks, in vain. However, he does not change his conception of what it is; on the contrary, enriched by his manifold knowledge of the fastidious, he seeks ever more fastidiously, but, as he believes, in vain. It never occurs to him that the mistake might lie in himself or in his wrong conception of what love is. On the contrary, the more refined he becomes in his fastidiousness, the more exalted opinion he entertains of himself and of the perfection of his conception of love—the more clearly he sees how imperfect men are, and this can be discovered only through the assistance of his own perfection! Nevertheless, he is absolutely certain that this is not his fault, that he does not act from any evil or hateful motive—he who is seeking only love.

For far be it from him to renounce love, he who so vividly realizes

how his conception of it becomes ever more enthusiastic—what indeed could ever become more enthusiastic than an error! And he has not checked the error, exactly the reverse; by its aid he has made himself giddy—in loving the invisible, an apparition one does not see. Or does not all this come to one and the same thing: *seeing an apparition*—and: *not seeing*? For if you take away the apparition you see nothing, the man himself admits that; but the man forgets that if you take *away* the *seeing*, then you still *see* an apparition. But, as was said, he will not give up love or talk humbly about it; he will talk enthusiastically about it and preserve it—the love of the unseen. Distressing error! We say about worldly honor and power, about wealth and happiness, that it is as a vapor, and this is indeed true. But that the strongest power in man, a power which according to his own definition is simply nothing less, since it is life and strength, that this should become as vapor, and that the man intoxicated by these vapors, proudly believes that he has apprehended the highest—that man has indeed seized upon clouds and fancies, which always soar high above reality: lo, that is terrible! Ordinarily one devoutly warns against wasting the gifts of God; but which of God's gifts is comparable to the love which he implanted in the human heart? Alas, and then to see it wasted in this way! For the clever man believes—foolishly, that one wastes his love in loving the imperfect, the weak men. I should suppose that this would be to apply his love, to make use of it. But to be able to find no object for love, to waste it in a vain search, to squander it in empty space by loving the unseen: that is truly wasting it.

Therefore be sober, come to your senses; understand that the fault lies in your conception of love, that this ought to constitute a claim, a most glorious one, since the whole of existence would not be able to pay it, any more than you can prove your right to collect this claim. At the very moment in which you changed your conception of love, that it is the exact opposite of a claim, that it is an outstanding indebtedness to which God binds you; that very moment you have found reality. And just this is your duty, thus with closed eyes (for in love you close your eyes to weakness and frailty and imperfection) to find reality, instead of with open eyes (aye, open and staring like a sleepwalker's) to overlook reality. For duty this constitutes the first condition, so that in loving at all you may come to love the men you see. The condition is to find a foothold of reality. Error always vacillates, that is why it sometimes looks so easy and so spiritual, because it is so airy. Truth takes firm and therefore sometimes difficult steps. It stands upon solid ground, and therefore sometimes looks so simple. There is also a significant change: instead of having a claim to recover to get a duty to fulfill; instead of having a world to traverse to take, as it were, a world upon

one's shoulders; instead of ardently wishing to seek the pleasant fruit of admiration to have to bear patiently with want. Ah, what a change! And yet it is through this change that love comes into being, the love which can perfect the duty: in loving, to love the men we see.

When it is a duty in loving to love the men we see, *then it is important that in loving the individual, actual man, we do not slip in an imagined conception of how we believe or might wish that this man should be.* He who allows himself to do this does not love the man he sees, but again something unseen, his own idea, or something like it.

There is in loving a manner of conduct which contains a considerable alloy of doubt and fastidiousness. It is one thing to reject and reject, and never find an object worthy of love; it is another thing in loving what one calls the object of his love, truly and sincerely to perfect this duty in loving what he sees. It is in truth a worthy wish, a truly worthy wish, that the one we love should possess the lovable perfections; we wish it not merely for our own sake, but also for his. Above all, it is worth while to wish and to pray that the one we love might always act and be such as we are able to approve of and agree with. But, for God's sake, let us not forget that it is not to our credit if he is so, even less to our credit to demand it of him—should any question of our merit arise, which is, however, improper and unseemly talk in relation to love, which should simply be to love equally faithfully and tenderly.

But there is a fastidiousness which always, as it were, works against love, and wishes to prevent it from loving what it sees, when the fastidiousness with a wavering and yet in a certain sense critical glance, effaces the actual form of love or offends against it, and cunningly demands to see something else. There are men about whom one may say that they have not yet taken form, that their reality has not consolidated itself, because inwardly they cannot make up their minds as to what they are and what they wish to be. But by the way in which one sees, one can also make another man's form vacillating and unreal, because the love, which should love the man it sees, cannot really decide, but sometimes would do away with one fault in its object; sometimes would demand a perfection in it, which would be, if I may say so, as if a bargain was not quite completed. Yet the one who by loving in this way is inclined to be fastidious, does not love the man he sees, and really makes his love objectionable, as hard for the beloved.

Your beloved, your friend, is also in the more general sense a man, and he exists as such for the rest of us; but for you he should essentially exist as the beloved, if you will to perfect your duty in loving the man you see. If there is duplicity in your relationship, so that he partly exists for you in a general sense as an individual man, partly in a particular sense as the beloved, then you do not love the man you see. It is

rather as if you had in that sense two ears, so that you do not as ordinarily hear the same thing with both ears, but you hear one thing with one ear, and another thing with the other ear. You hear with one ear what he says, and whether it is wise and correct and shrewd and spiritual and so on; alas, and with the other ear you hear that it is the voice of the beloved. You scrutinize him probingly with one eye, searchingly, critically, alas, and only with the other eye do you see that he is the beloved. Oh, but thus to divide, that is not to love the man one sees. Is it not as if there were constantly a third party present, even when the two are alone, a third party who tests and rejects, a third party who disturbs the inwardness, a third party who may sometimes make the concerned disgusted with himself and his love, because it is so critical; a third party who would alarm the beloved if he knew that this third party was present! What, too, does it mean, that this third party is present? It signifies that if . . . this or that is not in accordance with your wish, then you might not love; hence the third party signifies divorce, separation; so consequently the thought of separation is present—confidentially, alas, as when in paganism the destructive being is insanely included in the unity of the godhead. Does the presence of the third party not signify that the love-relationship is yet in a certain sense no relationship, in that you stand above the relationship and test the beloved? Do you not consider that in such a case something else is tested, whether you really have love, or rather that there is something else decided, that you do not really love? For life certainly has tests enough, and these tests should precisely find the lovers, find friend and friend, united in order to endure the test. But if the test is to enter into the relationship, then a treachery has been committed.

Truly this mysterious reserve is the most dangerous kind of faithlessness; such a man does not break his vow, but he makes it constantly indecisive whether he is bound by his vow. Is it not faithlessness when your friend clasps your hand, and there is in this handclasp something vague, as if it were doubtful to him who pressed your hand how closely at that moment he corresponded to your idea of him, so that you would reciprocate in the same way? Is the relationship to be such that it must every moment begin from the beginning to come into the relationship; is this to love the man you see, every moment to test him, as if it were the first time you saw him? It is abhorrent to see the fastidiousness which rejects all food, but it is also abhorrent to see the one who, to be sure, eats the food which is politely offered him, and yet in a certain sense does not eat, but constantly, as if he were already satiated, only tastes of the food or takes pains to taste a tidbit, while he is satiated by plainer food.

No, if a man wishes to fulfill his duty in loving to love the men he

sees, then he must not only find those he loves among actual men, but he must eradicate all doubt and fastidiousness in loving them, so that in earnestness and truth he loves them as they are; he must in earnestness and truth apprehend the task: to find the given or the chosen object lovable. We do not mean by this to recommend a childish infatuation with the accidental circumstances of the beloved, even less a fond indulgence in the wrong place; far from it, the earnestness lies in the fact that the relationship itself must with a united effort fight against the imperfect, overcome the defects, remove the differences. This is earnestness; fastidiousness makes the relationship itself ambiguous. His weakness or his fault does not make the one a stranger to the other, but the union regards the weaker as the stranger, which it is equally important to both to overcome and to remove. It is not you who because of the weakness of the beloved must, as it were, withdraw from him, or make your relationship less close; on the contrary, the two must hold themselves more closely and inwardly together in order to remove the weakness. As soon as the relationship is ambiguous, so that you do not love the man you see, then it is as if you demanded something else in order to be able to love; since on the contrary, the fault or the weakness makes the relationship more inward, not as if the fault should be retained, but just in order to overcome it, so you love the man you see. You see the fault, but the fact that the relationship becomes more inward, shows precisely that you love the man in whom you still see the fault or the weakness or the imperfection.

As there are hypocritical tears, hypocritical sighing and complaining about the world, so too is there hypocritical sorrow over the weaknesses and imperfections of the beloved. It is so easy and so complacent to wish the beloved to have all possible perfections, and then, if some are lacking, it is again so easy and so complacent to sigh and sorrow and become self-important over one's own presumably pure and profound distress. It is perhaps, on the whole, a more general form of sensualism selfishly to wish to show off the beloved or the friend, and to wish to despair over each insignificant fault. But would that be loving the men we see? Oh, no, the men we see, and hence ourselves when others see us, are not so perfect; and yet it is so often the case that a man develops in himself this delicate frailty which is only calculated to love the complete conception of the perfect. And although we are all of us so imperfect, one rarely sees the strong, sound, efficient love which is calculated to love those imperfect ones, that is, the men we see.

When in loving it is a duty to love the men we see, *then is there no limit to the love; if the duty is fulfilled, the love must be limitless, that is, unchanged, however its object changes.*

Let us consider what we were reminded of in the introduction to this

hasten to help Him, but He saw Peter lost if He did not hasten to save him. I wonder if there lives or ever has lived a man who cannot understand this which is so clear and so obvious; and yet Christ is the only one who saw this at the critical moment, when He Himself was the accused, the condemned, the mocked, the spit-upon, the denied.

A man is seldom tried in a crisis which involves life and death, and hence he seldom gets occasion to test the devotion of friendship to its extreme limit. But merely in some more important moment to find timidity and shrewdness where you were prepared because of your friendship to look for courage and resolution; to find duplicity, fickleness and evasion instead of candor, decision and refuge; to find only frivolity instead of sober-minded reflection: alas, how difficult then in the haste of the moment and the heat of passion, to be immediately able to understand on which side the danger lies, which one of the friends is in the greater danger, you or he who thus leaves you in the lurch; how difficult then to love the man you see—when you see him so changed!

Nowadays we are accustomed to praise Christ's attitude towards Peter; let us guard against this commendation becoming a delusion, a figment of the imagination, because we are not able or willing to exert our thought, to imagine ourselves contemporary with the event, so that while we praise Christ on the one hand, on the other hand, insofar as we are contemporaneous with a similar event, we act and speak quite differently. We have no report handed down concerning the contemporary interpretation of Christ's attitude towards Peter, but if you meet them, those contemporaries, then ask them, and you will learn that on this occasion, just as on the occasion of almost everything which Christ did, people said: "The fool! Even granting that his case was desperately lost, yet not to have power to muster all his strength for the last time in a single glance which would crush this traitor! What craven, unmanly weakness! Is that acting like a man!" Thus was He judged, and the insult found a new expression. Or it would be said by the powerful ruler who intended to review the circumstances: "Well, why did he seek his company with publicans and sinners, his followers among the poorest class of people? He should have associated himself with us, the leaders of the synagogue, but as it is, he gets what he deserves. This shows how far one can rely on that kind of people. Well, as he has always abandoned himself to that class, he keeps it up to the last. He does not even become infuriated by their shabby faithlessness."

Perhaps the more clever among them, wishing to seem magnanimous, would explain: "The fact that the high priests have allowed him to be taken, the fact that he, fanatic though he was, now sees that everything is lost, may have weakened his reason and broken his courage, so that

he has become depressed in a cowardly, spiritless stupor. Perhaps this explains his forgiving such betrayal, for of course no real man would behave in this way!" Alas, it is only too true: no man does behave in this way. That is just why Christ's life furnishes the only instance where a teacher, just at the moment His case is lost along with His life, and everything is most terribly forfeited through the apostasy of His disciple, by His glance at that very instant wins His most zealous adherent in this disciple, and thus His cause to a great extent, although the latter fact is hidden from everyone.

Christ's love for Peter was, therefore, boundless; in loving Peter He perfected the task of loving the man one sees. He did not say: "Peter must first be changed and become another man before I can love him." No, exactly the converse. He said: "Peter is Peter, and I love him. My love, if it amounts to anything, will precisely help him to become another man." Hence He did not break off His friendship, in order perhaps to resume it again when Peter had become another man. No, He maintained His friendship unchanged, and through that was helpful to Peter in becoming another man. Do you believe that without this loyal friendship of Christ Peter would have been rewon? But it is so easy to be a friend when this does not entail anything more than asking some definite favor from the friend, and, if the friend does not comply with this request, then allowing the friendship to lapse, until it is perhaps renewed when he complies with the request. Is this the relation of friendship? Who should be more ready to help an erring one than the one who calls himself his friend, even if the fault was committed against the friend! But the friend avoids him and says (and it is as if some third party were speaking): "When he changes and becomes another man, then he may perhaps again be my friend." And it is not far from being the case that we men regard such conduct as magnanimous. But truly, it is far from being true that a man can say about such a friend, that in loving he loves the man he sees.

Christ's love was boundless, as it must be if this is to be perfected: in loving to love the man one sees. This is very easy to perceive. However much and however a man is changed, he is not yet so changed that he becomes invisible. If this—the impossible—is not the case, then we see him, and our duty is to love the man we see. Generally we are inclined to believe that when a man has essentially changed for the worse, he is then so changed that one is excused from loving him. What a confusion of language: to be excused—from loving, as if it were a compulsory matter, a burden one wished to cast off! But Christianity asks: "Can you because of this change no longer see him?" To this the answer must be: "Certainly I can see him. I see exactly that he is no longer worthy of love." But if you see *that*, then you do not really

see him (which in another sense you cannot deny doing), you see only the unworthiness, the imperfection, and thereby you admit that when you loved him, in another sense you did not love him, but you loved only his superiority and his perfections. From the Christian standpoint, on the contrary, loving consists exactly in loving the man one sees. The emphasis lies not on loving the perfections one sees in a man, but the emphasis is placed on the man one sees, whether one now sees in this man perfections or imperfections, moreover, no matter how sadly this man has changed, since he still has not ceased to be the same man. He who loves the perfections he sees in a man, does not see the man, and therefore he ceases to love when the perfections cease, when a change enters, which change, even if distressing, still does not indicate that the man has ceased to exist. Alas, but even the wisest and most intelligent purely human interpretations of love are still somewhat highfalutin, somewhat hazy; Christian love, on the other hand, descended from heaven to earth. Its direction is consequently opposite. Christian love will not soar to heaven, for it comes from heaven and with heaven; it descends and thereby it succeeds in loving the same man in all the changes, because it sees the same man in all the changes. The merely human love is constantly prepared, as it were, to flee away after, or to flee away with the perfections of the beloved. We say about a seducer that he steals a maiden's heart; but we must say about all merely human love, even when it is most beautiful, that there is a little thievishness in it, that it still steals the perfections of the beloved, while the Christian love grants the beloved all his imperfections and weaknesses, and in all his changes abides with him, loving the man it sees.

If this were not so, then Christ would never have come in love; for where would He have found the perfect! Wonderful! What it would really do would be to prevent Christ from finding the perfect; for was He not Himself exactly the perfect, which is recognized by His boundless love for the men He saw? What a wonderful crossing of concepts! We speak constantly with regard to love, about the perfect and the complete; Christianity also speaks constantly in relation to love about the perfect and the complete: ah, but we men speak about finding the perfect in order to love him; Christianity speaks about being the perfect which illimitably loves the man it sees. We men wish to look up in order to see the object of perfection (the tendency is still constantly towards the invisible), but in Christ perfection looked down to earth and loved the man it saw. And from Christianity we should learn, for it is still so in a far more general sense than is realized, that no one ascends to heaven except One who first descended from heaven: however enthusiastic the speech sounds about soaring to heaven, it is a delusion, unless you first, as Christianity says, descend from heaven. But from the Christian point

OUR DUTY TO REMAIN IN THE DEBT OF LOVE TO ONE ANOTHER

Owe no man anything but to love one another.—ROMANS 13:8

MEN have tried in various ways to depict and describe how love is felt by the one who has it, his condition in love, or what it means to love. Love has been called a feeling, a mood, a life, a passion; yet since these are very general definitions, an effort has been made to describe love more precisely. Someone has called it a want, but it is worth noticing that the lover constantly wants what he already possesses; it has been called a longing, but, it is well to note, a constant longing for something the lover already has—for otherwise the love described is an unhappy one.

That simple wise man of old said that "love is the son of wealth and poverty." Who in truth could be poorer than the one who has never loved! But, on the other hand, does even the poorest, who bending over gleans up the crumbs and is humbly grateful for a penny, really have any idea how small a trifle may have infinite value for the lover; how small the trifle may be which the lover (in his poverty) gathers up with infinite care and cautiously hides—like the most precious treasure! I wonder if even the poorest is able to see that which may be so little that only the sharp glance of passion (love in its poverty!) sees and tremendously magnifies! But the smaller the object which poverty gathers up, when it is grateful beyond all measure for it, as if the object were extraordinarily great, the greater it proves the poverty to be. Not even all the assurances about the greatest poverty prove this so conclusively; as if the poor man to whom you gave less than a shilling were to thank you for it as passionately as if you had given him wealth and superfluity; as passionately as if he were now rich. Alas, for it is only too certain that the poor man remained essentially as poor as before, so it was only his—crazed idea that he had now become rich. So poor is the poverty of love!

A noble man has said about love: "It takes everything and it gives everything." Who indeed received more than the one who received a man's love? And who gave more than he who gave a man his love? But, on the other hand, can even envy, when it enviously strips a man of his actual or supposed greatness, thus penetrate to the inmost undergarment! Oh, envy is still so stupid; it does not even suspect where the enclosure might be, or that this enclosure exists, where the really rich man has his true treasure hidden. It does not even suspect that there is a burglar-proof receptacle against thieves (hence, also

against envy), just as there is treasure which thieves (hence, also envy) are not able to steal. But love can press forward into the inmost enclosure and strip a man so that he has nothing left, owns nothing, so that he must himself admit that he has nothing, simply nothing, owns nothing. Wonderful! Envy takes, as it thinks, everything, and, when it has thus taken, the man says, "I have really lost nothing." But love can take everything, so that the man himself says, "I own nothing at all."

However, love is perhaps most correctly described as an infinite debt: so that when love seizes upon a man he feels that he is infinitely in debt. Generally we say about the one who is loved, that through being loved he becomes a debtor. Thus we say that children are in love indebted to their parents, because these have loved them first, so that the children's love is only a partial payment on the debt, or a repayment. And this of course is true. But still such a statement reminds one too much of an actual business relation: where an indebtedness has been incurred and must be paid off in installments. It is love which has been shown us, and it must be repaid with love. We are not now speaking of the fact that *by receiving one runs into debt*. No, he who loves is in debt; when he feels himself gripped by love, he feels this as being in an infinite debt. Wonderful! To give a man his love is, as was said, the highest thing one man can give another—and yet, just when he gives his love and just through giving it, he becomes infinitely indebted. Therefore can one say: *this is love's characteristic, that the lover by giving, infinitely, comes—into infinite debt*. But this is the relation of the infinite, and love is infinite. By giving away money one does not really run into debt; on the contrary, the receiver is in debt. On the contrary, when the lover gives what is infinitely the highest gift one man can give another, his love, then he places himself in an infinite debt. What a beautiful, what a sacred diffidence does not love bring with it; it not only dares not persuade itself to regard its own act as something meritorious, but it is ashamed even to regard its own act as a part payment on the debt; its own gift becomes consciously like an infinite debt which it is impossible to repay, since in giving, it is constantly running into debt.

Thus one might describe love. Yet Christianity never lingers on the condition or on the description of it; it always hastens to the task, or hastens to set the task. This is precisely expressed in the Gospel passage we read: "Owe no man anything except to love one another," which words we shall use as the basis for this meditation:

OUR DUTY TO REMAIN IN THE DEBT OF LOVE TO ONE ANOTHER.

To remain in debt! But should that be difficult? Nothing is easier than running into debt! And, on the other hand, could remaining in

debt be a task? We usually think otherwise, that our problem is the one of getting out of debt: the indebtedness may be anything, there are money debts, debts of honor, promissory notes, in short, anything whatever, the problem ordinarily always being how to get out of debt, the sooner the better. But here the task would be, and hence the honor, to remain in debt! And if this is the task, then it must be an action, perhaps an extensive, a difficult action. But to stay in debt is still precisely the expression for not undertaking the least thing; it is the expression for inactivity, indifference, sluggishness. And this same phrase, as used here, will be the expression for that which is precisely the opposite of indifference, the expression for infinite love.

Lo, all this, all these strange difficulties, which, as it were, heap themselves up against this strange saying, indicate that the matter may have a peculiar connection, so that a certain reorganization of mind and thought is needed in order merely to realize what the discourse is really about.

Let us begin with a little thought-experiment. If the lover, humanly speaking, had done something for the beloved so extraordinary, so exalted, so self-sacrificing, that men might say, "This is the greatest thing one man can do for another": then this would be beautiful and good. But suppose he were to add: "See, now I have paid my debt!" Would this not be ungracious, cold, and, strictly speaking, if I may venture, an indecency which ought never to be heard, and which never is heard in the good society of true love! If, on the other hand, the lover had done this high-minded and self-sacrificing thing, and now were to add: "I still have one prayer—oh, let me remain in your debt": would this not be graciously said! Or if the lover by means of every sacrifice indulges the wishes of the beloved, and now says, "It is a joy to me to pay off by this means a fragment of the indebtedness—in which, however, I still wish to continue": would this not be graciously said! Or if he simply kept silent about its involving sacrifice, merely to avoid the confusion it might produce, in that this sacrifice might for a moment seem like a partial payment on the debt: would this not be a gracious thought! If this is true, has it not really indicated that any business relation is inconceivable, is most abominable to love? Reckoning can only find a place where there is a finite relation, because the relation of finite to finite permits calculation. But love cannot calculate. If its left hand never gets to know what its right hand does, then it is impossible to cast up the accounts, and equally so when the debt is infinite. To reckon with an infinite greatness is impossible, for reckoning is exactly to make finite. The lover consequently wishes for his own sake to remain in debt; he does not wish exemption from any sacrifice, far from it. Willing, indescribably willing, as the prompting of love is, he

will do everything, and fear only one thing, that he might thus do everything so that he would get out of debt. Rightly understood, this is fear; the wish is to remain in debt, but it is also a duty, a task. If the love in us is not so perfect that we truly wish this, then duty will help us to remain in debt.

When it is a duty to remain in the debt of love to each other, then must there be eternal vigilance, early and late, so that love never comes to dwell upon itself, or to compare itself with the love in other men, or to compare itself with its own deeds which it has performed.

In the world we often hear enthusiastic and exciting speeches about love and faith and hope, and about the heart's goodness, in short, about all spiritual categories, speeches which describe and fascinate through their use of the most burning expressions, the most glowing colors. And yet such a discourse is really only a painted wall; it is to a closer and more serious inspection a deception, since it must either flatter the listener or make fun of him. Sometimes we hear a Christian discourse whose whole secret, like the narration and instruction noted, consists of this deceitful enthusiasm. If, for example, such a speech is heard, and a man now quite simply and honestly (for honesty precisely consists in wishing to act in accordance with what is said, in wishing to shape one's life accordingly) asks, "What shall I do, how shall I get love thus to inflame me?" then the speaker might answer literally, "That is a strange question; he who has love and faith and hope and goodness of heart, has these in the manner described, but he who does not have them cannot be helped by talking about them." Strange! One would, nevertheless, suppose that it would be of special importance to talk to those who are not this way—in order that they might become so. But here lies just the deception in the delusion: to speak as if one would guide men, and then to be obliged to confess that one can only speak *about* those who need no guidance, because those whom the speech addresses are already so perfect. But who is it then *to* whom one speaks, who will be benefited by this speech, which at most has some individual *about* whom it speaks—if it is otherwise true that such an individual exists?

But could such poetic nonsense also be Christianity? If so, it is a mistake on the part of primitive Christianity, that in the sermon about righteousness and purity, it constantly refers to publicans and sinners, who certainly are not righteous! Then should not Christianity, instead of speaking sarcastically about the righteous, who need no conversion, more correctly have embellished the speech into a eulogy upon—the righteous! But if this is done, then not only does Christianity have no one to speak *to*, but neither does it have anyone to speak *about*, that is, Christianity is silenced. No, Christianity has least of all announced itself as a eulogy, and it has never concerned itself with describing or

dwelling upon the fact of how a man is now; it has never made *distinctions* between men so it might only speak about those who *are* now so fortunate as to be lovable. Christianity begins at once with what *every* man *must become*. Therefore Christianity calls itself a guide, and rightly so; for no one will ask Christ, who is the Way, or the Scriptures, which are the guidance, in vain about what he ought to do: the questioner will get to know immediately—if he himself *wills* to know.

This in order to prevent misunderstanding. Anyone who does not wish to understand the discourse about what one must do in relation to love, in that there is truly much, or rather everything, to do both in acquiring and preserving it: he has placed himself outside of Christianity, he is a pagan who admires the lucky, hence the accidental, but just because of this he gropes in darkness—does it really become lighter, however many will-o'-the-wisps play around him?

Hence, there is something to do, and which must be done, in order to continue in the debt of love to each other. When a fisherman has caught a fish and wishes to keep it alive, what must he do? He must at once place it in water, otherwise it weakens and dies after a longer or shorter time. And why must he put it in water? Because water is the natural element of fish, and *everything which is to be kept alive must be kept in its own element*. But the natural element of love is infinity, inexhaustible, immeasurable. If, therefore, you wish to preserve your love, then you must take care that by the aid of infinite indebtedness, ensnared by liberty and life, it constantly remains in its element, otherwise it sickens and dies—not after a longer or shorter time, for it dies at once, which is exactly the sign of its perfection, that it can only live in infinity.

That love's natural element is infinity, inexhaustible, immeasurable, certainly no one will deny, and it is indeed easy to see. Assume, we can only assume it, that a serving-man or a man whose labor and trouble you can pay for, does exactly the same work for you as do your friends, so that there is consequently not the slightest discoverable difference between the result of their work and that of the servant: and yet, yet there is an infinite difference, an immeasurable difference. There is, namely, always in the one case something extra, which, strangely enough, is worth *infinitely* more than that to which it is added as an extra. This is exactly the concept, "immeasurable"! In everything which the friend does for you, in the least trifle as in the greatest sacrifice, he is constantly giving his love with it, and thereby the smallest service, which in connection with your servant you would hardly consider worth reckoning, becomes immeasurable.

Or imagine that a man conceived the idea of wishing to see whether he, without loving the other man yet because he wished to do it (hence,

for the sake of the experiment—not because it was his duty), could not be, as we say, equally indefatigable in sacrifices, in services, in expressions of devotion as the one who really loved the same man: you readily see that he does not approach this; there is, on the contrary, an incommensurable difference between the two. He who actually loves always has a headstart, and an infinite headstart; for by the time the other has unearthed, computed and discovered a new expression of devotion, the friend has already carried it out, because the friend does not need to calculate, and hence wastes no time in doing so.

But the fact of being and continuing in an infinite indebtedness, is exactly an expression for the infinity of love, so that by remaining in debt, love remains in its element. It is here a reciprocal relation, but infinite from both sides. In the one case it is the beloved who in each one of the lover's affectionate expressions of love grasps the incommensurability of the love; in the other case it is the lover who feels the incommensurability, because he knows the debt to be infinite: it is one and the same thing which is infinitely great and infinitely small. The object of love confesses in love that the lover in the smallest things does infinitely more than all others through all the greatest sacrifices; and the lover confesses that even with all possible sacrifices he does infinitely less than he feels the debt to be. What a wonderful like for like in this infinity! Oh, the scholars are proud of their calculation of the infinite, but here is the philosopher's stone: the least expression of love is infinitely greater than all sacrifices, and all sacrifices are infinitely less than the least expression of love in reducing the debt!

But what, then, can take love out of its element? *As soon as love becomes self-centered, it is out of its natural element.* What does it mean to be self-centered? It means to become itself the object. But an object is always a dangerous matter if one wishes to move forward; an object is like a finitely fixed point, a boundary and a hindrance, a dangerous matter for the infinite. *Infinitely* it cannot be that love itself becomes the object, nor is there danger therein. For *infinitely* to be itself its own object is to remain in the infinite, and insofar only to exist or to continue to exist, since love is a reduplication in itself, as different as the particularity of the natural life is from the spiritual reduplication. Hence, when love becomes self-centered, it must be in its own individual expression that it becomes itself the object, or that another distinct love becomes the object, the love in the one man, and the love in the other man. When the object is thus finite, love becomes self-centered; for *infinitely to become self-centered* is exactly to be in movement. But when love is finitely self-centered, everything is lost. Imagine an arrow that flies, as we say, with the speed of an arrow; imagine that for a moment it gets the idea of halting its flight, perhaps in order to see how

far it has come or how high it has soared above the earth, or how its speed compared with that of another arrow, which also flew with the speed of an arrow: at that very moment, it falls to the ground.

So too with love when it becomes *finitely* self-centered, or becomes itself the object, which more exactly defined, is *comparison*. Love cannot *infinitely* compare itself with itself, for infinitely it so resembles itself that this would be merely saying that it is itself. There is in the *infinite* comparison no third party, that is a reduplication, hence there is no comparison. The third party belongs to all comparison, together with likeness and unlikeness. If there is no dwelling on itself, there is no comparison; if there is no comparison, there is no dwelling on itself.

comparison

calculation

But what then can the third party of the comparison be? The love in the individual man can compare itself with the love in others. Then he discovers, or thinks that he discovers, that his love is greater than that in the others, or that in certain others it is greater, but in others less. Perhaps at first he believed that the comparison was but a fleeting side-glance in passing, something which required neither time nor effort. Alas! the side-glance of comparison discovers only too easily a whole world of relationships and calculations. This causes a stoppage; at that very moment he is prepared to get out of debt, or is perhaps already out of debt—that is, out of love. Or the third party of the comparison may be those hitherto unaccomplished works of love. At the very moment when reckoning and weighing he is prepared to get out of debt, or perhaps with great self-satisfaction, he sees himself already more than out of debt—he is more than out of love.

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In the comparison everything is lost, love is made finite, the debt is to be paid—quite like every other debt; in contradistinction to the debt of honor which is peculiar in that it must be paid at once, the sooner the better, the debt of love is peculiar in being infinite. What does comparison always lose? It loses the moment, the moment which should be filled with an expression of the life of love. But to lose the moment is to become immediate. A moment lost, then is the chain of eternity broken; a moment lost, then is the continuity of eternity disturbed; a moment lost, then is the eternal lost; but to lose the eternal is precisely to become immediate. A moment wasted on comparison, then is everything forfeited. The moment of comparison is, namely, a selfish moment, a moment which wishes to be *for itself*; just this is the breach, the fall—as the fall of the arrow is due to dwelling on itself.

In comparison, everything is lost, love made finite, the debt to pay, position of no consequence, even if it were the highest; love thinks to participate comparatively in proportion to the love of others, or in proportion to its own special impulses. Let us understand each other.

If it were really true, we may for a moment assume this, that it were considered unbecoming and unseemly for the king's son to associate with common men—if he nevertheless did this, and now in his own defense said, "I am by no means surrendering my dignity, I shall certainly know how to assert myself as the first among all these men": I wonder if the subtle courtier would not say: "Your Highness, you do not understand; the unseemliness lies in the fact of your associating with such men. Your Highness will himself realize that it would sound like mockery for it to be said about you, the Prince, that you are the highest among those common men. In that comparison there is nothing for you to gain, practically nothing, by being first among them; for the relation itself, the possibility of comparison is a *faux pas*, and to remain outside of the possibility of comparison is the only thing worthy of the royal dignity." Still this is nothing but a jest. But when that which is and ought to be infinite seeks the evil companionship of intercourse and comparison with the finite, then this is unseemly, undignified; then is the debasement deserved, even if within the comparison one thinks to be the first. For even if it looked and were true, comparatively to love better than all other men, is not to love. To love is to remain in infinite indebtedness, the infinity of the debt is the bond of perfection.

Let me elucidate this by speaking about another infinite relationship. Imagine an enthusiast who enthusiastically desires only one thing, and who will enthusiastically sacrifice everything for that one good. Imagine that it now happens (that which does not happen *accidentally*, but which will absolutely happen as long as the world is the world) that to the degree he labors more and more disinterestedly, more and more sacrificingly, more and more strenuously, to that same degree the world works more and more against him; imagine him to have reached the point—where if for a single moment he makes a mistake and compares his effort with the reward which the world gives; or makes a mistake and compares his effort with his hitherto unrealized ambition; or makes a mistake and compares his lot with that of those distinguished ones who do not seem to be fired by enthusiasm: alas! then is he lost. Now the Tempter enters and says to him: "Halt your striving, lessen your exertions, have a good time, enjoy life in comfort and accept the flattering condition which is offered you of being known as one of the greatest enthusiasts"—for the Tempter does not speak ill of enthusiasm, he is too clever for that; nor does he fool men so easily into dropping the matter. However, if the enthusiast will not yield to the Tempter, he renews his efforts. Then again the Tempter comes to him and says: "Halt your labors, lessen your exertions, have a good time, enjoy life in comfort by accepting the most unconditionally flattering terms that can certainly ever be offered you, the being recognized as the world's great-

est enthusiast, a recognition which will make your life easier and secure for you, the enthusiast, the admiration of the world, whereas you are now only making your life strenuous and arousing the opposition of the world." Alas, to be *comparatively* enthusiastic is not to be enthusiastic at all.

Woe to the man who has corrupted his soul by the defilement of comparison, for he cannot understand his neighbor except as tremendous pride and vanity. For the enthusiast says to the Tempter: "Be off, and take your comparisons with you." And this is exactly the right procedure. Therefore we urge upon an enthusiast: "Shut your eyes, close your ears, stick to the demand of the infinite; then no comparison will slink in to assassinate your enthusiasm, and to tempt you to become the greatest enthusiast—comparatively! In the sight of the infinite demand your greatest efforts are but a childish performance, and this fact should prevent your becoming self-important, since you will just begin to understand how infinitely much more is required of you."

We warn the one on a ship which is sailing ahead before the wind, not to look at the waves lest he should become giddy; in the same way the comparison between the finite and the infinite makes a man giddy. Guard yourself, therefore, against the comparison which the world wishes to force upon you; for the world understands no more about enthusiasm than a capitalist does about love, and you will always find that dullness and stupidity are first of all intent on making comparisons, and in catching everything in the muddy "actuality" of comparison. Therefore do not look about you, "salute no man on the way," listen to no cry or shout which wishes to dupe you out of your enthusiasm and trick it into spending its strength laboring in the treadmill of comparison. Let it not disturb you if the world calls your enthusiasm madness, calls it selfishness—in eternity everyone will be forced to understand what enthusiasm and love are. Do not accept the terms offered you: the admiration of the whole world in exchange for half the labor. Continue in the debt of the infinite, happy in its terms: the opposition of the whole world because you will not bargain. Do not listen, for then it is already too late—to disbelieve it. On the other hand, do not listen to what is lyingly said about enthusiasm, lest you be injured in another way, by believing it, as if every man who *wills it* is not equally near to the infinite, and hence equally near to becoming enthusiastic. For what is enthusiasm? Is it not merely being willing to do and suffer everything? Is it not also wishing always to remain in the debt of the infinite? For every time the arrow will speed forth, the bowstring must be tensed, but for every time the enthusiasm renews or in the renewal maintains its impetus, the infinitude of the debt must be kept in mind.

So too with love. If you wish to preserve love, then you must preserve it in the infinite debt. Guard yourself, therefore, against comparisons! One who watches over the most precious treasure in the world does not need to exercise so much caution to prevent anyone from learning to know about it; for you must also be on guard so that you yourself do not learn to know something about love through comparisons. Guard against comparison! Comparison affords the most fatal connection into which love can enter. Comparison is the most dangerous acquaintance love can establish. Comparison is the worst of all seducers. And no seducer is so swiftly at hand, and no seducer is so everywhere present as is the comparison as soon as your side-glance beckons—however, let no one seduced say in his own defense, “The comparison seduced me,” for he was the one who discovered the comparison. We all know how timidly, how ineffectively, and with how much difficulty a man walks when he knows he is walking on smooth ice; but we know, too, that if because of darkness or for some other reason he does not know that he is walking on it, then he steps forth quite firmly and confidently. Be on guard therefore against the comparison! Comparison is the adventitious sucker on the root which takes the strength from the tree: as if cursed the tree becomes a withered shadow, but the adventitious sucker flourishes in its unwholesome growth. Comparison may be likened to your neighbor’s marshy ground; even if your house is not built on it, all the surrounding ground also sinks. Comparison is like the hidden worm of secret consumption which does not die, at least not until it has taken the life of love. Comparison is a loathsome skin-eruption which strikes inward and consumes the marrow. Be vigilant, therefore, in your love against the comparison.

But if the comparison is the only thing which could get love out of debt, or which is ready to get it out of debt, and the comparison is avoided, then the love remains, sound and vital—in the infinite debt. Remaining in debt is an infinitely artful and yet infinitely satisfying expression for the infinitude of love. When one says about a force of nature, for instance, that it is blowing a gale, or that it bursts forth with an infinite power and force, there is always the possibility that it may cease or become exhausted. But that which infinitely in itself has also an infinite debt behind it, is a second time made infinite; it has in itself the vigilance which always takes care that it does not cease—the debt is the second time the accelerating force.

When it is a duty to remain in the indebtedness of love to one another, *then the remaining in debt is not merely an enthusiastic expression, not a mere concept of love, but it is action; then the love remains, by the aid of duty, Christian love in action, in the haste of action, and just thereby in the infinite debt.*

To love is to assume an infinite debt. The wish to remain in debt might seem to be only an interpretation of a concept of love, a last and most extreme expression which is incident to it—like the garlands at a festival. For even the most precious goblet filled with the choicest wine still lacks something: that the goblet be garlanded! And even the most lovable soul in the form of the most lovely woman—still lacks something: the bridal garland which perfects her! So it must also be said, when one talks merely humanly about love: this wish to remain in debt is the highest festal expression, it is the garland at the festival, something which in a certain sense makes no difference (for one certainly does not drink the enwreathed goblet, nor do the garlands become a part of the bride), and just for that reason it is the expression of the beautiful enthusiasm. Only in the human sense is a beautiful enthusiasm the highest.

But Christianity does not speak enthusiastically about love; it says it is a duty to remain in the debt of love, and it says this not as a giddy thought now for the last time and as the result of intoxication—for the wish to continue in debt would be an exaggerated expression, and yet it might possibly seem to become more exaggerated through being regarded as a duty. Even the exaggeration has, against its will, an appearance of paying off on the debt, but if it is a duty to remain in debt, then the impossibility soars even higher. It might seem like a case of intoxication, where a sudden moment of sobriety means an increase of intoxication; for enthusiasm becomes even more enthusiastic when it is expressed quietly and coolly; the marvelous becomes even more marvelous when it is described quite simply, as an ordinary event. But Christianity does not speak in this way. It speaks about remaining in debt in quite the same fervent way that a noble human love speaks about it, but it says it quite differently. Christianity simply makes no fuss over it; it is not, like the purely human interpretation of love, overwhelmed by the sight; no, it speaks equally as earnestly about it as about that which seems to a merely human enthusiasm entirely unlike it. It says it is a duty, and thereby it takes away from love everything inflaming, everything immediate, everything giddy.

Christianity says it is a duty to remain in debt, and means thereby that it *involves action, not a mere expression about love*, not a reflective interpretation of love. In the Christian sense no human being has ever accomplished the highest in love; and even if it were possible, this impossibility, there would at that very moment, from the Christian standpoint, be a new task. But if there is immediately a new task, then it is impossible to have time to know whether one has achieved the highest or not; for at the moment when one would get to know it, he is engaged in accomplishing the new task, and hence is prevented from

knowing anything about the preceding moment, for which he has no time; he is occupied with the *haste of action*, whereas even in the moment of the greatest enthusiasm there is a certain lingering.

Christianity understands what action means, and how incessantly action is able to occupy love. The merely human interpretation of love admires love, and that is why it so easily comes to a standstill, a moment where there is nothing to do, an idle moment, that is the moment of enthusiasm. Love is to the merely human understanding as the extraordinarily gifted child is to the simple parents: the child finishes his task so quickly that the parents are at a loss to know what they can find to keep him busy. Love is to the merely human understanding of the conception, like the fiery snorting steed which quickly rides the horseman tired, instead of the horseman being able, if necessary, to ride his steed tired. And Christianity can do this. Its purpose is not to work love tired, far from it; but Christianity knows, by virtue of its eternal nature and by the earnestness of eternity, that it can master love, and therefore it speaks so simply, so earnestly, about the matter—just as the skilled horseman who knows that he can manage his horse, is not surprised at its mettle, for he says it ought to be mettlesome; and he does not destroy its spirit, but by training it he improves the horse. So Christianity knows how to constrain love, and to teach it that at every moment there is a task; it knows how to bear with love so that love may humbly learn that wishing to remain in debt is not a mere form of words, not merely enthusiasm, but that it is earnestness and truth.

The danger would be, as certainly happened, that love would come to dwell comparatively upon itself. This must be prevented, but when it is prevented by the aid of duty, something else also happens—love comes into a relation with the Christian concept, or in the Christian sense with the God-idea. This debt-relation is carried over into the relation between man and God. It is God who, so to speak, kindly takes charge of the demand of love; by loving a man the lover comes into an infinite debt—but also a debt to God as guardian of the beloved. Now comparison becomes impossible, and now love has found its master.

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There is no more talk about festal moods and showy achievements; love will no longer, if I may speak thus, play on the childish stage of men, which leaves it doubtful whether it is jest or earnest. While love in all its own expressions turns outward toward men, where it has its object and its tasks, it still knows that this is not the place where it shall be judged, but that in its innermost being, where love lays hold on God, there is the judgment. It is as when a child is out among strangers, it behaves as it has been taught. But whether strangers think well of the child or not, whether it occurs to the child that it behaves better than the other children or not: the seriously trained child never

loses sight of the fact that the decision will be made at home, where the parents do the judging. And yet the training is not planned for fitting the child to remain at home with its parents; on the contrary, it is planned to fit the child to go out into the world. So too with love when it is understood in the Christian way. It is, so to speak, God who trains the love in a man; but God does not do this just for His own pleasure, just to delight Himself with the sight. On the contrary, He does it in order then to send love out into the world, perpetually busy with its task. Nevertheless, the earnestly trained, the Christian love never for a moment forgets where it shall be judged; at evening, or morning, or whenever it may be, in short every time it temporarily leaves all its tasks in order to come home, it is catechized—in order to be immediately sent out again. For even with the greatest enthusiasm love may still tarry a little before it goes out again, but with God there is no tarrying.

Thus understood, earnestness and truth consist in remaining in the debt of love to each other. Even the most sincerely intended and, humanly speaking, the noblest enthusiasm, even the most fervent and disinterested enthusiasm, is still not earnestness, even though it accomplishes astonishing things, and even if it also wishes to remain in debt. The deficiency in even the noblest human enthusiasm is that it, as merely human, in the final analysis *is not itself powerful, because it has no higher power over it.* Only the God-relationship is earnest; the earnestness consists in forcing the task to its highest achievement because there is One who compels by the power of the eternal; the earnestness consists in the enthusiasm having power over itself and compulsion in itself. The individual is bound by his debt of love to other men; but it is neither the individual himself nor the other men who shall judge his love. If this is true, then must the individual remain in the infinite indebtedness. God has the infinite conception of truth and of the infallibility of love. God is love, hence the individual must remain in debt—as God judges him, or as he abides in God, for only in the infinitude of debt can God abide in him.

He is in debt, and he also recognizes that it is his duty to remain in debt, his duty to admit this, which from the Christian standpoint is not the admission of a fanatic, but of a humble, loving soul. The humility consists in making the confession; the loving, as it were, consists in being infinitely willing to make it because it belongs to love, because there is the meaning and coherence of eternal happiness in this confession; the Christian meaning consists in simply not ceasing to do this, because it is his duty.

“Therefore owe no man anything except to love one another”; no,

"pay everyone everything which you owe them; tribute to whom tribute is due; duty to whom duty, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." In this way owe no man anything, not what you have borrowed from him, not what you have promised him, not what he might rightly demand of you in repayment. If possible, owe no man anything, no favors, no service, no sympathy in joy or sorrow, no forbearance of judgment, no assistance in life, no advice in danger, no sacrifice, not even the hardest—no, in all these, owe no man anything; but still remain in debt, which with all this you have by no means desired, and which before God you have by no means been able to pay, the debt of loving one another!

Oh, do this! And then only one thing more: "Remember in time that if you do this, or if you try to comply with this, then will things go ill for you in the world." This is especially important to keep in mind with a particular reference to the conclusion of this discourse, and with a general reference to the conclusion of this little book, so that the discourse may not fascinate you with untruth. Therefore the world will simply find the conclusion entirely wrong, which fact again has significance in proving that the conclusion is—right.

We read and sometimes hear with sadness a Christian discourse which really leaves out the final danger. What is said about faith and love and humility is entirely right and wholly Christian; but nevertheless such a discourse may mislead a youth, instead of guiding him, because it neglects to tell him what happens to the Christian in the world. The discourse demands that a man shall work self-sacrificingly to develop his Christian nature—but then, yes then, there is no more said, or the supremely serious, more definite categories are suppressed, while such assertions are made that the good has its reward, that the good is loved both by God and man. If this Christian nature is rightly recommended as the highest, then the youth must surely believe that if he accomplishes the required task, or at least works honestly to accomplish it, then things will go well for him in the world. Oh, but this silence about the final difficulty (that, humanly speaking, it will go badly with him in the world, and so much more so as he develops his Christian character) is a deception, which may either lead the youth to self-despair (as if the fault lay squarely in himself, because he was not a true Christian) or to his despondently giving up his struggle, as if something quite unusual had happened to him, while nevertheless he had only experienced the ordinary consequence which the apostle John refers to when he says: "Marvel not at this." Consequently, the speaker has deceived the youth by keeping silent about the true sequence of events, as if, from the Christian standpoint, there were a conflict only in

one place, instead of the true Christian struggle always being a twofold danger because there is a conflict in two places: first, in the inner man, where he must fight with himself, and then, when he has made progress in this conflict, outside of himself, where he must fight with the world. Alas, perhaps such a speaker is afraid to recommend the Christian and the good in this certainly strange but veracious way, by saying that it has no reward in the world, and that, moreover, the world always works against it. Perhaps it may seem to the speaker like smiting himself on his own—eloquent lips, if, after having recommended the good in the most laudatory and particularly fortunately chosen turns and expressions, and after having almost brought the listener to go out even this very day and act in accordance with his teaching, it may perhaps seem to him like smiting himself upon the lips, moreover, it would really be a sin, considering the impression produced by his inspired eloquence, if among his recommendations he should now interject this statement: that the good is rewarded with hate, contempt, and persecution. For, if this is true, would it not be more natural to warn against the good? To put it even more exactly, one does just this by recommending it in this way. The speaker is certainly in a difficult position. Well-intentioned perhaps, he really wishes to attract men: so he omits the final difficulty, the one which makes the recommendation so difficult—and then the discourse flows on, elevating and tear-compelling in its polished delivery. Ah, but this, as everyone knows, is deception. If, on the contrary, the speaker makes use of—the difficult recommendation, then he “frightens his audience away,” perhaps the speech almost frightens himself. He, who is so highly popular, honored and appreciated, certainly proves that the good Christian has his reward in the world. He has, namely, his reward, even if eternity believes ten times over that he has lost it. It cannot be denied that he has a reward, but a somewhat worldly one, and it is not the compensation which Christianity *at the time* had promised its adherents, and by which it had *directly* recommended itself.

We should truly hate to make a youth conceited, and early teach him to form the habit of judging the world; God forbid that any word of ours should be able to contribute to the development of such unsoundness in a man. We believe in making his inner life so strenuous that from the very beginning he learns to think otherwise; for it is certainly a perverted hatred of the world which, possibly without even having once considered the tremendous responsibility involved, wishes to be persecuted. But, on the other hand, we should truly hate to deceive a youth by keeping silent about the difficulty and keeping silent at the very moment when we are trying to recommend the Christian way of life, for then and just then is the time to speak. Confidently and fear-

*Difficulties of Christianity -
necessarily involve opposition from the world.*

lessly we dare to recommend the Christian way of life, and to add that its reward, to put it mildly, will be the ingratitude of the world. We regard it as our duty to say this *in time*, so that we may not sometimes recommend Christianity by omitting any of its essential difficulties, and at other times, perhaps because of some particular text, find some ground of comfort for it in the life attempted. No, just at the time when the Christian way is being most strongly recommended, the difficulty must be simultaneously emphasized. It is unchristian sophistry if anyone reasons in this way: "Let us use every means to win men to the Christian way of life, and then when sometime adversities come upon them, then we shall have the remedy, then will be the time to speak about it." But this is the deception: that it might be possible for a Christian to escape these adversities, just as some people are fortunate in not being tried by poverty or sickness. That is, it places the opposition of the world in an accidental relation to the Christian way, not in an essential relation: opposition may perhaps come, but then again it may not. However, such a consideration is absolutely unchristian. If a pagan may rightly deem himself fortunate at his death because he was through with life and past all adversities, well, that is possible; but a Christian ought to be a little doubtful in this joy at the moment of death—for from the Christian standpoint, the opposition of the world has an essential relation to Christian inwardness. Besides, in the very moment of choosing Christianity, one should have an impression of its difficulties, so that he may know what it is he is choosing. Nothing should be promised the youth except what Christianity can hold to, but Christianity cannot hold to anything other than what it has promised from the beginning: the world's ingratitude, opposition, insults, and always increasingly so, the more earnestly Christian one becomes. This is the final difficulty in the Christian way of life, and least of all must there be silence about it when one is recommending Christianity.

No, if there is to be silence regarding the final difficulty, then there is really nothing to be said about the Christian way of life. If the world is not as Christianity originally assumed it to be, then is Christianity essentially abolished. That which Christianity calls self-denial simply and essentially implies a *double danger*, otherwise the self-denial is not Christian self-denial. Therefore, if anyone can show that the world or Christendom have now become essentially good, as if they were the eternal, then I can also show that the Christian self-denial is made impossible and Christianity abolished, just as it will be abolished in eternity, where it will cease to be a *striving*.

A *merely human self-denial* thinks as follows: give up your selfish wishes, desires and plans—then you will be honored and respected and loved as just and wise. It is easy to see that this sort of self-denial

does not lay hold of God or the God-relationship, but remains on the worldly plane of a relationship between men. The *Christian self-denial* thinks: give up your selfish wishes and desires, give up your selfish plans and purposes in order to work for the good in true disinterestedness—and then prepare to find yourself, just on that account, hated, scorned and mocked, and even executed as a criminal; or rather, do not prepare to find yourself in this situation, for that may become necessary, but choose it of your own free will. For Christian self-denial knows beforehand that these things will happen, and chooses them freely. Christianity has the eternal understanding of what it costs to give up its own selfish purposes; therefore it does not let the Christian go for half-price. One can readily see that the Christian self-denial lays hold on God, and in God has its only stronghold. But only thus is Christian self-denial to be relied upon—in the double danger. The other danger, or the danger in another place, is precisely the guarantee that the self-denial has the right God-relationship, that it is purely a God-relationship. And if there were no other double danger except that of wishing thus to be relied upon, the world regards as stupidity or folly that which it is very far from honoring and admiring. The world understands self-denial only as shrewdness, and therefore honors only the self-denial which shrewdly remains within the compass of the worldly. Therefore the worldly always sees to it that there shall be an adequate number of the counterfeit notes of the false self-denial in circulation; alas! and sometimes the crossing of the ratios and thoughts becomes so complicated that it needs an expert eye immediately to detect the counterfeit notes. For one can also take God along secularly into worldliness, and hence get a self-denial which bears the God-mark and yet is a forgery. Secularly it may sometimes look as if it is called to deny itself for the sake of God, yet not in that reliable confidence in God of the double danger, but in such a way that worldliness understands that man and honors him accordingly. Yet *it is easy* to recognize the forgery, for as soon as the double mark is lacking, then the self-denial is not the Christian self-denial.

It is human self-denial when a child denies himself while the arms of the parents encouragingly and promptly open to it. It is human self-denial if a man denies himself, and the world now opens its arms to him. But it is Christian self-denial if a man denies himself, and then, just because the world for that reason closes its arms to him, repulsed by the world he now must seek confidence in God. The twofold danger lies in the fact that he met opposition just where he had expected to find help, and consequently he must turn twice, instead of as in human self-denial turning but once. No self-denial, therefore, which is encouraged by the world, is Christian self-denial. This was the

meaning of the early Church Fathers when they said that all the virtues of the heathen were shining vices. It is *merely human self-denial*: without fear for one's self or for the consequences, to rush into danger—into a danger where honor awaits the victor, where the admiration of the environment, of the spectators, allures the one who only dares. It is easy to see that this self-denial does not lay hold on God, but is delayed by human relativities. *Christian self-denial* rushes into danger without fear of the consequences to itself, into a danger which the environment cannot understand will bring any honor to the victor, because the environment is itself blinded, entangled and guilty. Consequently, it is not only perilous to rush into the danger, but there is here a double danger because the contempt of the spectators awaits the hero, whether he wins or loses.

In the one instance the idea of danger is conceded; the environment is agreed that there is danger, danger in venturing, and hence honor to gain by victory, since the conception of the danger has made his contemporaries ready to applaud the one who dares. In the second case the hero must himself discover the danger and strive to get the right to call it danger, which his contemporaries are not willing to do, who, although they admit that it is possible to lose one's life in this danger, yet deny that it is really danger, since from their point of view it is ridiculous, and hence it is doubly ridiculous to lose one's life for the sake of something ridiculous. Thus Christianity discovered a danger which is called everlasting perdition. The world found this danger ridiculous. Let us now imagine a Christian witness. For the sake of this doctrine he rushes into a struggle with the powerful who hold his life in their hands, and who must look upon him as an agitator—a fact which will cost him his life. At the same time his contemporaries, with whom he has no immediate quarrel, but who are spectators, find it ridiculous that anyone should risk death for such foolishness. Here is life to lose and truly no honor or admiration to gain! Still, thus to be forsaken, only thus to be forsaken, is Christian self-denial.—If now the world, or Christendom, had been essentially good, then this self-denial would have been impossible; for under such conditions the world, as essentially good, would honor and praise the one who denied himself and who always had the true conception of where the danger was and what it truly was.

Therefore we wish to end this discourse like all our discourses which, according to the ability vouchsafed us, recommend the godly life, with this little ingratiating word of exhortation: watch yourself at the beginning of your task—lest you find that you are not truly in earnest in truly wishing to deny yourself. Our understanding of what Christianity is, is too serious to wish to entice anyone; we would almost rather warn

against it. He who in truth will appropriate the Christian teaching, he will yet come to experience inward terrors quite different from the bit of terror dramatically set forth in a discourse; he must make an outward resolution quite different from one he could make by the aid of the painted falsity of a bit of eloquence. We leave it to anyone to decide whether this, our earnest understanding of what Christianity means, could seem cold, cheerless and lacking in enthusiasm.

So far as one might speak of his own personal relation to the world, since this would be a different matter, it would be one's duty to speak as mildly, as apologetically as possible, and even if one does speak, it is his duty to remain in the debt of love. But when we speak instructively we dare not keep silent, a fact that is little calculated to win favor for the discourse in the longing understanding of an enthusiastic youth. Nor dare we recommend, smilingly to wish to elevate himself above the world's opposition and folly; if this could be done as it is done in heathendom, it can only be done in heathendom, because the heathen does not have the true Christian's earnest, eternally concerned conception of the truth: yet to the truth it is by no means ridiculous that others do not have it. From the Christian point of view the world's essential foolishness is not at all ridiculous, however ridiculous it is; for when there is an eternal happiness to win or lose, then it is neither a jest if I win it, nor laughable if someone loses it.

On the other hand, it would be an absurdity we should guard against, to speak complacently about the Christian truth. If a man were handing another man a terribly sharp, polished two-edged tool, would he hand it to him with the manner, bearing and gestures with which he would hand him a bouquet of flowers? Would not this be a crazy thing to do? How does one do it? If he is certain of the dangerous nature of the tool, while he may recommend it unhesitatingly, he also adds a word of caution. And so with the Christian truth. If necessary we should not hesitate, conscious of the greatest responsibility, in our Christian preaching, precisely in our Christian preaching, to preach against Christianity. For we know perfectly well in these times how anything unpleasant stings: so that the preacher by foolish and flattering sermons has tricked Christianity into becoming an illusion and us men into imagining that as such we are Christians. Still, if a man had thought that he was holding a flower in his hand, a flower which he half foolishly, half thoughtlessly has enjoyed looking at, and then some one, with truth, remember, cried to him, "You fool, do you not see that you are holding a terribly sharp, polished, two-edged tool!"—would he not for a moment be horrified? But, but—did the one who truthfully said that, deceive him or the truth? Therefore, if someone were to call that man's attention to the fact that the flower he held in his hand was no common, ordinary flower,

but a very rare one, this would again be to confirm him more strongly in his misunderstanding. No, Christianity is not from the human point of view the extremely rare blossom, nor is it the rarest of all—so the sermon becomes pagan and worldly within the limitations of the merely human understanding. Divinely understood, Christianity is the highest good, and therefore also, humanly understood, a tremendously dangerous good, because when only humanly understood, it is so far from being the rare flower that it is offense and foolishness, now as once in the beginning, and as long as the world stands.

Wherever the Christian religion is, there is the possibility of offense, but offense is the supreme danger. Everyone who has in truth appropriated the Christian teaching, or something of it, has been obliged thus to pass by the possibility of offense so that he has seen it, and with it before his eyes—has chosen the Christian way. If Christianity is to be discussed, the discourse must constantly hold the possibility of offense open, but hence it can never bring itself to recommend Christianity *immediately*, so the difference between the speakers would merely be that one used a stronger, a second a weaker, a third the strongest possible expression of praise. Christianity can only be recommended if at every point the possibility of the danger is constantly made manifest: that to the merely human understanding the Christian way is foolishness and offense. But by making this clear and explicit, the warning is given. So earnest is Christianity. Whatever stands in need of men's applause immediately tries to curry favor with them; but Christianity is so certain of itself, and recognizes with such earnestness and severity that it is men who need it, that just for that reason it does not recommend itself directly, but first startles them—just as Christ early commended Himself to His disciples by predicting to them that they would be hated for His sake; that the one who smote them would think that he was doing God service.

When Christianity came into the world it was not necessary for it to call attention to the fact (although it did so) that it would be a source of offense, for the world which was offended, discovered this soon enough. But now, now since the world has become Christian, now must Christianity first of all look out for offense. If it is therefore true that so many "Christians" in these times are disappointed in Christianity, how does this happen except because the possibility of offense escapes them, this frightfulness, please notice! What wonder, then, that Christianity and its eternal happiness and its duties are no longer able to satisfy the "Christians"—they cannot even be offended by them!

When Christianity came into the world it was not necessary even for it to call attention to the fact that it was contrary to human reason (although it did so), for the world discovered this readily enough. But

now, now, since Christianity has lived through hundreds of years in the complex intercourse with the human reason; now, since a fallen Christianity, like those fallen angels who married earthly women—has entered into a marriage with the human reason; now, since Christianity and reason have become on “*du*” terms: now Christianity must ever be on the watch for offense. If Christianity (alas! this sounds like the fairy story about the palace under enchantment for a hundred years) is to be preached out of the enchantment and the deformed metamorphosis of delusion, then must first the possibility of offense again be revived as the basis of preaching. Only the possibility of offense (the antidote against the sleeping potion of apologetics) is able to wake the slumberer, able to overcome the enchantment, so that Christianity may again be itself.

If then the Holy Scriptures say, “Woe to the one by whom the offense cometh,” then we can confidently say, “Woe to the one who first hit upon the idea of preaching Christianity without the possibility of offense.” Woe to the one who in ingratiating, amorous, attractive, convincing words foisted off something unworthy of men as Christianity! Woe to the one who would make a miracle comprehensible, or at least suggest that there were clear probabilities of soon being able to do so! Woe to the one who betrayed and broke the secret of faith, corrupted it into a popular wisdom by taking the possibility of offense away! Woe to the one who would lay hold on the secret of the atonement without perceiving the possibility of offense, and again, woe to him because he thought thereby to make God and Christianity into an esthetic coterie! Woe to all those faithless stewards who sat down and falsified their records, and thereby gained friends for Christianity and themselves by writing off the possibility of offense in Christianity, and imputed to it a hundred kinds of foolishness! Oh, what a sorry waste of ability and shrewdness! Oh, what an appalling waste of time spent on the tremendous task of defending Christianity! Truly, when Christianity again arises in its power through the possibility of offense, then will this horror again scare men up: then will Christianity need no defense.

And, on the other hand, the more scholarly, the more excellent the defense is, the more is Christianity corrupted, done away with, shrunken like a half-man. For the defense wishes out of the goodness of its heart, to take the possibility of offense away. But Christianity will not be defended; rather it is men who should look to it to learn whether they are able to defend themselves and defend for themselves that which they choose, when Christianity sometime terribly offers them the choice, and terribly forces them to choose: either to be offended or to accept Christianity. Therefore, take away from Christianity the possibility of

offense, or else take away from the forgiveness of sins the anxious debate of conscience (to which still, according to Luther's excellent explanation, this whole matter must be referred), and then lock the churches, the sooner the better, or make them into recreation centers which stand open all day.

But while the whole world has been made Christian through the taking away the possibility of offense: the strange circumstance constantly manifests itself: that the world is offended at the real Christian. Here the offense enters, if the possibility of offense is still inseparable from the Christian belief. Only the confusion becomes worse than ever; for if once the world was offended at Christianity—there was meaning in that; but now the world has the illusion that it is Christian, that it has appropriated Christianity, without paying any attention to the possibility of offense—and so it is offended at the real Christian. Truly, escape from such a delusion is difficult. Woe to the swift pens and busy tongues, woe to all the busyness which because it *neither* knows the one *nor* the other, therefore finds it so infinitely easy to reconcile *both* the one *and* the other!

The Christian world is always offended by the true Christian. Only now the passion of offense is not ordinarily so strong that it wishes to eradicate him; no, it will only continue to mock and insult him. This is easy to explain. At the time when the world was itself conscious of not being Christian, then there was something to fight about, then it was a fight to the death. But now, when the world is proudly and calmly certain that it is Christian, the true Christian insistence is merely something to laugh at. The confusion is even more distressing than in the first period of Christianity. That was distressing, but there was meaning in it, since the world was fighting to the death against Christianity. But the world's present lofty calmness in its consciousness of being Christian, its cheap bit of mockery, if one wishes to call it that—of the real Christian: this almost borders on madness. For never in its first period was Christianity thus made the object of ridicule.

If then in this Christian world a man's only desire is to fight to perfect his duty in remaining in the debt of love to everyone: then he will be swept out into the last difficulty, and will have the opposition of the world to fight against. Alas, the world seldom or never thinks of God; that is the reason why it completely misunderstands every life whose most essential and steadfast thought is precisely the thought of God, the thought about where, divinely understood, the danger is, and what is required of a man! Therefore the Christian world is apt to say about the true Christian in this respect: "See how he gives himself up; even there where he is manifestly the injured party, it is almost as if he were the one who begs for forgiveness." The world will in him—Chris-

tianly (for the world is indeed Christian) feel the lack of the requisite—Christian hard-heartedness, which busies itself with asserting its right to assert itself, to repay evil with evil, or at least busies itself with the proud consciousness of doing good.

The world simply does not notice that such a man has a totally different standard for his life, and that this explains the whole procedure quite simply, while, explained according to the world's standard, it becomes quite meaningless. But since the world does not realize and does not wish to realize that this standard, the God-relationship, exists, hence it cannot explain such a man's conduct as anything except a peculiarity—for the fact that it is Christian conduct naturally cannot occur to the world, which as Christian certainly best knows what Christianity is. It is odd for a man not to be self-seeking; it is odd that he does not quarrel; it is odd and foolish in him to forgive his enemy, and to be almost afraid that he does not do enough for his enemy; it is odd that he always sticks at the wrong place, never where it appears to his advantage to be courageous, high-minded and disinterested: this is odd, far-fetched and stupid, in short, rather laughable, since one just by virtue of being in the world, is certain, as a Christian, to possess the true and eternal happiness both here and hereafter.

The world has no conception, except at most a very remote conception of a great solemn festival, that the God-relationship exists, to say nothing of its daily determining a man's life—therefore it can judge in no other way. The invisible law determining such a man's life, its suffering and its happiness, simply does not exist for the world: *ergo* its most lenient explanation of such a life is that it is an oddity, just as we call it madness if a man is incessantly looking about for a bird which none of the rest of us can see; or if a man dances—to music which no other man except himself, even by straining his ears, can possibly hear; or if a man in walking turns aside from his path because of some—invisible barrier. And this, too, is madness. For a bird which is really present, cannot be invisibly present, any more than actual music can be inaudible, or an obstruction on one's path which makes it necessary to go out of the way, can be invisible. But God can only be invisibly and inaudibly present, so the fact that the world does not see Him still does not prove very much.

Let me illustrate this relationship by means of a simple metaphor which I have frequently used, even though for a different purpose, because it is so fertile, so suggestive, so significant. If a strictly disciplined child is in the company of rude or less well-trained children, and it will not share with them in their rude behavior, which to them does not seem in general to be rudeness: the naughty children do not know any way of explaining his behavior except to say that the child must be odd or

foolish. They do not realize that his behavior may be explained in another way, in that, wherever he is, the strictly trained child always has its parents' standard in mind to help it decide what it dares and what it dares not do. If the parents were visibly present, so that the rude children saw them, then they would be better able to understand the child, especially so, if it also seemed to resent having to obey the admonition of its parents; for that would show them that the child would be only too glad to act as the rude children did; and it would be easy enough to see what held the child back. But when the parents are not present, the rude children cannot understand the strictly trained child. They think as follows: *either* that child does not enjoy the things the rest of us do, which makes it stupid or odd; *or* it perhaps enjoys them well enough, but does not dare to—yet, why not? The parents are not present, so it really must be stupid and peculiar. One can, therefore, by no means call it mischievousness or badness in the less polite children that they judge the more strictly trained child in this way. Oh, no, perhaps in their way their intentions are good, they mean well by it. They do not understand the strictly trained child, they enjoy themselves as they are, and therefore they want him to play with them and be a real boy—like the others.

The application of this metaphor is easy to make. The world simply cannot get it into its head (and this is no accident) that a Christian should not have the same pleasures and passions as the world has. But if he does have them, then the world can still less get it into its head why he, from fear of an invisible Being, will foolishly, according to worldly ideas, restrain the innocent and permissible pleasures which it is even "a duty to enjoy"; why he will restrain the selfishness which the world not only calls innocent but praiseworthy; why he will restrain the resentment which the world not only regards as natural but as a sign of his manliness and honor; why he will make himself doubly unhappy, first by failing to satisfy his desires, and next by being ridiculed by the world as a reward of his self-denial.

One easily sees that self-denial is here rightly marked: it has the double sign. Just because this is so, because quite rightly the one who earnestly seeks to obey will fall into double danger: that is why we say that it is the duty of *Christians* to remain in the debt of love to each other.

WORKS OF LOVE

SOME CHRISTIAN REFLECTIONS
IN THE FORM OF DISCOURSES

BY

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LOVE EDIFIETH

But love edifieth.—I CORINTHIANS 8:1

ALL human speech, even the divine speech of the Holy Scriptures about spiritual matters, is essentially metaphorical. And this is quite proper as regards existence in general, since, although from the moment of his birth man is spirit, he does not become conscious of himself as spirit until later, and so sensuo-psychically he has already lived through a certain period of his life before the spiritual awakening. But this first period will not then be discarded when the soul awakens, just as little as the soul's awakening will proclaim itself in a sensuous or sensuo-psychical manner as against the sensuous and sensuo-psychical. That first period is simply taken over by the spirit, and thus employed, thus made the foundation, *it becomes the metaphorical*. The spiritual man and the sensuo-psychical man therefore in a certain sense say the same thing. Yet there is an infinite difference, since the latter does not suspect the secret of the figurative expression, although he nevertheless uses the same word, but not figuratively. There is a world of difference between the two; the one has made the transition, or has allowed himself to be *carried over* to that side, while the second remains on this side; yet there is a bond between them because they both use the same expression. The one in whom the soul has awakened, has not, therefore, abandoned the visible world; he is always, although conscious of being spirit, in the visible world, and even sensuously visible: so he also continues to use the same language except that it has become metaphorical. But the metaphorical expression is not a brand-new word; on the contrary, it is an ordinary word. As the spirit is invisible, so too is its language secret, and the secret lies precisely in the fact that it uses the same word as the child and the common man, but it uses it figuratively, whereby the spirit denies that it is the sensuous or the sensuo-psychical, but does not deny it in a sensuous or sensuo-psychical manner. The difference is by no means a conspicuous difference. We rightly regard it, therefore, as a sign of false spirituality to make a parade of the conspicuous distinction—which is the sign of the purely sensuous, whereas the essence of the spirit is the quiet, whispering secrecy of the metaphorical—to the one who has ears to hear with.

One of the figurative expressions which the Holy Scripture frequently makes use of, or one of the *words* which the Holy Scripture most frequently uses figuratively, is: to *build*, to *edify*. And it is really—yes, it is very edifying to see how the Holy Scripture does not tire of this word, how it does not spiritually desire changes and new turns of

expression, but that, on the contrary, how that which is the true essence of the spirit refashions the thought in the same word! And it is—yes, it is very edifying to see how the Scripture by the use of this simple word is able to indicate the highest and that in the most inward manner; it is like that miracle of feeding the multitude with a limited supply, which nevertheless through the blessing became so richly abundant that there was left a superfluity! And it is—aye, it is edifying, if someone succeeds, instead of busying himself in making new discoveries which will busily supplant the old, in being humbly satisfied with the Scriptural words, in thankfully and inwardly appropriating to himself the traditions of the early Fathers, in establishing a new acquaintance—with the old acquaintances. As children we have all frequently played “Stranger”: truly, this is exactly earnestness, spiritually understood, to be able to continue this edifying jest in earnest, to play “Stranger” with old acquaintances.

To edify is a figurative expression; however, we shall now, with that secrecy of the spirit in mind, see *what this word signifies in ordinary use*. To edify is formed from the verb “to build” [*at bygge*] and the adverb “up” [*op*], on which latter the emphasis must consequently be placed. Everyone who upbuilds builds, but not everyone who builds builds up. For instance, if a man builds a wing to his house we do not say that he builds up a wing, but that he builds an addition. This “up” seems consequently to indicate direction in height, direction upward. Yet this does not quite express it. Thus if a man carries a building which is sixty feet high twenty feet higher, we do not say that he builds up his house twenty feet higher; we say that he builds an addition. Now we begin to see the application of the word, for it seems that it does not depend on the height. On the contrary, if a man built a house, even if it was only a little, low house, but he built it from scratch, then we say he built [up] a house. To build [up] is consequently to build something from scratch. This “up” indicates a certain direction as height; but only when height is also depth reversed do we say “build up.” So that if a man builds up in height and from scratch, but the depth below ground does not quite correspond to the height, then we certainly say that he builds up, or simply that he builds, although by “simply building” we understand something different. Thus the emphasis is in relation to the fact of building, in building from scratch. We do not call building in the ground building up, we do not speak of building a well. But if we speak about building up, then no matter how high or how low the building is, it *must be from scratch*. We may therefore say that a man began to build a house, but he did not finish. On the contrary, we can never say that a man, however much he may have added to the height of the building, if it was not built from scratch, built it.

How strange! This "up" in the word "upbuilding" means height, but height as contrary to depth; for to build up is to start from the beginning. Therefore the Scriptures say of the man of little understanding, that he "built without a foundation"; but of the man who hears the word in true edification, or, as the Scriptures have it, the one who hears the word and acts accordingly, that he is like a man who built his house and "dugged deep." When, therefore, the waters came and the winds blew and beat upon this dependably built house, then we all rejoiced at the edifying sight that the storms could not shake it. Alas, for, as was said with reference to building up, it particularly depends on building on a foundation.

It is commendable that a man, before he starts to build, should reflect on "how high he will be able to build his tower," but if he decides to build, then let him take care to dig deep; for even if the tower, if that were possible, reached to the clouds, if it were without a foundation it was not really built. To build absolutely without a foundation is impossible, it is building in the air. Therefore we are grammatically correct when we talk about building air castles; we do not say "building up air castles," which would be a careless and absurd use of language. For even in expressing the insignificant, there must be harmony between the individual words, such as is not present between "in the air," and "to build up," since the first takes the foundation away, and the latter dispenses with "foundation"; the combination then would be a false overstatement.

This explains the expression "to build up" in simple unfigurative language. Let us now consider it as a figurative expression, and pass over to the subject of this reflection:

LOVE EDIFIETH.

But is that word "edifying," when spiritually understood, such a characteristic adjective for love, that it exclusively belongs to it? It is always quite possible, as regards an adjective, that there are many objects which equally, or even if in varying degrees, still have a claim to this same adjective. If this were the case with "edifying," it would be particularly wrong to emphasize its use, as this reflection does, in its relation to love; it would be an attempt of misunderstanding to impute to love a presumption, as if it wished exclusively to usurp to its own use that which it shared with others—and which love is precisely willing to share with others, since "it never seeks its own." Nevertheless, it is truly so that "edifying" is exclusively characteristic of love; but, on the other hand, this quality of edifying has also the characteristic, that it is able to sacrifice itself in everything, be present in everything—exactly like love. Thus one sees that love in this, its own characteristic quality,

does not isolate itself, or boast of independence and caution in comparison with others, but absolutely surrenders itself; its characteristic is exactly that it has the exclusive quality of absolutely sacrificing itself. There is nothing, simply nothing, which can [not] be said or done so that it becomes edifying; but whatever it is, if it is edifying, then is love present. Therefore we hear the admonition just at the point where a man himself admits the difficulty of formulating definite rules, "Do everything for edification." It might equally well say, "Do everything in love," and have expressed exactly the same meaning. One man may do exactly the opposite of what another man does, but if they each do the opposite—in love, the opposite is edifying. There is no word in the language which is edifying in itself, and there is no word in the language which can [not] be spoken edifyingly and become edifying when love is present. It is therefore, then, very far (alas, it is simply an unkind and divisive error) from being the case that edifying is a *privilege* of the individually gifted, like art and poetry and beauty and other such things; on the contrary, every man by his life and his behavior, by the conduct of his daily life, by his association with his equals, by his words and utterances, ought to and might be equally edifying, and would be so, if he really had love.

We ourselves are also aware of this, for we use the word "edifying" with the widest possible latitude; but what we do not ourselves perhaps realize is that we nevertheless only use it in connection with the idea of love. Still this constitutes the right usage: to be meticulous not to use this word except in connection with love, and within this limitation to make its range illimitable; then everything can be edifying in the same sense that love can be present everywhere.

Thus when we see a single man with praiseworthy frugality carefully making a little suffice, then we honor and commend him; we rejoice; it confirms our sense of the good. But we do not really call it an edifying sight. On the contrary, when we see how a mother, who has many to care for, by frugality and wise economy affectionately knows how to bless the little so that there is enough for all: then we say it is an edifying sight. The edification lies in the fact that at the same time that we see the frugality and economy which we honor, we also see the mother's loving care. On the contrary, we say that it is but little edifying, that it is a distressing sight, to see one who in a way starves in the midst of plenty, and who yet has nothing at all left for others. We say it is a shocking thing to see, we are disgusted with his luxury, we tremble at the idea of the horrible revenge of self-indulgence—the starving in the midst of plenty; but the fact that we look in vain for the least expression of love, confirms our belief that it is little edifying.

When we see a large family crowded into a small apartment, and we

nevertheless see it living in a comfortable, friendly—roomy apartment, then we say that it is an edifying sight, because we see the love which must be in the individuals and in each one of them, since one unfriendly one would be enough to make the whole place seem crowded; we say it because we see that there is always house-room where there is heart-room. And, on the other hand, it is very little edifying to find an uneasy spirit dwelling in a palace, unable to find rest in a single one of the many rooms, and yet not able to spare or dispense with the smallest closet.

Moreover, what is there which may not be thus edifying! We do not think of the sight of a man asleep as edifying. And yet, if you see a child sleeping on its mother's breast—and you see the mother-love, see that she seems to have waited for and now is using the moment while the child is sleeping, truly to rejoice over it, because she hardly dares let the child see how unspeakably she loves it: then this becomes an edifying sight. If the mother's love is not in evidence, if you look in vain in her face and expression to discover the least expression of the joy of mother-love or solicitude for the child; if you see only stolid indifference, as if she would be glad to be rid of the child: then the sight is not edifying. To see the child sleeping by itself is a friendly, a pleasant, a gratifying sight, but it is not edifying. If you wish to call everything edifying, then it is because you see love present everywhere; it is because you see the love of God hovering over the child.—To see a great artist perfecting his work is a glorious, an elevating experience, but it is not edifying. Suppose this masterpiece was marvelous—if now the artist, out of his love for a man, smashed it to pieces: then the sight would be edifying.

Wherever the edifying is, there is love; and everywhere love is, there is the edifying. Therefore Paul says that a man without love, though he speak with the tongues of men and of angels, is like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. What, too, can be less edifying than a tinkling cymbal! The worldly, however glorious and however vociferous it is, is nevertheless without love, and therefore it is not edifying; the most insignificant word, the slightest act with love or in love, is edifying. Therefore knowledge puffeth up. And yet knowledge and the communication of knowledge may also be edifying; but if it is, it is because there is love. To commend one's self seems little edifying, and yet even this too may be edifying. Does not Paul sometimes do it? But he does it in love, and, as he himself says, "for edification." It would therefore be the emptiest of all speeches to talk about what can be edifying, since everything can be so; it would be the emptiest of all, just as it is the most distressing accusation which can be brought against the world, that one sees and hears so little that is edifying. Whether it is rare to

see wealth is neither here nor there; we should rather see a general well-being. If it is rare to see a masterpiece, oh, well, in a certain sense that makes no difference, and, as far as that goes, men for the most part care little about it. It is otherwise with edifying. At any given moment there are countless numbers of men living; it is possible that everything which any man says, everything which any man undertakes, may be edifying: alas, and yet it is so rare to see or hear anything edifying!

Love edifies. Let us now consider that which we developed in the introduction to this discourse, whereby we at once assured ourselves against the danger of the discourse falling into error through choosing an insuperable task, since everything can be edifying. To edify is to build on some foundation. In the simple story about a house, a building, everyone knows what is understood by the ground and the foundation. But what is, spiritually understood, the ground and the foundation of the spiritual life which shall support the building? It is simply love; love is the origin of everything, and, spiritually understood, love is the deepest foundation of the spiritual life. Spiritually understood, the foundation is laid in every man in whom there is love. And the building which, spiritually understood, will be erected is again love; and it is love who does the building. Love edifies, and this means that love builds it up. In this way the task is limited; the discourse does not spread out on the individual and the manifold; it does not in confusion begin on something which it must quite arbitrarily break off somewhere in order to finish; no, it centers itself and its attention on the essential, on one and the same thing in all the manifold. The talk is first and last about love, just because the fact of edifying is love's most characteristic purpose. Love is the foundation, love is the building, love edifies. The act of edifying is the building up of love, and it is love which edifies. It is true we sometimes speak in a general sense about edifying; we use the word in contrast to the corruption which would only tear down, or in contrast to the confusion which can merely tear down and divide; about the fact that it is the clever man who edifies, the one who knows how to direct and lead, the one who knows so well how to instruct in his line, the one who is master of his art. Every such person builds up in contrast to tearing down. But all of this building up of knowledge, of insight, of ingenuity, of righteousness and so on, is still, insofar as it does not build up love, not edification in the deepest sense. For, spiritually, love is the *foundation*, and to edify is *to build on this foundation*.

Consequently when the speech is about the work of love in edifying, this must then *either* indicate that the lover implants love in another man's heart; *or* it must indicate that the lover presupposes that love already exists in the other man's heart, and just through this presup-

position, he builds up the love in him—radically, insofar as he affectionately presupposes love at bottom. One or the other of these conditions is necessary for edifying. But I wonder if one man can implant love in another man's heart? No, this is a superhuman relation, an unthinkable relation between man and man; in this sense human love cannot edify. It is God, the Creator, who must implant love in every man, He who is Himself love. It is therefore unkind and by no means edifying, for someone presumptuously to imagine himself as wishing and being able to create love in the other man; all busy and self-important zeal in this respect neither builds up love, nor is itself edifying. The first relationship would be unthinkable for edifying; hence, we must consider the second relationship—between man and God. Thus we have gained the explanation of what it means, that love edifies, on which explanation we shall now reflect: *the lover presupposes that there is love in the other man's heart, and just through this presupposition he builds up the love in him—on that foundation, insofar as he affectionately presupposes that it exists at bottom.*

The speech can then not be about what the lover, who wishes to edify, will now do to transform the other man, or to force the love forth in him, but it is about how the lover edifyingly constrains himself. Certainly this is already edifying, to see how the lover edifies by constraining himself! Only the non-lover imagines that he is able to edify by constraining the other; the lover constantly presupposes that love is present, and just by this he is edifying. A builder thinks little about the stone and gravel he will use in building; a teacher presupposes that the pupil is ignorant; a disciplinarian presupposes that the other man is perverted: but the lover who edifies has but one course—to presuppose love; what further he constantly has to do is only constantly to constrain himself to presuppose love. Thus he lures the good forth, he encourages love, he edifies. For love can be and will only be treated in one way, by being loved forth; to love it forth is to edify. But to love it forth consists exactly in presupposing that it is basically present. Men can therefore be tempted to become master-builders, to become teachers, to become disciplinarians, because those things seem to imply having control over others; but to edify, as love does, cannot tempt one, for that means exactly to be the servant; therefore only love has the desire to edify because it is willing to serve.—The master-builder can point to his work and say, "That is my work"; the teacher can point to his pupil; but the love which edifies has nothing to point at, for its work consists only in presupposing it.

Again, this is very edifying to consider. Suppose the lover succeeded in building up love in another man; when the building stands there, the lover stands aside by himself, abashed he says, "I have always

presupposed this." Alas, the lover has no merit at all. The building up of love is not like a monument to the master-builder's art, or, like the pupil who is a reminder of the teacher's instruction; the lover has done nothing, he has only presupposed that there was love at bottom. The lover works so quietly and so soberly, and yet the forces of eternity are in motion. Love humbly makes itself inconspicuous just when it is working hardest; aye, its labor is as if it did nothing at all. Alas, to busyness and worldliness this is the greatest folly conceivable, the idea that, in a way, doing nothing at all should be the hardest work. And yet it is true. For it is more difficult to rule one's own spirit than to take a city, and more difficult to edify as love edifies, than to carry out the most marvelous undertaking. If it is difficult for one to rule one's own spirit, then how difficult to annihilate one's self completely in one's relation to another man, and still do everything and suffer everything! If it would ordinarily be difficult to begin without the presupposition, truly the most difficult of all is to begin to edify with the presupposition that love is present, and to end with the same presupposition, so that one's entire labor is discounted in advance, since the presupposition from first to last involves self-denial, or that the master-builder be hidden and as nothing. The only thing with which we are able to compare this edification of love is the secret working of nature. Man sleeps, but the forces of nature rest not either night or day: no one considers how they go on—while all take delight in the beauty of the fields and the fruit of the pastures. So is love manifest in the same way; it presupposes that love is present like the germ in the corn, and if it succeeds in bringing that to growth, then has the love concealed itself, as if it were hidden, whereas it was working early and late. Nevertheless, this is the edifying wonder in nature: you see all this glory and then it impresses you edifyingly if you happen to consider how strange it was that you did not see at all the one who produced it. If you could see God with the sensual eye, if He, if I dare say this, stood by your side and said: "I produced all this!" then would the edification have disappeared.

Love edifies by presupposing that love is present. Thus one lover edifies the other, and here it is easy enough to presuppose it, since love is generally known to be present. Alas, but love is never perfectly present in any man, insofar as it is possible for him to do something else than presuppose it; possible to discover one or another fault or frailty in it. And then when he has unkindly discovered this, he wishes perhaps, as they say, to take it away, to take the mote away in order really to build love up. But love edifies. The one who loves much, to him is much forgiven; but the more perfect the lover presupposes the love to be, the more perfect a love he loves forth. In no worldly relations is there found any relation where there is thus like for like, where that

which results corresponds so exactly to what was presupposed. Let no one raise an objection, let no one appeal to experience, for this would be unkindly arbitrarily to fix a day when it must appear how it turned out. Love itself does not understand such things, it is eternally certain about the fulfillment of the presupposition; if this is not true, then the love is already at the point of exhaustion.

Love edifies by presupposing that love is fundamentally present, therefore love also edifies there where, humanly speaking, love seems to be lacking, and where, humanly understood, it seems first and foremost necessary to tear down, not indeed for the sake of pleasure but for the sake of salvation. Tearing down is the opposite of building up. This contrast never shows more clearly than when the discourse is about the fact that love edifies; for in whatever other connection there may be talk about edifying, it still has a resemblance to tearing down, that is, doing something through another. But when the lover edifies, then it is exactly the opposite of tearing down, because the lover does something through himself: he presupposes that love is present in the other man—which is certainly exactly the opposite of doing something through the other man. Tearing down satisfies only too readily the sensual man; edifying in the sense that one does something through the other man, can also satisfy the sensual man; but to edify by overcoming one's self satisfies only love. And yet this is absolutely the only way to edify. But in the well-meant zeal for tearing down and building up, one forgets that in the last analysis no man is able to plant the ground of love in another man.

Just here it appears how difficult the art of building is, as practiced by love, and as it is described in that celebrated passage by the apostle Paul; for what he says about love is just a closer definition of how love manages to edify. "*Love is long-suffering*," and thereby it edifies; for long-suffering is just continuing to presuppose that there is love at bottom. He who judges, even if this came about slowly, that the other man is wanting in love, takes away the foundation—he cannot edify. But love edifies through long-suffering. Therefore it *harbors neither envy nor spite*, for envy and spite negate the love in the other man, and consume, if that were possible, the foundation of love. The love which edifies endures the other man's misunderstanding, his ingratitude, his anger—that is certainly enough to bear; how then should love also be able to bear envy and spite! That is the way things are divided in this world: he who bears envy and malice does not bear the other man's burdens, but the lover who loves does not bear malice and envy, he bears the burdens. Each one bears his own burden, the envious and the lover, both in a certain sense are martyrs, for as a

devout man has said: the envious man is also a martyr—but the devil's.

"*Love seeketh not its own,*" therefore it edifies. For he who seeks his own must push the other aside; he must tear down in order to get a place for his own house which he wishes to build. But love presupposes that love is basically present, therefore it edifies. "*It rejoiceth not in iniquity*"; but he who wishes to tear down, or at least wishes to seem important by pretending that it is necessary to tear down, he may be said to rejoice in iniquity—otherwise there would be nothing to tear down. Love, on the contrary, rejoices in presupposing that love is fundamentally present, therefore it edifies. "*Love beareth all things*"; for what does it mean to bear all things? In the final analysis it means being able to find love in everything, as it is fundamentally presupposed. When we say of a man who has a very strong constitution, that as regards food and drink he can stand anything, we mean by that, that his system is healthy enough to get nourishment from even unhealthful food (just as the sick may be injured by even healthful food); we mean that his system derives nourishment even from that which would seem least nourishing. In this way love bears all things, always presupposing that it is fundamentally present—and thereby it edifies.

"*Love believeth all things*"; for to believe all things is exactly, although it does not seem so, although it seems just the opposite, to presuppose that love is fundamentally present, even in the misguided, even in the perverted, even in the most malicious. Mistrust precisely takes the foundation away by presupposing that love is not present; therefore mistrust cannot edify.

"*Love hopeth all things*"; but to hope all things is truly, although it does not seem so, and even seems to be the opposite, to presuppose that love is, nevertheless, fundamentally present, and that it will manifest itself in the erring, in the misguided, even in the lost. Was not the father of the prodigal son perhaps the only one who did not know that he had a prodigal son, for the father's love hoped all things? The brother knew at once that he was hopelessly lost. But love edifies; and the father regained the prodigal son just because he who hoped for everything, presupposed that love was fundamentally present in his son. On the father's side, in spite of the son's dissipation, there was no rupture (and a rupture is exactly the opposite of edifying), he hoped all things; therefore by his fatherly forgiveness he edified in truth, because the son vividly felt that his father's love had borne with him, so that there had been no breach.

"*Love endureth all things*"; for to endure all things is exactly to presuppose that love is fundamentally present. When we say that a mother endures all her child's naughtiness, do we mean thereby that as woman

on these; on the contrary, it would depend on his being a reliable, kindly man, that is, a truly loving man. Hence you believe that to be able to edify decisively and essentially depends on being loving, or in having love to such a degree that one can depend upon it.

But what, then, is love? Love is presupposing love; to have love is to presuppose love in others; to be loving is to presuppose that others are loving. Let us understand each other. The characteristics a man may have may either be characteristics he has for himself, even if he makes use of them for others; or attributes for others. Wisdom is one quality inherent in himself; power and talent and knowledge and so on may also be attributes peculiar to himself. To be wise is not to say, not to assume, that others are wise; on the contrary, it may very certainly be true, if the truly wise man assumes that all men are far from wise. Moreover, because "wise" is an exclusively personal attribute, there is nothing in the thought to prevent one from assuming that there might live, or has lived, a wise man who dared say that he assumed that all other men were unwise. In the thought (of being wise—and assuming that all others are unwise), there is no contradiction. In the realities of life, such an expression would be arrogant, but merely in the thought as such, there is no contradiction. On the other hand, if one were to believe that he himself was loving, but also that all other men were not loving, then we should have to say: "No, stop; there is a contradiction here in the thought itself; for to be loving is just to assume, to presuppose, that other men are loving." Love is not an exclusively personal attribute, but an attribute by virtue of which or in which you exist for others. In ordinary conversation we of course say, when we sum up a man's qualities, that he is wise, understanding, loving—and we do not notice what a difference there is between the last attribute and the first. His wisdom, his experience, his understanding are his own, even if others benefit by them; but if he is truly loving, then he does not have love in the same sense as he has wisdom, but it is exactly his love which presupposes that the rest of us have love. You praise him as the lover; you believe love is an attribute he has, as it really is; you feel edified by him just because he is loving, but you do not notice that this is because his love indicates that he presupposes love in you, and that just for this reason you are edified, just for this reason the love in yourself is built up. If it were actually true that a man could be loving without this indicating a presupposed love in others, then you would not in the deepest sense feel yourself edified; however certain it was that he was loving, you would not in the deepest sense feel yourself edified, any more than you would in the deepest sense be edified, no matter how certain it was that he was wise, understanding, learned and experienced. If it were possible that he might

in truth be loving without this signifying that it presupposed love in others, then you could not fully rely upon him, for the test of reliability in the lover is exactly that, even when you are distrustful of yourself, of your own love, he is loving enough to presuppose, or rather he is the lover who presupposes it.—But you demanded that a man in order truly to be able to edify should be truly loving. And to be loving has shown itself as signifying: presupposing love in others. So you say absolutely the same thing that has been developed in the discourse.

So the reflection returns to its beginning. To edify is to presuppose love; to be loving is to presuppose love; only love edifies. For to edify is to build up something on a foundation, but spiritually love is the foundation of everything. No man can lay the foundation of love in another man's heart; nevertheless, love is the foundation, and one can only build on that foundation; hence one can only edify by presupposing love. Take love away, then there is nothing which edifies, and no one who is edified.

II

LOVE BELIEVETH ALL THINGS—AND YET IS NEVER DECEIVED

Love believeth all things.—I CORINTHIANS 13:7

NOW abideth faith, hope and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love," which is therefore the foundation of everything, is before everything, and abides when all else is done away with. Love is consequently the "greatest" of "these"; and what is there more perfect to compare love with than faith and hope! But he who is greatest from the standpoint of perfection must also, if I may venture to say so, take upon himself the duty of bringing himself into subjection, and become even more perfect. In a worldly sense a man may sometimes be the most distinguished without being the most perfect, and this exactly constitutes the worldly imperfection. It is true that the greatest man may be able to do what the lesser man can do; and this holds true about love, that it can take upon itself the tasks of faith and hope, and do them even more perfectly.

We shall now consider this thought as we reflect on the theme:

LOVE BELIEVETH ALL THINGS—AND YET IS NEVER DECEIVED.

We shall first consider what it means when we say that love believes all things, and next, how the one who loves, simply by believing all things, can be assured against every deception. For truly, not everyone who believes everything is therefore a lover, and not everyone who believes everything is thereby assured against every deception—not even faith, if it will believe everything. And even if it might seem that the fact of being assured against every deception is a good for love, an advantage it has, then this meditation would not really be suitable as a subject for consideration in an essay about the *works* of love: since it is not that. The fact of being assured against every deception is a work, a task, entirely synonymous with that of believing all things, so that one can just as unconditionally say that love believeth all things, as it can say that it is never deceived, since they are one and the same thing. It is not as if the action were one thing, and the prudence which guards against a man being deceived were another. It is not from the standpoint of earthly wisdom that love is never deceived; for to love so that one is never deceived is, according to what earthly wisdom says and thinks, the most stupid and foolish thing one can do; moreover, it is an offense to prudence—and therefore it may readily be recognized as belonging essentially to Christianity.

Love believeth all things. Thoughtlessness, inexperience, credulity believe everything that is said; vanity, conceit, self-satisfaction believe all the flattering things that are said; envy, spite, depravity believe all the evil things that are said; mistrust believes nothing at all; experience will teach that not to believe everything one hears is the wisest course; but love believes everything.

Consequently mistrust believes nothing at all; it is the exact opposite of love. Generally speaking, men do not, I suppose, think very highly of mistrust, but still it by no means follows that they have absolutely and unanimously decided to renounce all mistrust unconditionally, or that they have absolutely and unanimously decided to recommend the love which believes everything, unconditionally. Perhaps, strange to say, men prefer to make a compromise, hence a dissident compromise between the mistrust which—a little loving, still believes something, and the love which—a little mistrustful, still has a suspicion or two. Moreover, if someone wished to describe the shrewd secret of mistrust, to array it in the supernatural greatness of shrewdness, of cunning, in the dazzling appearance of sagacity, then it might well tempt many. There might be someone who would cleverly give us to understand that that was just what he had discovered—proud of his discovery. And in contrast to this, as so often happens to the good, the love, which believes all things, would appear to a great disadvantage, so that many would not even dare to confess that they could wish to be so simple-minded.

What really is the shrewd secret of mistrust? It consists in an abuse of knowledge, an abuse which without further ceremony, in a single breath wishes to attach itself *ergo* to what as knowledge is absolutely true, and only becomes something else when it is preposterously believed by virtue of this knowledge, something which is just as impossible as it is preposterous, for one does not become a believer by virtue of knowledge. That which mistrust says or talks about is really only knowledge; the secret and the falsity lie in the fact that, without further ceremony, it transposes this knowledge into faith, pretending it to be nothing, pretending that it was something that need not even be noticed. "since everyone who has this knowledge must necessarily decide in the same way"; as if, consequently, it were eternally certain and absolutely decided that if a man has knowledge, then it is also known what conclusion he will reach. The deception lies in the fact that mistrust, by virtue of the disbelief inherent in it, infers, assumes, believes what it does infer, assume and believe, *from* its knowledge (for the appearance and fallacy is that knowledge causes the mistrust), whereas *from* the same knowledge, by virtue of belief, a man can infer, assume and believe exactly the opposite. Mistrust says: "Deception stretches unconditionally as far as truth, duplicity unconditionally as far as honesty; there is no

absolute criterion of truth or of honesty or of sincerity. So, too, in relation to love; hypocrisy and craftiness and cunning and seduction deceptively extend absolutely as far as love extends; they are able to resemble true love so deceptively that there is no absolute criterion, because with every expression of the truth or with every expression of true love there exists the possibility of a delusion which exactly corresponds to this." And so it is and ever shall be. Just because existence will test "you," test "your" love or whether you have love, just for that reason it places truth and deception before you in the balance of possibilities opposed to each other, by the aid of reason, so that now when "you" judge, that is, when in judging you *choose*, it becomes manifest what you yourself are. Alas, many believe that the judgment is something that takes place the other side of the grave, and this is also true; but one forgets that the judgment lies much closer, that it is going on every moment, because existence is judging you in every moment you live, since to live is to judge one's self, to reveal one's self. Just for this reason existence must be so arranged that you may not by the aid of an authenticity of knowledge, evade revealing yourself in your judging or in how you judge. When then deception and truth are placed in the balance of possibilities opposed to each other, then it is decided whether you are suspicious or loving. For perhaps some one says, "Even that which seems to be the purest of feelings might still be a deception"—oh, well, that is possible and will always be possible: "*Ergo* I choose mistrust, or to believe nothing," that is, he reveals his mistrust.

Let us reverse the conclusion we drew about "truth and falsehood unconditionally stretching equally far; consequently it may be possible that what even appears to be the basest conduct might be pure love." Oh, well, that is possible, and it will be possible: *ergo* the lover chooses to believe everything, that is, he manifests his love. A man whose thinking is confused certainly thinks that existence is a fairly muddy element: oh, not even the sea is so transparent! If someone, therefore, can prove that one ought to believe nothing at all because of the possibility of deception, then I can prove that one ought to believe everything—because of the possibility of deception. If anyone thinks that one ought not to believe even the best of men because of the possibility that he might prove a deceiver, then this is also true of the converse, that you can expect good in even the worst of men, for it would be possible that his baseness was only an appearance of evil.

Love is the exact opposite of mistrust and yet it is based on the same knowledge; as far as knowledge goes, we may say that they are indistinguishable from one another (in the infinite sense knowledge is objective); only in the conclusion and in the decision, in the *faith*

horse has its own peculiarities. And, now, the differences between man and man! How infinite! If this were not true, then would mankind be debased; for man's superiority over the brutes is not only the one which is most often mentioned, the universally human, but also that which one most often forgets, that every individual within the species has essential diversities and characteristics. And this superiority is really the proper human superiority; the first superiority is the racial superiority over the animal species. Moreover, if it were not a fact that one man, honest, sincere, respectable and God-fearing, can under the same circumstances do exactly the opposite of what another man does, who is also honest, sincere, respectable and God-fearing: then the God-relationship would not essentially exist, not in its most profound significance. If one man were able with absolute truth to judge every man according to a common pattern, then would the God-relationship be essentially abolished; then would everything face outward, heathenishly finding its complete expression in the state and community life; then living would become far too easy, but also very empty; then would neither personal exertion nor deepening of the self be possible or necessary, which, in the most difficult collision of the infinite misunderstanding, is exactly that which develops the God-relationship in a man."

Can you tell me who has said this? No, that is impossible; it is entirely uncertain; the most suspicious and the most kindly man could, as far as knowledge is concerned, equally well have said it. No man has said it; it is superhumanly uttered; it is a sound which first becomes articulate through the inspiration of diversified personalities, who pronounce it by adding voice to it. It is knowledge, and knowledge as such is impersonal, and must be communicated impersonally. Knowledge posits everything in possibility, and is to that extent outside the reality of existence in the possibility. The individual first begins his life with *ergo*, with *faith*. But most people simply do not notice that, in one way or another, every moment they live they live by virtue of an *ergo*, of a *faith*—so heedless are their lives. There is no decision in knowledge; decision, the determination of the personality, and determination are first in *ergo*, in *faith*.

Knowledge is the infinite art of ambiguity, or the infinite ambiguity; at its highest it consists in bringing opposing possibilities into equilibrium. To be able to do this is to have knowledge, and only the one who knows how to describe the balancing of these opposing possibilities, only he communicates knowledge. To expect to impart a decision by means of knowledge or knowledge by means of a decision is preposterous, as it has certainly become in these times—aye, preposterous it is and remains, but in these times it has become the truly profound, the true profundity of profound thought. Knowledge is not suspicion, for knowledge is

infinitely objective; it is the infinite indifference in equilibrium. Nor is knowledge love, for knowledge is infinitely objective, it is the infinite indifference in equilibrium. Nor is knowledge defilement, since it is the infinite indifference. The suspicious man and the lover have knowledge in common, and the suspicious man does not become suspicious because of his knowledge, nor does the lover become the lover through that knowledge. But when a man's knowledge has balanced the opposing possibilities, and he is about to or wishes to pronounce a judgment, then it appears in what he then thinks next, who he is, whether he is suspicious or loving. Only extremely confused and ordinary men believe that they are able to judge another man by virtue of knowledge. From this it is evident that they do not even know what knowledge is; that they have never taken the time and pains to develop the infinite, objective sense for possibilities; or by means of the art of infinite ambiguity to understand the possibilities and bring them into equilibrium; or to understand them clearly. In a kind of nebulous condition, they have a stolid or a passionate preference for a certain kind of possibility; they judge that a little of it is enough, and they call that judging by virtue of knowledge; and they think, self-satisfied in thus—believing—by virtue of knowledge (a sheer contradiction), that they are assured against mistakes—which would be restricted faith (a new contradiction).

It is quite common to hear men express a great fear of making a mistake in judging. When you listen more closely to what is said, then, alas, there is so often a distressing misunderstanding in this—serious fear. Behold that noble, simple, wise man of old; he became what he was—moreover it was not something great—he did not become a great capitalist, nor an ambitious statesman in this best of all possible worlds. Impoverished, laughed at, ridiculed, accused, condemned, he remained the noble, simple, wise man, still so rarely seen; almost the only one who really made a distinction between what he understood and what he did not understand; and he remained so, because he “feared most of all to be in error.”

I wonder if this elevation of thought, this sublime equipoise, is what men are really thinking about when they are afraid of making a mistake in judging. Possibly. But then it would also be possible that the fear is sometimes somewhat one-sided. All men have a natural fear of making a mistake—through believing too well of a man. The mistake, on the other hand, of believing too badly of another man, is perhaps less feared, at least not in comparison with the first. But then if we did not fear most of all being in error, then we are, on the contrary, in error through our one-sided fear of a certain kind of error. It mortifies our vanity and our pride to have thought too well of a swindler, to have been foolish enough to believe him—for it is a contest between brain