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WORKS OF LOVE

SOME CHRISTIAN REFLECTIONS IN THE FORM OF DISCOURSES

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II B

You Shall Love Your *Neighbour*

It is in fact Christian love which discovers and knows that one's neighbour exists and that—it is one and the same thing—everyone is one's neighbour. If it were not a duty to love, then there would be no concept of neighbour at all. But only when one loves his neighbour, only then is the selfishness of preferential love rooted out and the equality of the eternal preserved.

The objection is often made against Christianity—though in different manners and moods, with various passions and purposes—that it displaces erotic love and friendship.[33] Then, again, men have wanted to defend Christianity and to that end appealed to its doctrine that one ought to love God with his whole heart and his neighbour as himself. When the argument is carried on in this manner, it is quite indifferent whether one agrees or disagrees, just as a fight with air and an agreement with air are equally meaningless. One should rather take pains to clarify the point of contention in order calmly to admit in the defence that Christianity has thrust erotic love and friendship from the throne, the love rooted in mood and inclination, preferential love, in order to establish spiritual love in its place, love to one's neighbour, a love which in all earnestness and truth is inwardly more tender in the union of two persons than erotic love is and more faithful in the sincerity of close relationship than the most famous friendship. One must rather take pains to make very clear that the praise of erotic love and friendship belong to paganism, that the *poet* really belongs to paganism since his task belongs to it—in order with the sure spirit of conviction to give to Christianity what belongs to Christianity, love to one's neighbour, of which love not a trace is found in paganism. One must rather take care to discern and divide rightly, in order, if possible, to occasion the individual to choose, instead of confusing and

combining and thereby hindering the individual from getting a definite impression of which is which. Above all, one must refrain from defending Christianity, rather than consciously or unconsciously wanting to uphold everything—also what is non-Christian.

Everyone who earnestly and with insight thinks on these things will easily see that the question for discussion must be posed in this way: are erotic love and friendship the highest love or must this love be dethroned? Erotic love and friendship are related to passion, but all passion, whether it attacks or defends itself, fights in one manner only: either—or: "Either I exist and am the highest or I do not exist at all—either all or nothing." Confusion and bewilderment (which paganism and the poet are opposed to just as much as Christianity is) develops when the defence amounts to this—that Christianity certainly teaches a higher love but *in addition* praises friendship and erotic love. To talk thus is a double betrayal—inasmuch as the speaker has neither the spirit of the poet nor the spirit of Christianity. Concerning relationships of the spirit, one cannot—if one wants to avoid talking foolishly—talk like a shopkeeper who has the best grade of goods and in addition a medium grade, which he can *also* highly recommend as being almost as good. No, if it is certain that Christianity teaches that love to God and one's neighbour is true love, then it is also certain that as it has thrust down "every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God and takes every thought captive to obey Christ"[34]—that it likewise has also thrust down erotic love and friendship. Would it not be remarkable—if Christianity were such a confusing and bewildering subject as many a defence (often worse than any attack) would make it into—would it not be remarkable, then, that in the whole New Testament there is not found a word about love in the sense in which the poet sings of it and paganism defined it; would it not be remarkable that in the whole New Testament there is not found a single word about friendship in the sense in which the poet sings of it and paganism cultivated it. Or let the poet who himself understands what it is to be a poet go through what the New Testament teaches about love, and he will be plunged into despair because he will not find a single word which could inspire him. And if, for all that, any so-called poet did find a word and used it, then it would be a deceitful, guilt-laden use, for instead of respecting Christianity, he would be stealing a precious word and distorting the meaning in his use of it. Let the poet search the New Testament for a word about friendship which could please him, and he will search vainly unto despair. But let a Christian search, one who wants to love his neigh-

bour; he certainly will not search in vain; he will find each word stronger and more authoritative than the last, serving to kindle this love in him and to keep him in this love.

The poet will seek in vain. But is a poet, then, not a Christian? We have not said this, nor do we say it, either, but say only that *qua* poet he is not a Christian. Yet a distinction must be drawn, for there are also godly poets. But these do not celebrate erotic love and friendship; their songs are to the glory of God, songs of faith and hope and love.[35] Nor do these poets sing of love in the sense a poet sings of erotic love, for love to one's neighbour is not to be sung about—it is to be fullfilled in reality. Even if there were nothing else to hinder the poet from artistically celebrating love to one's neighbour in song, it is quite enough that with invisible letters behind every word in Holy Scriptures a disturbing notice confronts him—for there it reads: go and do likewise. Does this sound like an artistic challenge, inviting him to sing? —Consequently the religious poet is a special case, but it holds true of the secular poet that *qua* poet he is not a Christian. And it is the secular poet we usually think of when we speak of poets. That the poet lives within Christianity does not alter the matter. Whether *he* is a Christian is not for us to decide, but *qua* poet he is not a Christian. It might well seem that since Christendom has existed so long now it must have penetrated all relationships—and all of us.[36] But this is an illusion. Because Christianity has existed so long, it cannot thereby be said that it is we who have lived so long or have been Christians so long. The poet's very existence within Christianity and the place which is accorded to him are an earnest reminder (rudeness and envious attacks on him are certainly not *Christian* objections or misgivings concerning his presence) of how much is taken for granted and how easily we are tempted to fancy ourselves far in advance of ourselves. Whereas, alas, the Christian proclamation very often is scarcely listened to, everybody listens to the poet, admires him, learns from him, is enchanted by him; whereas, alas, men quickly forget what the pastor has said, how accurately and how long they remember what the poet has said, especially what he has said with the help of the actor! The significance of this cannot be that men should seek to get rid of the poet, perhaps by force, for this would result only in a new illusion. What good would it be if there were no poets if in Christendom there were still so many who are contented with the understanding of existence which the poet presides over—and so many who long for the poet! Neither is it required of a Christian that he, in blind and unwise zeal, should go so

far that he could no longer bear to read a poet—any more than it is required that a Christian should not eat ordinary food with others or that he should live apart from others in seclusion's hermitage. No, but the Christian must understand everything differently from the non-Christian, must understand himself in that he knows how to make the distinction. A man would not be able to live every moment exclusively in the highest Christian ideals any more than he could live only on the food from the Lord's table. Therefore simply let the poet be, let the individual poet be admired as he deserves, if he really is a poet, but also let the single one in Christendom try his Christian convictions by the help of this test: how does he relate himself to the poet, what does he think of him, how does he read him, how does he admire him? Such things are hardly ever discussed these days. Alas to many people this discussion will seem to be neither Christian nor earnest enough, just because it has to do with such things which nevertheless—note this—occupy men so much six days of the week, and even more of their time on the seventh day than do godly things. Meanwhile we are confident—because from childhood we have been well educated and trained in Christianity and also because in these more mature years we have dedicated our days and our best powers to this service, even though we always repeat that our voice is "without authority"[37]—we have confidence in the knowledge particularly of what should be said in these times and of how it should be said. We are all baptized and instructed in Christianity; there can consequently be no talk about professing Christ in contrast to the non-Christian. It is, however, both beneficial and necessary that the single individual carefully and consciously scrutinises himself and, if possible, helps others (insofar as one man can help another, for God is the true helper)[38] to become Christian in a deeper and deeper sense. The word *Christendom* as a common designation for a whole nation is a superscription which easily says too much and therefore easily leads the individual to believe too much about himself. It is a custom—at least in other places—that signs stand along the highway indicating where the road leads. Suppose that just as one sets out on a journey he sees on such a sign that the road leads to the distant place which is his destination: has he therefore reached the place? So it is also with this road-sign *Christendom.* It designates the direction, but has one therefore reached the goal, or is one always only—on the way? Is it an advance along the road to go on that road for an hour once a week and for six days of the week to live in entirely different categories and make no attempt to understand how all this

can hang together? Is it genuine earnestness, then, to be silent about the problem of integrity and relationships in order to talk very solemnly about very serious things, which might just as well be brought along into the confusion, if, out of sheer earnestness, one does not show the relationship to these serious matters. Who has the more difficult task: the teacher who lectures on earnest things a meteor's distance from everyday life—or the learner who should put it to use? Is only this a fraud, to be silent about serious matters? Is it not just as dangerous a fraud to speak of these things—but under certain conditions—and portray them—but in a light altogether different from reality's daily life? If it is true, then, that all of secular life, its pomp, its diversions, its charm, can in so many ways imprison and ensnare a man, what is the earnest thing to do—either from sheer earnestness to be silent in the church about things, or earnestly to speak about them there in order, if possible, to fortify men against the dangers of the world? Should it really be impossible to talk about things of the world in a solemn and truly earnest manner? If it were impossible, does it follow that it should be suppressed in the religious discourse? Certainly not, for the implication is that such things should be prohibited in religious discourse only on the most solemn occasions.

Therefore we will test the Christian conviction on the poet. What does the poet teach about love and friendship? The question is not about this or that particular poet, but only about the poet, that is, only about him as far as he is faithful as a poet to himself and to his task. If such a so-called poet has lost faith in the artistic worth of erotic love and friendship and in its interpretation and has supplanted it by something else, he is not a poet, and perhaps the something else which he sets in its place is not Christian either, and the whole thing is a blunder. Erotic love is based on disposition which, explained as inclination, has its highest, its unconditional, artistically unconditional, unique expression in that there is only one beloved in the whole world, and that only this one time of erotic love is genuine love, is everything, and the next time nothing. Usually one says, proverbially, that the first try does not count. Here, on the other hand, the one time is unconditionally the whole; the next time is unconditionally the ruin of everything. This is poesy, and the emphasis rests decisively in the highest expression of passionateness—to be or not to be. To love a second time is not really to love, and to poetry this is an abomination. If a so-called poet wants to make us believe that erotic love can be repeated in the same person, if a so-called poet wants to occupy himself

with gifted foolishness, which presumably would exhaust passion's mysteriousness in the *why* of cleverness, then he is not a poet. Nor is that Christian which he puts in place of the poetic. Christian love teaches love of all men, unconditionally all. Just as decidedly as erotic love strains in the direction of the one and only beloved, just as decidedly and powerfully does Christian love press in the opposite direction. If in the context of Christian love one wishes to make an exception of a single person whom he does not want to love, such love is not "also Christian love" but is decidedly not Christian love. Yet there is this kind of confusion in so-called Christendom—the poets have given up the passion of erotic love, they yield, they slacken the tension of passion, they strike a bargain (by adding on) and are of the opinion that a man, in the sense of erotic love, can love many times, so that consequently there are many beloveds. Christian love also yields, slackens the tension of eternity, strikes compromises, and is of the opinion that when one loves a great deal, then it is Christian love. Thus *both* poetic and Christian love have become confused, and the replacement is *neither* the poetic *nor* the Christian.[39] Passion [40] always has this unconditional characteristic—that it excludes the third; that is to say, a third factor means confusion. To love without passion is an impossibility. Therefore the distinction between erotic love and Christian love is the one possible eternal distinction in passion. Another difference between erotic love and Christian love can not be imagined. If, therefore, one occasionally presumes to understand his life with the help of the poet and with the help of Christianity's explanation, presumes the ability to understand these two explanations together—and then in such a way that meaning would come into his life—then he is under a delusion. The poet and Christianity explain things in opposite ways. The poet idolises the inclinations and is therefore quite right—since he always has only erotic love in mind—in saying that to command love is the greatest foolishness and the most preposterous kind of talk. Christianity, which constantly thinks only of Christian love, is also quite right when it dethrones inclination and sets this *shall* in its place.

The poet and Christianity give explanations which are quite opposed, or more accurately expressed, the poet really explains nothing, for he explains love and friendship—in riddles. He explains love and friendship as riddles, but Christianity explains love eternal. From this one again sees that it is an impossibility to love according to both explanations simultaneously, for the greatest possible contradic-

tion between the two explanations is this, that the one is no explanation and the other is the explanation.

As the poet understands them, love and friendship contain no ethical task. Love and friendship are good fortune. Poetically understood (and certainly the poet is an excellent judge of fortune) it is good fortune, the highest good fortune, to fall in love, to find the one and only beloved; it is good fortune, almost as great, to find the one and only friend. Then the highest task is to be properly grateful for one's good fortune. But the task can never be an *obligation* to find the beloved or to find this friend. This is out of the question—something the poet well understands. Consequently, the task is dependent upon whether fortune will give one the task; but ethically understood this is simply a way of saying that there is no task at all. On the other hand, when one has the *obligation* to love his neighbour, then there is the task, the ethical task, which is the origin of all tasks. Just because Christianity is the true ethic, it knows how to shorten deliberations and cut short prolix introductions, to remove all provisional waiting and preclude all waste of time. Christianity is involved in the task immediately, because it has brought the task along. There is, indeed, great debate going on in the world about what should be called the highest good. But whatever it is called at the moment, whatever variations there are, it is unbelievable how many prolixities are involved in grasping it. Christianity, however, teaches a man immediately the shortest way to find the highest good: shut your door and pray to God—for God is still the highest. And when a man will go out into the world, he can go a long way—and go in vain—he can wander the world around—and in vain—all in order to find the beloved or the friend. But Christianity never suffers a man to go in vain, not even a single step, for when you open the door which you shut in order to pray to God, the first person you meet as you go out is your neighbour whom you *shall* love. Wonderful! Perhaps a girl tries inquisitively and superstitiously to find out her fate, to get a glimpse of her intended, and deceptive cleverness makes her believe that when she has done this and this and that, she shall recognise him by his being the first person she sees on such and such a day. I wonder, then, if it should be so difficult to get to see one's neighbour also—if one does not make it difficult for himself to see him—for Christianity has made it for ever impossible to make a mistake about him. There is in the whole world not a single person who can be recognised with such ease and certainty as one's neighbour. You can never confuse him with anyone else, for

indeed all men are your neighbour. If you confuse another man with your neighbour, there is essentially no mistake in this, for the other man is your neighbour also; the mistake lies in you, that you will not understand who your neighbour is. If you save a man's life in the dark, supposing him to be your friend, but he is your neighbour, this again is no mistake; alas, the mistake would be only in your wanting to save only your friend. If your friend complains that, in his opinion, you did for a neighbour what he thought you would do only for him, be at rest, it is your friend who makes the mistake.

The point at issue between the poet and Christianity may be stated precisely in this way: *erotic love and friendship are preferential and the passion of preference*. Christian love is self-renunciation's love and therefore trusts in this *shall*. To exhaust these passions would make one's head swim. But the most passionate boundlessness of preference in excluding others is to love only the one and only; self-renunciation's boundlessness in giving itself is not to exclude a single one.

In other times when men were still earnest about understanding Christianity in relationship to life, they thought Christianity was in some way opposed to erotic love because it is based upon spontaneous inclinations. They thought that Christianity, which as spirit has made a cleft between body and spirit, despised love as sensuality. But this was a misunderstanding, an extravagance of spirituality.[41] Moreover, it may easily be shown that Christianity is far from unreasonably wishing to turn the sensuous against a man by teaching him extravagance. Does not Paul say it is better to marry than to burn![42] No, for the very reason that Christianity in truth is spirit, it understands the sensuous as something quite different from what men bluntly call the sensual. Just as it has not forbidden men to eat and drink, so has it not been scandalised by a drive men have not given themselves. Sensuality, the flesh, Christianity understands as selfishness. No conflict between body and spirit can be imagined, unless there is a rebellious spirit on the side of the body with which the spirit then struggles. In the same way no conflict can be thought of as existing between spirit and a stone, between spirit and a tree. Therefore self-love, egocentricity, is sensuality. Consequently Christianity has misgivings about erotic love and friendship because preference in passion or passionate preference is really another form of self-love. Paganism had never dreamed of this. Because paganism never had an inkling of self-renunciation's love of one's neighbour, whom one *shall* love, it therefore reckoned thus: self-love is abhorrent because it is love of self,

but erotic love and friendship, which are passionate preferences for other people, are genuine love. But Christianity, which has made manifest what love is, reckons otherwise. Self-love and passionate preferences are essentially the same; but love of one's neighbour—that is genuine love. To love the beloved, asks Christianity—is that loving, and adds, "Do not the pagans do likewise?" If because of this someone thinks that the difference between Christianity and paganism is that in Christianity the beloved and the friend are loved with an entirely different tenderness and fidelity than in paganism, he misunderstands. Does not paganism also offer examples of love and friendship so perfect that the poet instructively goes back to them? But no one in paganism loved his neighbour—no one suspected that there was such a being. Therefore what paganism called love, in contrast to self-love, was preference. But if passionate preference is essentially another form of self-love, one again sees the truth in the saying of the worthy father, "The virtues of paganism are glittering vices."[43]

That passionate preference is another form of self-love will now be shown, together with its opposite, that self-renunciation's love loves one's neighbour, whom one *shall* love. Just as self-love centres exclusively about this *self*—whereby it is self-love, just so does erotic love's passionate preference centre around the one and only beloved and friendship's passionate preference around the friend. The beloved and the friend are therefore called, remarkably and significantly enough, the *other-self*, the *other-I*—for one's neighbour is the *other-you*, or more accurately, the third-man of equality. The other-self, the other-I. But wherein lies self-love? It lies in the I, in the self. Would not self-love, then, still remain in loving the other-self, the other-I? Certainly one need not be an extraordinary judge of human nature in order with the help of these clues to make discoveries about erotic love and friendship, discoveries provocative for others and humiliating for one's self. The fire in self-love is spontaneously ignited; the I ignites itself by itself. But in erotic love and friendship, poetically understood, there is also self-ignition. Truly enough one may say that it is only occasionally—and then morbidly—that jealousy *shows* itself, but this is no proof that it is not always fundamentally present in love and friendship. Test it. Bring a neighbour between the lover and the beloved as the middle term whom one shall love; bring a neighbour between friend and friend as the middle term whom one shall love—and you will immediately see jealousy. Nevertheless *neighbour* is definitely the

middle-term of self-renunciation which steps in between self-love's I and I and also comes between erotic love's and friendship's I and the other-I. That it is self-love when a faithless person jilts the beloved and leaves the friend in the lurch, paganism saw also—and the poet sees it. But only Christianity sees as self-love the devotion of the lover's surrender to the one and only, whereby the beloved is held firmly. Yet how can *devotion* and *boundless abandon* be *self-love*? Indeed, when it is devotion to the other-I, the other-myself.—Let a poet describe what erotic love in a person must be if it is to be called erotic love. He will say much that we shall not dwell upon here, but then he will add: "and there must be admiration; the lover must admire the beloved." The neighbour, however, has never been presented as an object of admiration. Christianity has never taught that one must admire his neighbour—one shall love him. Consequently there must be admiration in erotic love's relationship, and the greater, the more intense the admiration is, the better, says the poet. Now, to admire another person certainly is not self-love, but to be loved by the one and only object of admiration, must not this relationship turn back in a selfish way to the I which loves—loves its other-I? It is this way with friendship, too. To admire another person certainly is not love, but to be the one and only friend of this rarest object of admiration, must not this relationship turn back in a doubtful way to the I from which it proceeded? Is it not an obvious danger for self-love to have a one and only object for its admiration when in return this one and only object of admiration makes one the one and only object of his own love or his friendship?

Love of one's neighbour, on the other hand, is self-renouncing love, and self-renunciation casts out all preferential love just as it casts out all self-love—otherwise self-renunciation would also make distinctions and would nourish preference for preference. If passionate preference had no other selfishness about it, it still would have this, that consciously or unconsciously there is a wilfulness about it—unconsciously insofar as it is in the power of natural predispositions, consciously insofar as it utterly surrenders itself to this power and consents to it. However hidden, however unconscious this wilfulness is in its impassioned yielding to its "one and only," the arbitrariness is nevertheless there. The one and only object is not found by obedience to the royal law, "You shall love," but by choosing, yes, by unconditionally selecting a one and only individual, but Christian love also has a one and only object, one's neighbour, but one's neighbour is as far as possible from

being only one person, one and only, infinitely removed from this, for one's neighbour is all men. When the lover or the friend can love only this one person in the whole world (something delightful to the poet's ears), there is in this tremendous devotion a tremendous wilfulness, and the lover in this onrushing, inordinate devotion really relates himself to himself in self-love. Self-renunciation would eradicate this self-loving and self-willing by the " You shall " of the eternal. And self-renunciation, which presses in as a judge to try self-love, is therefore double-edged in that it cuts off both sides equally. It knows very well that there is a self-love which one may call faithless self-love, but it knows just as well that there is a self-love which may be called devoted self-love. The task of self-renunciation is therefore a double one, relating itself to the difference between these two variants. For the faithless self-love which wants to shirk there is the task: devote yourself. For the devoted self-love, the task is: give up this devotion. That which delights the poet indescribably, namely, that the lover says, " I cannot love anyone else, I cannot give up loving, I cannot give up this love, for it would be the death of me and I would die of love "—this does not satisfy self-renunciation at all and it will not tolerate that such a devotion be honoured by the name of love, since it is self-love. Thus self-renunciation first judges and then sets the task: love your neighbour; him *shall* you love.

Wherever Christianity is, there is also self-renunciation, which is Christianity's essential form. In order to be related to Christianity one must first and foremost become sober, but self-renunciation is precisely the way by which a human being becomes sober in an eternal sense. On the other hand, wherever Christianity is absent, the intoxication of self-feeling is the most intense, and the height of this intoxication is most admired. Love and friendship are the very height of self-feeling, the I intoxicated in the other-I. The more securely the two I's come together to become one I, the more this united I selfishly cuts itself off from all others. At the peak of love and friendship the two really become one self, one I. This is explainable only because in this exclusive love there are natural determinants (tendencies, inclinations) and self-love, which selfishly can unite the two in a new selfish self.[44] Spiritual love, on the other hand, takes away from myself all natural determinants and all self-love. Therefore love for my neighbour cannot make me one with the neighbour in a united self. Love to one's neighbour is love between two individual beings, each eternally qualified as spirit. Love to one's neighbour is spiritual love, but two spirits are never able

to become a single self in a selfish way. In erotic love and friendship the two love one another in virtue of differences or in virtue of likenesses which are grounded in differences (as when two friends love one another on the basis of likeness in customs, character, occupation, education, etc., consequently on the basis of the likeness by which they are different from other men or in which they are like each other as different from other men). In this way the two can selfishly become one self. Neither one of them has yet the spiritual qualifications of a *self*;[45] neither has yet learned to love himself Christianly. In erotic love the I is qualified as body-psyche-spirit, the beloved qualified as body-psyche-spirit. In friendship the I is qualified as psyche-spirit and the friend is qualified as psyche-spirit. Only in love to one's neighbour is the self, which loves, spiritually qualified simply as spirit and his neighbour as purely spiritual. Therefore what was said at the beginning of this discourse does not hold good at all for erotic love and friendship, that only one human being recognised as one's neighbour is necessary in order to cure a man of self-love—if in this human being he loves his neighbour. In love and friendship one's neighbour is not loved but one's other-self, or the first I once again, but more intensely. Although self-love is condemnable, frequently it seems as if men do not have strength enough to agree about self-love; then it really makes its first open appearance when the other-self has been found and the two I's find in this relationship strength for the self-feeling of self-love. If anyone thinks that by falling in love or by finding a friend he has learned Christian love, he is in profound error. No, if one is in love and in such a way that the poet will say of him, " He is really in love" —yes, then the command of love can be changed a little when it is spoken to him and yet the same thing will be said. The command of love can say to him: love your neighbour as you love your beloved. And yet, does he not love the beloved *as himself*, as required by the command which speaks of one's neighbour? Certainly he does, but the beloved whom he loves *as himself* is not his neighbour; the beloved is his other-I. Whether we talk of the first-I or the other-I, we do not come a step closer to one's neighbour, for one's neighbour is the first-*Thou*.[46] The one whom self-love in the strictest sense loves is also basically the other-I, for the other-I is oneself, and this is indeed self-love. In the same way it is self-love to love the other-I which is the beloved or the friend. Just as self-love in the strictest sense has been characterised as self-deification, so love and friendship (as the poet understands it, and with his understanding this love stands and falls)

are essentially idolatry. Fundamentally love to God is decisive; from this arises love to one's neighbour; but of this paganism was not aware. Men left God out; men considered erotic love and friendship to be love and shunned self-love. But the Christian love-command requires one to love God above all and then to love one's neighbour. In love and friendship preference is the middle term; in love to one's neighbour God is the middle term. Love God above all else and then love your neighbour and in your neighbour every man. Only by loving God above all else can one love his neighbour in the next human being. The next human being—he is one's neighbour—this the next human being in the sense that the next human being is every other human being. Understood in this way, the discourse was right when it stated at the beginning that if one loves his neighbour in a single other human being he loves all men.[47]

Love to one's neighbour is therefore eternal equality in loving, but this eternal equality is the opposite of exclusive love or preference. This needs no elaborate development. Equality is just this, not to make distinctions, and eternal equality is absolutely not to make the slightest distinction, is unqualifiedly not to make the slightest distinction. Exclusive love or preference, on the other hand, means to make distinctions, passionate distinctions, unqualifiedly to make distinctions.

Has not Christianity, then, since by its "You shall" it thrust love and friendship from the throne, set something far higher in its place? Something far higher—yet let us speak with caution, with the caution of orthodoxy. Men have confused Christianity in many ways, but among them is this way of calling it the highest, the deepest, and thereby making it appear that the purely human was related to Christianity as the high or the higher to the highest or supremely highest. But this is a deceptive way of speaking which untruthfully and improperly lets Christianity in a meddlesome way try to ingratiate itself with human curiosity and craving for knowledge. Is there anything at all for which humanity as such—is there anything for which the natural man has greater desire than for the highest! When a mere newsmonger blazons abroad that his newest news is of the highest significance, then the gathering of hangers-on proceeds merrily in the world, which from time immemorial has had an indescribable partiality for and has felt a deep need of—being deceived. No, Christianity is certainly the highest and the supremely highest, but, mark well, to the natural man it is an offence.[49] He who in describing Christianity as the highest omits the middle term, offence, sins against it: he commits an

effrontery, more abominable than if a modest housewife were to dress like a strip-teaser, even more appalling than if John,[50] the rigorous judge, were to dress like a Beau Brummel. Christianity is in itself too profound, in its movements too serious, for dancing and skipping in such free-wheeling frivolity of talk about the higher, the highest, the supremely highest. Through offence goes the way to Christianity. By this is not meant that the approach to Christianity should make one offended by Christianity—this would be another way of hindering oneself from grasping Christianity—but offence guards the approach to Christianity. Blessed is he who is not offended by it.

So it is also with this command to love one's neighbour. Only acknowledge it, or if it is disturbing to you to have it put in this way, I will admit that many times it has thrust me back and that I am yet very far from the illusion that I fullfill this command, which to flesh and blood is offence, and to wisdom foolishness. Are you, my reader, perhaps what is called an educated person? Well, I too am educated. But if you think to come closer to this highest by the help of *education*, you make a great mistake. Precisely at this point the error is rooted, for we all desire education, and education repeatedly has *the highest* in its vocabulary. Yes, no bird which has learned only one word cries out more continuously this single word and no crow caws more continuously its own name than education cries out about the highest. But Christianity is by no means *the highest* of education, and Christianity disciplines precisely by this repulsion of offence. This you can easily see, for do you believe that your education or the enthusiasm of any man for gaining an education has taught either of you to love your neighbour? Alas, have not this education and the enthusiasm with which it is coveted rather developed a new kind of distinction, a distinction between the educated and the non-educated? Only observe what is said among the educated about love and friendship, the degree of similarity in education a friend must have, how educated a girl must be and precisely in what way. Read the poets, who hardly know how to defend their frankness against the mighty domination of education, who hardly dare believe in the power of love to break the bonds of all distinctions. Does it seem to you that such talk or such poetry or a life attuned to such talk and such poetry brings a man closer to loving his neighbour? Here again the marks of offence stand out. Imagine the most educated person, one of whom we all admiringly say: "He is so educated." Then think of Christianity, which says to him: "You shall love your neighbour!" Of course, a certain courteousness in

social intercourse, a politeness towards all men, a friendly condescension to the poor, a frank attitude towards the mighty, a beautifully controlled freedom of spirit—yes, that is education—do you think it is also loving one's neighbour?

One's neighbour is one's equal. One's neighbour is not the beloved, for whom you have passionate preference, nor your friend, for whom you have passionate preference. Nor is your neighbour, if you are well educated, the well-educated person with whom you have cultural equality—for with your neighbour you have before God the equality of humanity. Nor is your neighbour one who is of higher social status than you, that is, insofar as he is of higher social status he is not your neighbour, for to love him because he is of higher status than you can very easily be preference and to that extent self-love. Nor is your neighbour one who is inferior to you, that is, insofar as he is inferior he is not your neighbour, for to love one because he is inferior to you can very easily be partiality's condescension and to that extent self-love. No, to love one's neighbour means equality. It is encouraging in your relationship to people of distinction that in them you *shall* love your neighbour. In relation to those inferior it is humbling that in them you are not to love the inferior but *shall* love your neighbour. If you do this there is salvation, for you *shall* do it. Your neighbour is every man, for on the basis of distinctions he is not your neighbour, nor on the basis of likeness to you as being different from other men. He is your neighbour on the basis of equality with you before God; but this equality absolutely every man has, and he has it absolutely.

II C

You Shall Love Your Neighbour

Go, then, and do this—take away distinctions and similarities of distinctions—so that you can love your neighbour. Take away the distinctions of preference so that you can love your neighbour. But you are not to cease loving the beloved because of this—far from it. If this were so, the word *neighbour* would be the greatest fraud ever discovered, if you, in order to love your neighbour, must begin by ceasing to love those for whom you have a preference. Moreover, it would also be a contradiction, for, if one's neighbour is all men, then no one can be excluded—shall we now say, least of all the beloved? No, for this is the language of preference. Consequently, it is only the partiality which should be taken away—and yet it is not to be introduced again into the relationship with one's neighbour so that with extravagant preference you love your neighbour in contrast to your beloved. No, as they say to the solitary person, " Take care that you are not led into the snare of self-love," so it is necessary to say to the two lovers, " Take care that you are not led by erotic love itself into the snare of self-love." For the more decisively and exclusively preference centres upon one single person, the farther it is from loving the neighbour. You, husband, do not lead your wife into the temptation of forgetting your neighbour because of love for you; you, wife, do not lead your husband into this temptation! The lovers think that in erotic love they have the highest good, but it is not so, for therein they still do not have the eternal secured by the eternal. To be sure, the poet promises the lovers immortality if they are true lovers, but who is the poet; how good is his signature—he who cannot vouch for himself? The *royal law*, on the other hand, the love-command, promises life, eternal life, and this command simply says, " You shall love your neighbour." Just as this command will teach every man how he ought

to love himself, likewise will it also teach erotic love and friendship what genuine love is: in love towards yourself preserve love to your neighbour, in erotic love and friendship preserve love to your neighbour. It may perhaps offend you—well, you know it anyway, that Christianity is always accompanied by signs of offence. Nevertheless believe it. Do not believe that the teacher who never extinguished a single smoking candle would extinguish any noble fire within a man; believe that he who was love will teach every man to love; believe that if all the song writers united in one song to the praise of erotic love and friendship, what they would have to say would be nothing in comparison with the command, " You shall love; you shall love your neighbour as yourself! " Do not stop believing because the command almost offends you, because the discourse does not sound as flattering as that of the poet who courts your favour with his songs, because it repels and terrifies as if it would frighten you out of the beloved haunts of preference—do not for that reason cease to believe in it. Consider that just because the command and the discourse are what they are, for that very reason the object can be the object of faith! Do not give yourself over to the notion that you might compromise, that by loving some men, relatives and friends, you would love your neighbour—for this would mean giving up the poet without grasping what is Christian, and it was to prevent this compromise that the discourse set you between the poet's pride, which scorns all compromise, and the divine majesty of the royal command, which regards any compromise as blameworthy. No, love your beloved faithfully and tenderly, but let love to your neighbour be the sanctifier in your covenant of union with God; love your friend honestly and devotedly, but let love to your neighbour be what you learn from each other in the intimacy of friendship with God! Death erases all distinctions, but preference is always related to distinctions; yet the way to life and to the eternal goes through death and through the extinction of distinctions. Therefore only love to one's neighbour truly leads to life. As Christianity's glad proclamation is contained in the doctrine about man's kinship with God, so its task is man's likeness to God. But God is love;[51] therefore we can resemble God only in loving, just as, according to the apostle's words, we can only " be God's co-workers—in love."[52] Insofar as you love your beloved, you are not like unto God, for in God there is no partiality, something you have reflected on many times to your humiliation, and also at times to your rehabilitation. Insofar as you love your friend, you are not like unto God, because

before God there is no distinction. But when you love your neighbour, then you are like unto God.

Therefore go and do likewise. Forsake all distinctions so that you can love your neighbour. Alas, perhaps it is not necessary to say this to you at all. Perhaps you have found no beloved in this world, no friend along the way, and you walk alone. Or perhaps God took from your side[53] and gave you a beloved, but death came and took her from your side; it came again and took your friend but gave you none in return, and now you walk alone; you have no beloved to cover your weak side and no friend at your right hand. Or perhaps life separated you, even though all of you remained unchanged—in the solitariness of separation. Or, alas, perhaps change separated you and you walk sorrowfully alone because you found what you sought but then found that what you found—changed! How inconsolable! Yes, just ask the poet how inconsolable it is to live alone, to have lived alone, without being loved and without having any beloved. Just ask the poet if he knows of anything other than comfortlessness when death comes between the lovers, or when life separates friend from friend, or when change separates them as enemies from each other. For doubtless the poet loves solitude—he loves it so that in solitude he may discover the lost happiness of erotic love and friendship, just as one goes to a dark place in order to see the wonder of the stars. And yet, if a man were blameless in not having found a beloved, if he were blameless in having looked in vain for a friend, if the loss, the separation, and the change were not his fault, does the poet know of anything else than comfortlessness? But the poet himself has succumbed to change when he, the prophet of joy, does not know of anything else on the day of need than the mournful lament of comfortlessness. Or would you not call it change? Would you call it fidelity on the part of the poet that he inconsolably sorrows with the inconsolably sorrowing—well, we won't quarrel about that! But if you will compare this human fidelity with the faithfulness of heaven and the eternal, you will certainly concede that there is a change. For heaven not only rejoices—above any poet—with the joyful; heaven not only sorrows with the sorrowing—no, heaven has something new, a holier joy, in readiness for the sorrowing. Thus Christianity always has consolation, and its consolation is different from all human consolation in that human consolation recognises itself to be a substitute for lost joy—and Christian consolation *is joy itself*. Humanly speaking, consolation is a more recent invention. First came pain and suffering and the loss of joy, and then, afterwards,

alas, after a long time, man hit upon the way of consolation. The same is true in the life of the individual. First comes pain and suffering and the loss of joy, and then afterward, alas, sometimes long afterward, comes consolation. But Christian consolation can never be said to come afterward, for since it is the consolation of the eternal, it is older than all temporal joy. As soon as this consolation comes, it comes with the head-start of the eternal and swallows up, as it were, pain, for pain and the loss of joy are momentary—even if the moment were a year—and the momentary is drowned in the eternal. Neither is Christian consolation a substitute compensation for lost joy, since it is joy itself. All other joy is essentially only disconsolateness in comparison with Christianity's consolation. Man's life was not and is not so perfect on this earth that the joy of the eternal could be proclaimed to him simply as joy which he had and which he has wasted. For that reason the joy of the eternal can be proclaimed to him only as consolation. As the human eye cannot bear to look directly at the sun except through dark glasses, so man cannot bear the joy of the eternal except through the dimness of being proclaimed as consolation.—Consequently, whatever your fate in erotic love and friendship, whatever your privation, whatever your loss, whatever the desolation of your life which you confide to the poet, the highest still stands: love your neighbour! As already shown, you can easily find him; him you can never lose. The beloved can treat you in such a way that he is lost to you, and you can lose a friend, but whatever a neighbour does to you, you can never lose him. To be sure, you can also continue to love your beloved and your friend no matter how they treat you, but you cannot truthfully continue to call them beloved and friend when they, sorry to say, have really changed. No change, however, can take your neighbour from you, for it is not your neighbour who holds you fast—it is your love which holds your neighbour fast. If your love for your neighbour remains unchanged, then your neighbour also remains unchanged just by being. Death itself cannot deprive you of your neighbour either, for if it takes one, life immediately gives you another. Death can deprive you of a friend, because in loving a friend you really cling to your friend, but in loving your neighbour you cling to God: therefore death cannot deprive you of your neighbour.—If, therefore, you have lost everything of erotic love and friendship, if you have never had any of this happiness—in loving your neighbour you still have the best left.

Love to one's neighbour has the very perfection of the eternal. Is it really perfection belonging to love that its object is the superior, the remarkable, the unique? I should think that this would be a perfection belonging to the object, and the perfection of the object would evoke a subtle suspicion concerning the perfection of the love. Is it an excellence in your love that it can love *only* the extraordinary, the rare? I should think it would be a merit belonging to the extraordinary and the rare that it is extraordinary and rare, but not a merit of the love for it. Are you not of the same opinion? Have you never meditated upon God's love? If it were love's merit to love the extraordinary, then God would be—if I dare say so—perplexed, for to him the extraordinary does not exist at all. The merit of being able to love *only* the extraordinary is therefore more like an accusation, not against the extraordinary nor against love, but against the love which can love *only* the extraordinary. Is it the merit of a man's delicate health that he can feel well in *only* one place in the world, surrounded by every favourable condition? When you see a person who has thus arranged matters in life, what is it you praise? No doubt the comfortableness of his surroundings. But have you not noticed that every word eulogising this magnificence really sounds like a joke on the poor fellow who can live *only* in this luxurious environment? Consequently, perfection in the object is not perfection in the love. Precisely because one's neighbour has none of the excellences which the beloved, a friend, a cultured person, an admired one, and a rare and extraordinary one have in high degree—for that very reason love to one's neighbour has all the perfections which love to a beloved one, a friend, a cultured person, an admired one, a rare and extraordinary one, does not have. Let men debate as much as they wish about which object of love is the most perfect—there can never be any doubt that love to one's neighbour is the most perfect love. All other love, therefore, is imperfect in that there are two questions and thereby a certain duplicity: there is first a question about the object and then about the love, or there is a question about both the object and the love. But concerning love to one's neighbour there is only one question, that about love. And there is only one answer of the eternal: this is genuine love, for love to one's neighbour is not related as a type to other types of love. Erotic love is determined by the object; friendship is determined by the object; only love to one's neighbour is determined by love. Since one's neighbour is every man, unconditionally every man, all distinctions are indeed removed from the object. Therefore genuine love is recognisable by this, that its object is without any of the more definite qualifications of difference, which means that this love is recognisable only by love.

Is not this the highest perfection? Insofar as love can and may be recognised by something else, then this something else, in the relationship itself, is like a suspicion about the love, that it is not comprehensive enough and therefore not in an eternal sense infinite. This something else, unconscious to love itself, is a disposition to morbidity. In this suspicion, therefore, lies hidden the anxiety which makes erotic love and friendship dependent upon their objects, the anxiety which can kindle jealousy, the anxiety which can bring one to despair. But love to one's neighbour does not contain a suspicion about the relationship and therefore cannot become suspiciousness in the one who loves. Yet this love is not proudly independent of its object. Its equality does not appear in love's proudly turning back into itself, indifferent towards the object. No, its equality appears in love's humbly turning itself outwards, embracing all, yet loving everyone in particular but no one in partiality.

Let us consider what has already been developed, that in a human being love is a need, is the expression of riches. In fact, the deeper this need is, the greater are the riches; if the need is infinite, then the riches are also infinite. If a man's love-need is to love one single person, it must be said, even if one concedes that this need is riches, that he really needs this person. On the other hand, if the love-need in a man is to love all, there is a real need, and it is so great that it could almost produce its own object of love. In the first case the emphasis is on the speciality of the object, in the second on the essentiality of the need, and only in this latter sense is need an expression of riches. Only in this latter sense are the object of love and the love-need related equally in an infinite way, for the first person is the best person and every human being is one's neighbour, or, in the sense of *speciality* there is no object of love; whereas in the infinite sense every human being is the object of love. When one feels the need of talking with one particular person, he really needs this person; but when this need of conversing is so great that he must speak, so that if he were transported to a desert island or put in solitary confinement and the need of conversing were so great that every human being was the special person he wanted to talk with—then the need would be riches. For him in whom there is love to his neighbour, love is a need, the deepest need. He does not have need of men just to have someone to love, but he needs to love men. Yet there is no pride or haughtiness in this wealth, for God is the middle term and the "shall" of the eternal binds and guides the great need so that it does not run wild and turn into pride. But there are

no limits to the objects of love, for one's neighbour is all men, unconditionally every human being.

Therefore he who in truth loves his neighbour loves also his enemy. The distinction *friend or enemy* is a distinction in the object of love, but the object of love to one's neighbour is without distinction. One's neighbour is the absolutely unrecognisable distinction between man and man; it is eternal equality before God—enemies, too, have this equality. Men think that it is impossible for a human being to love his enemies, for enemies are hardly able to endure the sight of one another. Well, then, shut your eyes—and your enemy looks just like your neighbour. Shut your eyes and remember the command that *you* shall love; then you are to love—your enemy? No. Then love your neighbour, for you cannot see that he is your enemy. When you shut your eyes, you do not see the distinctions of earthly existence, but enmity is also one of the distinctions of earthly existence. And when you shut your eyes, your mind is not diverted and confused just when you are to listen to the words of the command. And when your mind is not disturbed and confused by looking at the object of your love and the distinction of your object, then you become all ears for the words of the command, which speak one thing and one thing only to you, that *you* ought to love your neighbour. Now, when your eyes are closed and you have become all ears for the command, you are on the way of perfection in loving your neighbour.

It is veritably true, then (the previous exposition has already shown that *neighbour* is the unqualified category of spirit), that one sees his neighbour only with closed eyes or by looking *away from* all distinctions. The sensual eye always sees distinctions and pays attention *to* the distinctions. Therefore worldly prudence shouts early and late: " Look before you love." Ah, if one shall love his neighbour in truth, it follows above all that one must not look around, for this prudence in scrutinising the object will result in your never getting to see your neighbour, because he is every man, the first the best, taken quite blindly. The poet scorns the sighted blindness of prudence, which teaches that one should be careful about whom he loves. He teaches that love makes one blind. In a mysterious, obscure manner, according to the poet's view, the lover should find his object or fall in love and thus become—blind from love, blind to every fault, blind to every imperfection in the beloved, blind to everything else than this beloved—but nevertheless not blind to this one's being the one and only one in the whole world. When this is the case, erotic love certainly does make a man blind,

but it also makes him very particular not to mistake any other person for his beloved. Consequently, with regard to this beloved, it makes him blind by teaching him to make an enormous distinction between this one and only one and all other men. But love to one's neighbour makes a man blind in the deepest and noblest and holiest sense, so that he blindly loves every man, just as the lover loves his beloved.

Love to one's neighbour has the perfection of the eternal—*this is perhaps why at times it seems to fit in so imperfectly with earthly relationships and with earthly temporal distinctions, why it is easily misunderstood and exposed to hate, and why in any case it is very thankless to love one's neighbour.*

Even the person who is otherwise not inclined to praise God and Christianity does so when with a shudder he reflects on the dreadfulness in paganism or a caste system whereby men are inhumanly separated man from man through the distinctions of earthly life, when he reflects on how this ungodliness inhumanly teaches one man to disclaim relationship with another, teaches him presumptuously and insanely to say of another man that he does not exist, that " He is not born."[54] Then even he praises Christianity, which has saved men from this sort of evil by deeply and eternally unforgettably stamping the imprint of kinship between man and man, because kinship of all men is secured by every individual's equal kinship with and relationship to God in Christ, because the Christian doctrine addresses itself equally to every individual and teaches him that God has created him and Christ has redeemed him, because the Christian doctrine calls every man aside and says to him, " Shut your door and pray to God and you have the utmost a human being can have; love your Saviour, and you have everything, both in life and death; then pay no attention to the differences, for they make no difference. I wonder if a person looking from a mountain peak at the clouds below is disturbed by the sight; I wonder if he is disturbed by the thunderstorm which rages below in the low regions of the earth? Just so high has Christianity set every man, absolutely every human being—because before Christ just as in the sight of God there is no aggregate, no mass; the innumerable are for him numbered—they are unmitigated individuals. Just so high has Christianity placed every man in order that he should not damage his soul by preening himself over or grovelling under the differences in earthly existence. For Christianity *has not taken distinctions* away—any more than Christ himself would or would pray God to *take the disciples out of the world*[55]—and these remain one and the same thing. Never in Christendom, therefore, just as never in paganism, has there lived any

man who has not been attired in or clothed with the distinctions of earthly life. Just as the Christian does not and cannot live without the body, so he cannot live without the distinctions of earthly life which belong to each individual, whether by virtue of birth, position, circumstance, education, *etc.*—no one of us is pure or essential man. Christianity is too earnest to present fables about pure man—it wants only to make men pure. Christianity is no fairy tale—even if the eternal happiness which it promises is more glorious than what any fairy tale offers. Neither is it an ingenious fragment of the imagination intended to be difficult to understand, nor does it impose the conditions of—an idle head and an empty mind.

Consequently, Christianity has once and for all dispelled this horror belonging to paganism, but the distinctions of earthly existence it has not taken away. These must continue as long as time continues and must continue to tempt every man who enters into the world, for by being a Christian he does not become free from distinctions, but by winning the victory over the temptation of distinctions he becomes a Christian. In so-called Christendom, therefore, the distinctions of earthly existence still continually tempt; alas, very likely they more than tempt, so that one behaves arrogantly and another defiantly envies. Both ways are rebellion, rebellion against what is Christian. Far be it from us to strengthen anyone in the presumptuous delusion that only the mighty and the famous are the guilty ones, for if the poor and weak merely aspire defiantly for the superiority denied them in earthly existence instead of humbly aspiring for Christianity's blessed equality, this also damages the soul. Christianity is not blind, nor is it one-sided; with the quietness of the eternal it looks equably on all the distinctions of earthly life, but it does not contentiously take sides with any single one. It sees—and with real distress—that earthly busy-ness and the false prophets of secularism will in the name of Christianity conjure up the illusion of perfect equality, as if only the high and mighty make much of the distinctions of earthly existence, as if the poor were entitled to do everything in order to attain equality—only not by way of becoming Christians in earnestness and truth. I wonder if one can come closer to Christian likeness and equality that way?

Christianity, then, will not take differences away, neither the distinction of poverty nor that of social position. But on the other hand, Christianity will not in partiality side with any temporal distinction, either the lowliest or the most acceptable in the eyes of the world. Whether the temporal distinction which a man falls in love with by

fastening himself carnally to it is in the eyes of the world revolting and disturbing or is in the eyes of the world innocent and lovable does not concern Christianity at all; it makes no earthly distinction. It is not concerned with the means whereby he damages his soul, but it is concerned with his doing damage to his soul—by means of a triviality? Perhaps. But damaging one's soul is certainly no triviality. Between the extremes of fashionable life and poverty there lies a great throng of specific qualifications of earthly differences, but in none of those more specific and therefore less conspicuous distinctions does Christianity make an exception. Differences are like an enormous net in which the temporal is held. The meshes in this net are additional variations; one man seems more caught and bound in existence than another; but all these differences, the distinction between one difference and another and the comparing of these differences, do not concern Christianity at all, not in the least; such preoccupation and concern are nothing other than worldliness. Christianity and worldliness never come to an understanding with one another, even for a moment—although to the less observing they may deceptively seem to. To bring about likeness among men, to apportion the conditions of temporal existence equally, if possible, to all men, this is a task which pre-eminently occupies the secular world. Yet even what one may call well-intended secular striving along these lines never comes to an understanding with Christianity. This well-meaning worldliness is piously—if one may say so—convinced that there must be one temporal condition, one earthly distinction—which one discovers with the aid of calculations and surveys or some other preferred device—in which there is equality.[56] If this condition were to become one and the same for all men, then likeness would have been achieved. On the one hand, this cannot be accomplished and, on the other, the likeness of everyone's sharing the same temporal distinction is by no means Christian equality. Earthly likeness, if it was possible, is not Christian equality. And perfect achievement of earthly likeness is an impossibility. Well-meaning worldliness really confesses this itself. It rejoices when it succeeds in making temporal conditions similar for more and more, but it recognises that its struggle is a pious wish, that it has taken on an enormous task, that its prospects are remote—if it rightly understood itself it would perceive that its vision will never be achieved in time, that even if this struggle were continued for millennia it would never attain its goal. Christianity, on the other hand, aided by the short-cut of the eternal, is immediately at the goal: it allows all distinctions to

stand, but it teaches the equality of the eternal. It teaches that everyone shall *lift himself above* earthly distinctions. Notice carefully how equably it speaks. It does not say that it is the poor who shall lift themselves above earthly distinctions, while the mighty should perhaps come down from their elevation—ah, no, such talk is not equable, and the likeness which is obtained by the mighty climbing down and the poor climbing up is not Christian equality; this is worldly likeness. No, if one stands at the top, even if one is the king, he shall *lift himself above* the distinction of his high position, and the beggar shall *lift himself above* the distinction of his poverty. Christianity lets all the distinctions of earthly existence stand, but in the command of love, in loving one's neighbour, this equality of lifting oneself above the distinctions of earthly existence is implicit.

Because every man, the poor fully as much as the prominent and powerful, can in his own characteristic manner lose his soul by not Christianly willing to lift himself above the distinctions of earthly existence, and alas, because it happens to both and in various ways—because this is the situation, willing to love one's neighbour is often exposed to double, to multiplied dangers. Everyone who in despair has clung to one or another of the distinctions of earthly existence so that he centres his life in it—not in God—also demands that everyone who possesses this same distinction shall stick together with him—not in the good (for the good does not form an association, does not unite two or a hundred or all men in an association), but in an ungodly association against the universally human. Persons in despair consider it traitorous to want to have fellowship with others, with all men. On the other hand, these other men are also differentiated in terms of other temporal distinctions and very likely misunderstand when anyone who does not belong to their group wants to associate with them. Through a misunderstanding, both strife and harmony are strangely involved simultaneously in the distinctions of earthly existence; one wants to do away with a particular distinction, but he desires another in its place. Distinction can, as the word signifies, mean important distinction or the utmost distinction, but everyone who struggles against distinction in this way that he wants to have one set aside and another in its place really works for distinction. He, then, who will love his neighbour, he who consequently does not concern himself about eliminating this or that distinction or about mundanely eliminating all distinctions but concerns himself devoutly with permeating his distinction with the sanctifying thought of Christian equality, such a person easily becomes

like one who does not fit in with earthly existence, not even with so-called Christendom; he is readily exposed to attacks from all sides; he easily becomes like a lost sheep among ravenous wolves. Wherever he looks he naturally sees distinction (for, as said, no man is pure man, but the Christian lifts himself above distinctions); and they who have mundanely fastened themselves to a temporal distinction, whatever it is, are like ravenous wolves.

Let us take a few examples of the distinctions of earthly existence in order to make this matter clear. Let us proceed very carefully. And may your patience in reading correspond to my diligence and time in writing, for since being an author is my only work and my only task, I both can and am obliged to use a careful—fussy, if you so will—but certainly a serviceable precision which others are not able to use since they, in addition to not being authors, must use their perhaps longer days, perhaps richer gifts, and their perhaps greater working-strength in other ways.—You see, the times are past when the powerful and prominent alone were men, and the others—human slaves and serfs. We are indebted to Christianity for this. But from this it does not follow that prominence and power can no longer become a snare for a man in that he makes something of these distinctions, damages his soul, and forgets what it is to love his neighbour. If this should happen now, it certainly must come about in a more hidden and secret manner, but basically it is still the same thing. Whether in the enjoyment of his haughtiness and pride one openly gives other people to understand that they do not exist for him, whether in the nourishment of his arrogance one wants them to be sensitive to this by demanding an expression of slavish subjection from them, or whether stealthily and secretly, simply by avoiding any contact with them (perhaps also out of fear that openness would incite men and put him in a dangerous situation), one expresses that they do not exist for him—these are basically one and the same thing. The inhumanness and unChristianness of this does not consist in the manner in which it is done but in wanting to deny one's relationship in the human race with all men, with absolutely every man. Alas, alas, to keep oneself pure and unspotted from the world is the task and doctrine of Christianity—would that we did it—but in a worldly manner to close oneself off as if therein lay the most glorious of all distinctions, this is nothing less than corruption. It is not rude labour which corrupts—if it is done in purity of heart; and it is not meagre living conditions which corrupt—if you devoutly aim to lead a quiet life; but silk and ermine can corrupt

if they have occasioned a man to damage his soul. It is corruption when the poor man shrivels up in his poverty so that he lacks the courage to will to be built up by Christianity. It is also corruption when a prominent man wraps himself in his prominence in such a way that he shrinks from being built up by Christianity. And it is also corruption if he whose distinction is to be like the majority of people never comes out of this distinction through Christian elevation.

Therefore this distinguished corruption teaches the man of distinction that he exists only for distinguished men, that he shall live only in their social circle, that he must not exist for other men, just as they must not exist for him. But he must be circumspect, as it is called, in order with smoothness and dexterity to avoid getting people excited; that is to say, the secret and the art of the secret consist in keeping this secret to oneself. This avoidance of disturbance must not be an expression for the relationship, and it must not be done in a striking manner that might awaken attention. No, the evasiveness must be for the purpose of shielding oneself and therefore must be practised so carefully that no one becomes aware of it, to say nothing of being offended by it. Consequently he will go about as if with closed eyes (alas, but not in the Christian sense) when he travels amid the human throng. Proudly, and yet quietly, he will flit, as it were, from one distinguished circle to another. He must not look at those other men—lest he be seen; yet behind this screen his eyes will be all attention, just in case he should happen to meet a fellow-being or an even more distinguished person. His glance will float vaguely about, sweeping over all these men so that no one may catch his eye and remind him of their kinship. He must never be seen among less important people, at least never in their company, and if this cannot be avoided, it must appear as a stately condescension—although in the subtlest guise in order not to offend and hurt. He must be prepared to employ extreme courtesy towards common people, but he must never associate with them as equals, for thereby expression would be given to his being—a human being—whereas he is a distinguished personage. And if he can do this easily, smoothly, tastefully, elusively and yet always keeping his secret (that those other men do not really exist for him and he does not exist for them), then this refined corruption will confirm him as being—a well-bred man. Yes, the world has changed—and corruption has also changed. Yet it would be jumping to a conclusion if one believed that the world has become good because it has changed. Consider one of those proud, defiant figures who delighted in the ungodly game of

openly letting "those mortals" feel their paltriness—how surprised he would be to find out to what extent public-relations has now become necessary to keep this secret. Alas, but the world has changed, and gradually as the world changes the forms of corruption also become more cunning, more difficult to point out—but they certainly do not become better!

So it is with distinguished corruption. And if there were a distinguished person whose life, as a result of birth and conditions, definitely belonged within this same earthly distinction, a distinguished person who would not consent to this contentious plot against the universally human, that is, against his neighbour, if he could not find it in his heart to do this, if he, clearly perceiving the consequences, nevertheless trusted in God for strength to bear these consequences, since he lacked strength—to harden his heart: experience would certainly teach him what he was risking. First of all, distinguished corruption would accuse him of being a traitor and an egotist—because he would love his neighbour; for solidarity with corruption—this is love and loyalty and honesty and devotion! If, then, as it so often happens, the common people, again from the point of view of their distinctions, misunderstood and misjudged him, this one who did not belong to their synagogue, and rewarded him with mockery and insult—because he would love his neighbour!—well, then he would stand in double danger. If instead he had sought to become a leader of the common folk in a rebellion to stamp out all distinctions of quality, they perhaps would have honoured and loved him. But this he would not do. He would merely express what to him was a Christian need—to love his neighbour. And for that very reason his fate would become very precarious, for that very reason the double danger.

Now if this distinguished corruption should triumphantly ridicule him, should scoffingly and condemningly say: "This he has richly deserved"—it would certainly use his name as a scarecrow to prevent inexperienced, distinguished young people from going astray, astray—from the good form of high-class corruption. And many of the better ones among the upper class, over whom the good form of high-class corruption still exercised power, would not dare to defend him, would not dare refrain from laughing with the "council of the scornful";[57] it would indeed be extraordinary if anyone dared to defend him. It is quite conceivable that an inspired, eloquent distinguished person could in the upper-class circles advocate love to one's neighbour, but when it came to something real he would be unable to subject his mind

obediently to the view he had perhaps victoriously championed. But to champion an opposite viewpoint from within and behind the partitions of distinction, a viewpoint which in a Christian sense (not in a rebellious sense) will take the distinctions away, means nevertheless a maintenance of the distinctions. In company with scholars or within an environment which insures and elevates his distinction as such, a scholar would perhaps be willing to lecture enthusiastically on the doctrine of the equality of all men, but this means a continued maintenance of the distinction. In company with rich men, in an environment which makes the advantage of wealth conspicuous, a rich man would perhaps be willing to make every concession to the likeness of all men, but this would mean the continued maintenance of the distinction. The superior person, who in upper-class society could perhaps drive all opposition victoriously from the field, would very likely in a refined and cowardly manner avoid contact with reality's opposition to distinction.—"To walk with God"—we use this expression as a felicitation—if this superior one among the men of distinction should walk with God among men instead of proudly escaping, then he would perhaps seek to hide from himself and also from God what he had come to see, except what God saw—that he hid. When one walks with God, he no doubt walks free from danger, but one is also constrained to see and to see in a unique way. When you walk in company with God you need to see only one single person in misery, and you will not be able to escape what Christianity will have you understand, human likeness. Alas, but the superior person would perhaps not quite dare risk going through with this journey in company with God and the impression it gives; he would perhaps take his leave—although he might still champion the Christian viewpoint in distinguished society the same evening. Yes, walking with God (and it is really only in this company that one discovers his neighbour, for God is the middle term) in order to learn to know life and one's self is an earnest walk.[58] Then honour, power, and glory lose their worldly gloss: in company with God you cannot rejoice over them in a worldly way. If you stick together (for sticking together is not for the good) with certain other people who have a special position and special conditions in life, even if it is only with your wife, then worldliness tempts. Even if it does not have great meaning in your eyes, it tempts you comparatively in respect of persons; it tempts you perhaps for her sake. But when you walk with God, hold only to him and understand God within everything you understand; then you will discover—shall I say to your own disadvantage—then

you will discover your neighbour, since God will constrain you to love him—shall I say to your own disadvantage—for loving one's neighbour is a thankless task!

It is one thing to let ideas strive with ideas; it is one thing to battle and be victorious in a dispute; it is something else to be victorious over one's own mind when one battles in the reality of life. For however close one battling idea comes to another in life, however close one combatant comes to the other in an argument, all this strife is still at a distance and like shadow-boxing. On the other hand, the measure of a man's fundamental disposition is this: how far is what he understands from what he does, how great is the distance between his understanding and his action. Fundamentally we understand all the highest things. A child, the simplest man, the wisest, all understand the highest things and everyone the same, for this is, if I may put it so, one lesson we have all been assigned. But what makes the difference is whether we understand it at a distance—then we do not act accordingly—or close at hand —then we do act accordingly and "cannot do otherwise," cannot keep from doing it, as Luther, who understood the radical reduction of the distance between required action and words when he said, " I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."[59]—In the quiet hour's remoteness from the confusion of life and the world, every man understands what the highest is. When he departs, he has understood it. If good weather seems to abound for him in life, he understands it; but when confusion begins, understanding flees—or reveals 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 then to understand the highest—this everyone can do; but, speaking figuratively, to have to sit in the kettle which the coppersmith is hammering and then to have the same understanding—well, then understanding must have been very close at hand, otherwise it would show itself to be at a distance—because one was absent from his understanding.—In the still hour's remoteness from the confusion of life, a child, the simplest person, and the wisest one all understand, and almost with equal ease, what every man ought to do—what every man should do. But if, in the confusion of life, there is only a question about what *he* ought to do, then it appears, perhaps, that his understanding is at a distance—it is at the distance of humanity from him.—In the remoteness of an argument from action, in the remoteness of a magnanimous vow from action, in the distance of repentance from action, every man understands the highest. Within the security of conditions unchanged through

old habit, every one can understand that a change should be made, for this understanding is at a distance—is not unchangedness an enormous distance from the change? Alas, in the world there is perpetually the agitated question about what the one can do and that one can do and this one cannot do; the eternal in speaking about the highest assumes calmly that every man can do it, and merely asks therefore, whether or not he has done it. From the distance of superior condescension the distinguished man understands equality between man and man; from the distance of concealed patronising the scholar and the gentleman understand equality between man and man; from within a little concession to variations of fortune, the man whose distinction is to be like most men understands equality between man and man—at a distance all of them recognise the neighbour, but only God knows how many recognise him in actuality, that is, close at hand. But at a distance one's neighbour is only a figment of the imagination —he who by being close at hand, the first one the best, is unconditionally every man. At a distance one's neighbour is a shadow which in imagination enters every man's thought and walks by—but alas, one perhaps does not discover that the man who at the same moment actually walks by him is his neighbour. At a distance every man recognises his neighbour, and yet it is impossible to see him at a distance. If you do not see him so close that you unconditionally before God see him in every man, you do not see him at all.

Let us now consider the distinction of insignificance. The times are past when those called the poor and insignificant had no conception of themselves or only the conception of being slaves, not merely poor and insignificant men but essentially not men at all. The wild rebellion and terror which followed on the heels of that horror are perhaps also over, but I wonder if corruption may not dwell hidden in a man? Thus a corrupt insignificance will induce the insignificant man to see his enemy in the powerful and important, in everyone who is favoured by some advantage. But use caution, it says, for these enemies still have so much power that it could be dangerous to break with them. Therefore this corruption will not teach the lower ranks to create disturbances or to repress entirely every expression of deference or to permit revelation of the secret, but it will teach that this must be done and yet not be done, that it should be done and yet in such a way that the powerful will derive no pleasure from it, and at the same time they will not be able to say that anything has been withheld from them. Therefore even in homage there will be a crafty defiance which secretly can

provoke, a sullenness which secretly disavows what the mouth confesses, a sort of hoarseness of suppressed envy in the jubilation which honours the mighty. No force shall be used—it would be dangerous; no break must be made—it would be dangerous. But a disguise of hidden exasperation and a remote intimation of painful dejection will transform the power and glory and eminence into a plague for the mighty, the honoured, the eminent, who nevertheless cannot find anything specific to complain about, for precisely therein lies the art and the secret.

And if there were an unimportant person into whose heart this secret envy did not come and who would not let corruption from without get this power over him, an insignificant man who without craven submission, without fear of men, modestly, but above all with joy, gave every earthly advantage its due, happier and more joyful for the giving, many times more, perhaps, than he can be who receives—if there were such a man, he also would discover the double danger[60]. His peers would perhaps thrust him away as a traitor, scorn him as slave-minded, alas, and the favoured ones would perhaps misunderstand him and deride him as a climber. What in the previous relationship would perhaps be regarded as too unimportant for the important —to love one's neighbour—would perhaps here be regarded as too presumptuous for the unimportant—to love one's neighbour.—Thus it is dangerous to want to love one's neighbour. For there are plenty of distinctions in the world; differences are everywhere present in temporal existence, which means just that, differences and multiplicity. Perhaps a man might also have success, by virtue of his differences, in fitting into all differences through a compliant, accommodating adjustment which deducts a little here and exacts a little elsewhere. *But the equality of eternity*, to will to love one's neighbour, *seems both too little and too much, and therefore it is as if this love to one's neighbour did not fit properly within the relationships of earthly existence.*

Imagine a man who gave a banquet feast and invited to it the halt, the blind, cripples, and beggars. Now far be it from me to believe anything else about the world than that it would find this beautiful even though eccentric. But imagine that this man who gave the feast had a friend to whom he said, " Yesterday I gave a great feast! " Is it not true that the friend would first and foremost wonder that he had not been among those invited? But when he found out who the guests had been—now, far be it from me to believe anything else about this friend than that he would find it beautiful even though eccentric. Yet

he would wonder and would perhaps say, " It is a strange use of language to call such a gathering a feast: a feast—where friends are not present, a feast—where the concern is not for the choiceness of the wine, the quality of the company, the number of servants who waited on a table." One could call such a meal a charitable gesture, the friend would think, but not a feast. For however good the food which they received may have been, even if it had not merely been, like the food in the poor house, "substantial and edible," but really choice and costly, yes, even if they had had ten kinds of wine—the company itself, the organisation of the whole, a certain lack, I know not what, would prevent calling such a thing a feast; it all runs contrary to language-usage—which makes distinctions. Suppose, now, that the man who had given the feast answered, " I thought I had language-usage on my side. Do we not read in Luke's gospel (14 : 12-13) these words of Christ: ' When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.' Not only is the word *feast* used in this manner, but in the beginning a less festive expression, *dinner* or *banquet* is used. The word *feast* is first used when the discussion is about inviting the poor and crippled. Do you not think that this is what Christ meant, that this inviting of the poor and crippled is not only what we should do but that it is something far more festive than eating a dinner or supper with friends and relatives and rich neighbours; this ought not to be called a banquet or a feast, because inviting the poor makes the feast. But I well perceive that our ways of using language are different, for in accordance with common language-usage the list of those invited to a feast is something like this: friends, brothers, relatives, rich neighbours—who can repay one's hospitality. But so scrupulous is Christian equality and its use of language that it demands not only that you shall feed the poor—it requires that you shall call it a feast. Yet, if in the actuality of daily life you will hold fast to this strict language-usage and do not think that Christianly understood it is a matter of indifference under what name food is handed to the poor, then men will certainly laugh you to scorn. But let them laugh; they laughed at Tobit, too. Willing to love one's neighbour is always exposed to double danger, as we see in the example of Tobit. Under punishment of death, the king had forbidden burial of the dead. But Tobit feared God more than the king, loved those who had died more than life—he buried them. This was the first

danger. And then when Tobit had risked this heroic deed—then " his neighbours mocked him ' (Book of Tobit 2 : 8). This was the second danger. . . ." So spoke the man who had given the feast. Was he not right, my reader? Nevertheless, should there not be additional objections to his behaviour? Why was he so obstinate in inviting only the lame and the poor? Why did he, as it were, purposely, yes, defiantly, refrain from inviting his friends and relatives? He could just as well have invited them all. Undeniably, and if he were obstinate in this way, then we would praise neither him nor his use of language. But according to the word of the gospel, the meaning is this—the others would not come. Therefore the friend's amazement over not being invited ceased as soon as he heard what sort of company it had been. If the man—according to his friend's use of language—had given a feast and had not invited him, he would have become angry. But now he did not become angry—for he would not have come anyway.

Does it seem to you, my reader, that the preceding paragraphs are only an argument over the use of the word *feast*? Or do you perceive that the issue concerns loving one's neighbour? He who feeds the poor but yet is not victorious over his own mind in such a way that he calls this feeding a feast sees in the poor and unimportant only the poor and unimportant. He who gives a *feast* sees in the poor and unimportant his neighbours—however ridiculous this may seem in the eyes of the world. Alas, it is not rare that one hears the world's complaint over this or that man for not being earnest enough, but the question is what the world understands by earnestness, whether it does not more or less understand thereby the bustle of temporal concern. The question is whether the world by this constant confounding of earnestness and vanity is not in spite of its earnestness so jocular that if it got a notion of earnestness in the highest sense, thereby seeing that one would act earnestly—the question is whether the world would not quite involuntarily break into laughter. So earnest is the world! If the manifold and manifoldly complex distinctions of temporal existence did not make it just as difficult to see whether one loves his neighbour as to see *humanity*, the world would always have material enough for laughter—if there otherwise were a sufficient number who loved their neighbour. To love one's neighbour means, while remaining within the earthly distinctions allotted to one, essentially to will to exist equally for every human being without exception. To will to exist openly for other men only in the basis of the advantages of one's earthly distinction is pride and arrogance, but the clever invention of not willing to exist

for others at all in order secretly to enjoy the advantage of one's distinctions in the company of one's peers is cowardly pride. In both instances there is discord. But he who loves his neighbour is tranquil. He is made tranquil by being content with the earthly distinction allotted to him, whether it be important or unimportant; moreover, he lets every earthly distinction retain its significance and be taken for what it is and ought to be worth in this life, for one shall not covet what is his neighbour's, neither his wife nor his donkey, nor, consequently, the advantages granted him in life.[61] If they are denied to you, you shall rejoice that they are granted to him. Thus he who loves his neighbour is made tranquil. He neither cravenly shuns those mightier than he, but he loves his neighbour; nor does he proudly shun the less significant, but he loves his neighbour and wishes essentially to be equal to all men, whether he is actually known to many or not. Undeniably this is quite a stretch of one's wings, but this is not a proud flight which soars above the world; it is self-renunciation's humble and difficult flight along the earth. It is far easier and far more comfortable to sneak through life by living in stately seclusion if one is a distinguished person, or in quiet obscurity, if one is an insignificant person. Yes, one can—however strange it is—seem to get on even better through this sneaky manner of life, because one exposes himself to much less opposition. But even if it is rather pleasant for flesh and blood to avoid opposition, I wonder if it is a consolation likewise at the time of death? At the hour of death there is only this one consolation, that one has not avoided opposition but has survived it. What a man achieves or does not achieve is not within his power. He is not the One who shall steer the world; he has one and only one thing to do—to obey. Therefore everyone ought first and foremost (instead of asking what position is most comfortable for him, what connections are most advantageous to him) to place himself at the point where Governance can use him, if it so pleases Governance. That point is simply to love one's neighbour or to exist on an essentially equal basis for every man. Every other position is schismatic, however advantageous and convenient and seemingly significant this other position may be; Governance cannot use the man who has oriented himself in this way, for he is really in revolt against Governance. But he who takes this overlooked, this scorned, disdained sound position without clinging to his earthly distinctions, without forming a party with a single person, existing on an essentially equal basis for every man, he shall, even if he seemingly achieves nothing, even if he becomes exposed to the mockery of the insignificant and the

jests of the distinguished or to the mockery and jests of both—may yet at the time of death dare to speak consolingly to his soul, " I have done what was mine to do. Whether or not I have accomplished anything, I do not know. I do not know if I have done anyone any good. But I do know that I have existed for them; I know that because they have scoffed at me. And this is my consolation that I shall not take with me into the grave the secret that I, in order to have good, undisturbed, and comfortable days in this life, had repudiated kinship with other men, with the insignificant in order to live in superior reserve, with the superior in order to live in hidden obscurity." Let the one who by the help of his connections and by not existing for all men has achieved so much, let him watch out that death does not change his life for him when it reminds him of his liability. For he who did what he was supposed to do in order to make men aware, the insignificant or the significant, he who learning, acting, striving, existed equally for all men, he has no liability if men by persecuting him reveal—that they had become aware. He has no liability. No, he has even been of some benefit, because the prerequisite for benefit is first and foremost to become aware. But the one who cravenly existed only within the walls of his clique, where he accomplished so very much and won so many advantages, he who cravenly did not dare make men aware, neither the insignificant nor the significant, because he had a suspicion that the awareness of men is an ambiguous good—if one has had any truth to communicate and cravenly kept his celebrated activity within the security of the respect of persons: he bears the responsibility—for not having loved his neighbour. If such a person were to say, " Well, what good is it to order one's life according to such a standard? " I would answer, " What good do you think such excuses will be in eternity? " For the requirement of the eternal is infinitely higher than ever so clever an excuse. I wonder whether a single one of those whom Governance has employed as instruments in the service of truth (and let us not forget that every human being shall and ought to be this, at least he shall and ought to order his life in such a way that he could be an instrument) has ordered his life otherwise than by existing equally for every man. No person of this kind has ever clanned together with the insignificant or clanned together with the significant, but he has existed equally for the significant and insignificant. Truly, only by loving one's neighbour can a man achieve the highest, for the highest is the capability of being an instrument in the hand of Governance. As previously stated, everyone who has placed himself in any other

position, everyone who has organised parties and established connections or is a member of a party or a clique, steers according to his own reckoning and all his accomplishment, were it even the remodelling of a world, is a delusion. He will not have great joy from it in eternity either, for possibly Governance did utilise the accomplishment, but, alas, it did not employ him as an instrument. He was a self-willed person, conceited in his own cleverness, and Governance makes use of the strivings of such a person, also, by taking his arduous labours and letting him have his just reward.—However ridiculous, however backward, however inexpedient loving one's neighbour may seem in the world, it is still the highest a man is capable of doing. But *the highest* has never quite fitted into the relationships of earthly life—it is *both too little and too much.*

Consider for a moment the world which lies before you in all its variegated multiplicity; it is like looking at a play, only the plot is vastly more complicated. Every individual in this innumerable throng is by his differences a particular something; he exhibits a definiteness but essentially he is something other than this—but this we do not get to see here in life. Here we see only what rôle the individual plays and how he does it. It is like a play. But when the curtain falls, the one who played the king, and the one who played the beggar, and all the others—they are all quite alike, all one and the same: actors. And when in death the curtain falls on the stage of actuality (for it is a confused use of language if one speaks about the curtain being rolled up on the stage of the eternal at the time of death, because the eternal is no stage—it is truth), then they also are all one; they are human beings. All are that which they essentially were, something we did not see because of the difference we see; they are human beings. The stage of art is like an enchanted world. But just suppose that some evening a common absent-mindedness confused all the actors so they thought they really were what they were representing. Would this not be, in contrast to the enchantment of art, what one might call the enchantment of an evil spirit, a bewitchment? And likewise suppose that in the enchantment of actuality (for we are, indeed, all enchanted, each one bewitched by his own distinctions) our fundamental ideas became confused so that we thought ourselves essentially to be the rôles we play. Alas, but is this not the case? It seems to be forgotten that the distinctions of earthly existence are only like an actor's costume or like a travelling cloak and that every individual should watchfully and carefully keep the fastening cords of this outer garment loosely tied,

never in obstinate knots, so that in the moment of transformation the garment can easily be cast off, and yet we all have enough knowledge of art to be offended if an actor, when he is supposed to cast off his disguise in the moment of transformation, runs out on the stage before getting the cords loose. But, alas, in actual life one laces the outer garment of distinction so tightly that it completely conceals the external character of this garment of distinction, and the inner glory of equality never, or very rarely, shines through, something it should do and ought to do constantly. For the actor's art is deceptive; the art is the deception. The ability to deceive is its greatness; permitting oneself to be deceived is just as great. Therefore one must be able to see and not want to see the actor through the costume. Therefore it is the height of artistry when the actor becomes one with the rôle he plays, because this is the height of deception. But the actuality of life, even if it is not the truth as the eternal is truth, ought nevertheless to partake of the truth, and therefore that other person who everyone essentially is should always shine through the disguise. Alas, but in actual life the individual develops in temporal growth simultaneously with his individual differences; this is in contrast to eternal growth, which grows away from distinctions. The individual grows misshaped; every such individual is, in the view of the eternal, a cripple. Alas, in actuality the individual grows simultaneously with his differences so that death at last must use force to tear them from him.—Yet if one were in truth to love his neighbour, he would be reminded every moment that the differences are a disguise. As previously said, Christianity has not wanted to storm forth to abolish distinctions, neither the distinction of prominence nor that of insignificance, nor has it wanted in a worldly manner to make a worldly compromise between distinctions; but it wills that differences shall hang loosely about the individual, loosely as the cloak the king casts off in order to show who he is, loosely as the ragged costume in which a supernatural being has disguised itself. When distinctions hang loosely in this way, then there steadily shines in every individual that essential other person, that which is common to all men, the eternal likeness, the equality. If this were true, if every individual lived in this manner, then temporality would have reached its utmost. It cannot be like the eternal. But this expectant solemnity which, without stopping the stream of life, every day renews itself by the eternal and by the equality of the eternal, every day saves the soul from the differences in which it still remains: this would be the reflection of eternity. If then in actual life

you were actually to see the sovereign, gladly and respectfully bring him your homage; but for all that you should see in the sovereign the inner glory, the equality of glory which his magnificence only conceals. If then you were to see the beggar—perhaps suffering in sorrow over him more than he himself, you should nevertheless also see in him the inner glory, the equality of glory, which his wretched outer garments conceal. Yes, then you should see—wherever you turned your eye—your neighbour. For no man exists or has existed from the beginning of the world who is the neighbour in the sense that the king is king, the scholar a scholar, your relative your relative—that is, in a particular sense or, which is the same, in the sense of distinction. No, every man is your neighbour. In being king, beggar, scholar, rich man, poor man, male, female, *etc.*, we do not resemble each other—therein we are all different. But in being a neighbour we are all unconditionally like each other. Distinction is temporality's confusing element which marks every man as different, but neighbour is eternity's mark—on every man. Take many sheets of paper and write something different on each one—then they do not resemble each other. But then take again every single sheet; do not let yourself be confused by the differentiating inscriptions; hold each one up to the light and you see the same watermark on them all. Thus is neighbour the common mark, but you see it only by help of the light of the eternal when it shines through distinction.[62]

My reader, doubtless this must seem glorious to you and you must have thought of it in this way whenever in silent exaltation you devoted yourself to meditation and let the thought of the eternal rule; yet do not simply remain at a distance from this understanding. Should it not seem just as glorious that you for your part resolve to make the agreement with God that you will cling to him in order to stick to this understanding, that is, in order to express in your life that you with him hold to this understanding as the only essential, whatever may befall you in life for the sake of this understanding—should it even cost you your life—that you with God hold fast to it as your victory over all vexations and all wrongs? Remember that he who in order to will one thing in truth chooses to will the good in truth, remember that he has this holy comfort: one suffers only once but is victorious for eternity. —The poet knows how to talk much about the dedication of erotic love about what an ennobling power it casts over a man falling in love and being loved, about what a transfiguration takes place in his whole existence, about, according to the poet's view, what a heavenly

difference there must be between the one who has fallen in love and one who has never felt the transformation of erotic love. O, true dedication, however, is to give up all demands on life, all demands on power and honour and advantage, all demands—but the happiness of erotic love and friendship is among the very greatest demands—consequently to give up all demands in order to understand what an enormous demand God and the eternal make upon one himself. He who will receive this understanding is ready to love his neighbour. A man's life begins with the delusion that a long, long time and a whole world lie in the distance before him, begins with the rash fancy that he has ample time for the fullfillment of all his expectations. The poet is the smooth-talking, enthusiastic confidant of this rash but beautiful fancy. But when a man in the infinite transformation himself discovers the eternal so near to life that there is not the distance of one single wish, of one single evasion, of one single moment from what *he* in this *now*, in this second, in this holy moment *ought* to do—then he is on the way to becoming a Christian. It is characteristic of childhood to say: *Me want—me—me.* It is characteristic of youth to say, "*I*—and *I*—and *I*." The mark of maturity and the dedication of the eternal is to will to understand that this *I* has no significance if it does not become the *you*, the *thou*, to whom the eternal incessantly speaks and says: "*You shall, you* shall, *you* shall." It is youthful to want to be the only I in the whole world. Maturity is to understand this *you* as addressed to oneself, even though it were not said to a single other person. *You* shall; *you* shall love your neighbour. O, my reader, it is not to *you* *I* speak. It is to me, to whom the eternal says: "*You* shall."