

KENNETH BOULDING
The Practice of The Love of God
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The Practice of The Love of God

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world, in ways that we often do not recognize, and out of the very depth of the misery of our time there will come a reawakening of His love in the hearts of millions of His prodigal children, a new springtime to the weary earth. Let us press forward to that time; let us do more, let us anticipate it in our own lives, secure even in the midst of destruction, secure in the persuasion that whatever may happen to us, “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

of their minds, and of the knowledge of our day, but speaking principally to the spiritual hunger that grips the hearts of men everywhere. I see them preaching fearlessly – “Love God more than your country, more than your class, more than your race, more than your creed.” I see them persecuted, and cast into prison, and put to death, but conquering all these things through the love that fills their whole being, leaving no room for mistrust, or fear, or pain. They shall absorb the world’s hate and anger into their own bodies, and will give none in return, so that the streams of hatred that fly around the world, bounding and rebounding from the flinty surfaces of unredeemed souls, will dwindle and pass away. I see the hardness melting from men’s souls, a new and eager look brightening in their eyes, a dissolving of old hates, a coming together in joyful unity.

Let us not despair of the world. It is God’s world, and He has made it for Himself, as He has made us. Is our life threatened? It is not ours to withhold from Him. Is our peace, our comfort, our security threatened? These things have come between us and His glory, and we shall find the true peace, the true comfort, the true security that lies in His riches, not in ours. Are we threatened with prison, with concentration camps, with the loss of our jobs, the withdrawal of the esteem of our fellows? If so, we shall be in a goodly company; we shall sing with Paul and Silas, and enter prisons as palaces with William Dewsbury. Is our country going to be defeated, our civilization going to collapse? Out of the utter defeat of Israel came the sweetest psalms and the noblest prophets; out of the collapse of Rome came Augustine and the City of God; after the fire and fury of the Thirty Years War came the divine cadences of Bach. After a disastrous war in Denmark came Bishop Grundtvig, the Folk High Schools, the cooperatives, and the agriculture that is the model of the world. God is always redeeming His

God Is Love

How do you respond to these three words? Perhaps they bring a faint smile of derision to your face, as you recall the pious phrases of Sunday School, or the plush-embroidered text that hung over Grandmother’s bed. Perhaps they represent something dim that you think you have outgrown as you have advanced into the bright intellectualism of a scientific day. Perhaps they cover you with a warm, safe feeling, perfumed with the scent of red cushions and worn benches, and lit with the gentle light that flows from the smile of a well-fed worshipper. Perhaps they lead you into a comfortable corner of your soul, well insulated from the chilly world of rational thought, where you secretly indulge in spiritual drinking. If any of these conditions is yours, then you have missed a treasure. For to some these words are a key to a Kingdom, a Kingdom where Truth reigns in so great majesty that we can hardly bear the splendour, where life springs born again from every moment of time, and where a rich joy compounded of bitter spices scents every breath we breathe.

We are not sent into this world to walk it in solitude. We are born to love, as we are born to breathe and eat and drink. The babe is hardly separated from his mother’s womb before he stretches out a tiny clasping hand, and from that time forth he will constantly stretch out to touch the world that lies about him and the folk that dwell therein. The purpose of our growth in life is to bring us into unity with the universe into which we are born, to make us aware that

we are not lonely individual meteors hurtling blindly through an abysmal dark, but living parts of a living whole. As we grow we learn to love more and more: first ourselves; then the family within the small kingdom of the home; then the school, the wider circle of friends, the home community, the college, and the still wider community of the nation; and finally, the greatest country of all, which has no boundaries this side of Hell, and perhaps not even there. In some this process of enlargement is arrested at an intermediate stage, and then love turns in upon itself and becomes sour. Some have never truly loved anything but themselves – perhaps ‘because their first outreachings were received with coldness and lack of sympathy – and then love quickly turns putrid, and becomes greed, and lust, and turns even to self-disgust, Some confine their love to the narrow limits of the family, and then too love decays into sentimentality, or hardens into indifference. The couple that are wrapped up in themselves soon find the parcel uncomfortably tight; the mother who pours out her love on her child till both are smothered in a cocoon of sentiment soon tastes the bitter worm of ingratitude and ruins the very object of her love. There are few more depressing spectacles than the perennial “old grad, ” who has never broken the bonds of collegiate enthusiasm or developed beyond the throaty lore of Alma Matriolatry. And the present day provides us with the awful spectacle of what an ingrown love of country can do, what fanatical hatreds and cruelties it can engender, and how again it can destroy the very object of its love.

There is no resting place for expanding love short of God and his whole Kingdom. If our love ceases to expand, it will perish, as a tree planted in a narrow pot must perish if it does not break the vessel that confines it. But this is the mystery of love: that as it grows to wider and wider objects,

willingness to forgive and to forget the past, and to build our actions on hope for the future. This is of increasing importance as our system crystallizes into organized groups, for let nobody think that organization, or socialization, lessens conflict. The less we act as individuals, the more we are organized into interest-groups, the more acute economic conflicts become, and the more necessary it is to have a principle within society by which conflicts can be resolved fruitfully. This principle is that men should wish to act in the general welfare, and not in their particular interest. But apart from the love of God, this principle is a mere moral platitude, incapable of execution, and we shall never stir the mass of men to observe it unless we first fire them with the love of God.

Let us then not be ashamed of the love of God. Too long have we hidden our light under the bushel of unobtrusive good works. We have made of our religion a holy relic, to be kept in a discreet plain box, brought out perhaps to be dusted on Sunday morning, but never to be exhibited to the unfriendly gaze and polite laughter of the world. But relics decay, and soon our box will be empty, and then perhaps we shall mourn our loss, and say “Religion is dead.” And all the while God will be smiling sorrowfully at us, and His love will spring up again as a flower comes up in the spring, fresh and sweet-smelling. It will spring up in strange places where we never thought of looking, among the poor and the outcast, the uneducated and the foolish, the wayward and the heathen. And if we are awake and sensitive it will spring up, alive and gay, out of the dust of our own hearts, through the matted growth of our intellectual pride and worldly riches.

I have a vision for the world. I see a band of men and women going out unto all people, preaching this splendid news of God’s love by word and deed, using all the resources

the German his atrocities, the Japanese forgive the Exclusion Act, the Americans forgive the blows at their pride and prestige? By human power it is impossible. Let us have no illusions about this war, or the peace to follow. It will not be a just peace: it will be a revengeful peace; it will lay the seeds of another war. There are some wrongs that cannot be forgiven, save by a powerful upsurge of the Love of God, and Germany has committed them all. But there can be no peace, and no security, without forgiveness, without a new birth, a new start, a wiping of the slate. And this will never come as long as men love anything – self, family, culture, religion, civilization – more than they love God.

In our economic and social life, in the sphere of race and class also we have reached a point where conflict threatens to become acute. Many of the problems of economic life are technical rather than spiritual, and will be solved in the due course of the progress of truth. But behind the technical economic problems of our day there lies a true disease of the spirit, the same disease that rots our political system. It is the lack of responsibility, a lack of that extension of self-interest that brings all men into its sphere. We have wars because nations approach all questions asking “how will this affect us,” not “how will this affect the world.” We have economic strife and discontent because business men and trade unionists and professional workers alike approach all questions asking “how will this affect us,” and not “how will this affect everybody.” So we have no compunction in pressing for a tariff that will ruin half a million lives across the seas, nor in raising our own wages at the expense of unorganized workers, nor in squeezing a competitor out of business to add a fraction to our own power and wealth. Whatever economic system we adopt, whether a free economy or a planned economy, its spiritual foundation must be a certain sense of unity with all men, a code of honor, a

the narrower loves are not made less, but are made more perfect. The man who discovers the exquisite mutual love of a united family life is not thereby made the less in himself, for as he loves his family and gives himself for them, his self is renewed and becomes more worthy of love. The family which reaches out beyond itself in all manner of community concerns does not thereby lose the love that flows within its sacred circle; rather does it purify and intensify that love. There is truth even in the hackneyed phrase “I could not love thee dear, so much, loved I not honor more.” And though the world is slow to recognize it, the love of country is not destroyed by the love of a greater Kingdom, but rather is purified and strengthened thereby. Love indeed is a widow’s cruse for the more its fragrant oil is poured forth, the fuller flows the stream. It is a realm where the laws of economics do not hold, and are turned quite upside down, for what we carefully mete out will wither in our hands, like the manna of old, while what we squander recklessly abroad will multiply till we can hardly contain our riches.

Let us not be ashamed of love. It is unfortunate, perhaps, that for so great a thing we have to use a word so smeared by mishandling. There is a melancholy Gresham’s Law of language by which bad meanings drive out the good, and just as the good word “charity” became tainted with the fetid odour of the poorhouse, so even “love” has come to reek of stale emotion and cheap scent. But let us look behind the words that bedevil us to that which “suffereth long, and is kind; envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things – and never faileth.”

Let us not be afraid because love is an emotion. There is a strange heresy abroad at the present time, that things

intellectual are good, and things emotional are bad. It is a curious example of race prejudice in the spiritual realm, and follows from the logical fallacy of all race prejudice – that of generalizing from an inadequate sample. Because some emotional experiences are shallow and unreal, we too hastily condemn the whole gamut. In fact, there is truth and falsehood in the realm of emotion just as there is truth and falsehood in the realm of intellect. We do not condemn mathematics because a schoolboy makes a mistake in his algebra, nor should we condemn emotion because a schoolgirl titters at the sight of a man. So in the religious life we should not condemn the deep stirrings of the love of God in the soul because of the riotous conduct of the Holy Rollers. It is our duty to seek emotional truth, as it is to seek intellectual truth, and indeed as we seek them we shall find that they are not two truths, but one.

In our love also, we must seek that which is true, and reject that which is false. There are grades and degrees of love, as of all emotions: there is shoddy, sentimental love and there is pure, ennobling love. The quality of love depends not only on the quality of the lover; it depends on the quality of the *object* of love. A worthy object will call forth a worthy love, a trivial object a trivial love. The love of a mother for her child is worthier than that of a spinster for her cat precisely because its object is more worthy of love. And the character of the lover depends in turn on the character of the loved. If we waste our love on unworthy objects, or devote to an object an inappropriate kind of love, we ourselves are weakened. If we give to a cat the kind of love that should be given to a child, we degenerate into mawkishness and the cat is spoiled. If we love ourselves, our wealth, and our position with the kind of love with which we should love mankind, we will become hard without and fearful within. Even if we love our family, our Society, and our country

her vast fleets of ships and planes can do to her enemies; rather do we wish her to be respected for her integrity and unselfishness, for the greatness of her life, not for the range of her guns. He who loves his country in the light of his love for God, expresses that love by endeavoring to make his country respected rather than feared, loved rather than hated. But he who loves his country only, expresses that love by trying to make his country feared, and succeeds too often in making it hated. We see clearly that German bombs, German soldiers, German tanks, German rule and German victories make Germany hated – indeed, it is because her people have loved her so passionately that she has become the most hated nation on earth. But it is equally true that American bombs, American soldiers, American tanks, American rule and American victories make America hated. For this reason the man who admits the Love of God to every corner of his soul cannot participate in war, for he must seek to express his love for his country in ways that will make his country loved. To love God truly is indeed to live in “that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars,” for it cannot possibly be an expression of His love to kill, maim, and burn His other children, no less beloved than we.

Apart from the love of God there is no end to the cycle of war. For war will not cease until governments everywhere, and the people who make them, sense a unity with all men and recognize a responsibility for the good of all men, whether they are fellow-countrymen or so-called “aliens.” But this will not come until there is forgiveness; until the Jew, the Pole and the Norwegian forgive the German, and the German forgives the Englishman; until the Japanese forgive the white races, and America’s slogan becomes not “remember Pearl Harbor,” but “forgive Pearl Harbor.” But how can there be forgiveness of such great wrongs? How can the Pole forgive

country, or of our civilization? With its greed, its cruelty, its hatreds, its wars, its poverty, its injustices, and above all, its shallowness of life and its vulgarity, it seems almost to be given over to the pursuit of evil and of self-destruction rather than to the love of a loving God. Yet I am not ashamed to say that I love America, its great spaces and free air, the more perhaps because I am not a “birthright” but a “convinced” American. Nor am I ashamed to say that I love my mother, England, for though she is sometimes blind and boastful, she has suffered much, and has green fields and gray towers. Even do I love this whole rantipole civilization of ours, with its street cars and automobiles, movies and machines, its noise and shouting and bright lights, its science and sanitation, its impertinent questioning and swaggering progress, that straddles the earth from Samarkand to Patagonia, and winks a daring 200-inch eye at the farthest galaxies. Because I love these things, I long for their redemption, for they are not yet redeemed, they may never be redeemed, and yet they can be perfected in the love of God. The love of God does not destroy, but purifies and liberates our love of country. The love of country without the love of God is a destructive emotion; it leads into selfishness, pride, arrogance, injustice, cruelty, domination and war. Wars are not fought primarily for economic reasons, for the web of economic conflicts coincides hardly anywhere with the pattern of national boundaries. Most men go to war because they love their country more than they love God, or because the God they love is a national God, speaking the national tongue, thinking in national ways, hating the national hates. But when we love the universal suffering Father before all else, our love of country becomes pure. We wish to see her a Christ among nations, not conquering by guns and bombs and starvation, but by love and suffering. We do not wish her to be respected out of fear for the harm

with the kind of love with which we should love God, we will become narrow, blind, and a danger even to the thing we love.

It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that our greatest love should be devoted to God, and that all our other loves should be subordinated to our love for Him. Only as we love Him with our whole heart, and mind, and strength do we find all other objects of love taking their proper place, and as we love Him we find too that our other loves take on His quality, and shine with ever-brighter lustre. But now perhaps I speak a language which some do not understand. For how can we love God, whom we have not seen? Our selves we know, our home we know, our country we know and have seen – but who is this God who so jealously commands our adoration? Indeed, the greatest obstacle in the way of our love for God is the vague notions which we entertain of Him. One has a certain sympathy for the young man who said that every time he thought of God he thought of an oblong blur, and that he thought of love as a faint pink smell filling the air. Most of us fancy that we are past the stage where we think of God as an old man with whiskers sitting in the clouds. It is extremely unfashionable, especially in university circles, to think of God in personal terms at all. There is a long word of peculiar magical properties. “Anthropomorphism,” which haunts the intellectual in his search for God. Consequently we wander off into all manner of vague phrases and analogies: Spiritual Forces, Wills, Powers, World-Souls, Hidden Dynamios and the like, in a desperate attempt to avoid the simplest, most beautiful, and most penetrating analogy of all; that of the Father who is known through his children. Once we recognize that all analogies, all words, all symbols express less than the truth, once we acknowledge that God is greater than anything that we know or can say, surely we need not be afraid to think of

Him as a person. For the way to God is through mutual love, not through abstract metaphysic, and mutual love is a relationship of persons.

Not more than one or two people in this whole continent knew my father, who lived all his life in England. Yet anyone who knows me knows something of what my father was like, for I resemble him in many respects. So we may look into our selves, and into the faces of our friends, and find there evidence of a heavenly paternity, stained and adulterated with the clay of this earth, but nevertheless stamped with a heavenly form. We have a strange faculty of recognition of that which is God-like. We know that we are not pure, elemental beings, but are compounded, a mixture of earth and heaven, of temporal and eternal, of mortal and immortal.

“Mind that which is pure in you to guide you to God” says George Fox, and good advice it is, for as we find that within ourselves which is worthy of high love – the clear thought, the generous impulse, the rush of unity that binds us to the suffering of all creation – so indeed we are guided to God.

But it is not enough to look merely within ourselves. The God who is to be the object of our highest love cannot be a fragmentary part, however deep, of our own little personalities. “That which is pure within us” is not so much God himself, as his family likeness printed in us. It guides us to God, but we shall be deluded if we seek God only in our own soul. A dear friend of mine who left the Society of Friends to join the Roman Catholic Church, wrote that in the book of Christianity the chapter on “God in the Soul” would contain all that was meaningful to the Quaker. Perhaps there are Friends who think that. If so, I would urge them to think again, for such is not part of the testimony of our Society. The God whom we love and worship is not a

the life of the Meeting, or of the Church into His presence. An organization often comes to usurp the place of the spirit which founded it. Men come to love their government more than their country, to love their party more than justice, and to love their church more than God. It is temptingly easy to love the Society of Friends more than we love God – its noble history, its endearing charm, its ancient observances, its manifold activities claim our attention and affection until we almost forget the object of the whole structure. I have heard it said of Friends that they talk too much in Meeting about “Quakerism.” We are given to self-observation, we twirl ourselves around in our fingers with sincere self-satisfaction, we bask in the world’s praise, and we lose the sight of God’s face because we are absorbed in our own benevolent contours. But if we do this, we are lost; our meetings lose their freshness, our spirit loses its spring, we lose even our love for one another, and unless we rediscover the love of God itself whose expression is the reason and purpose of our Society, the very Society that we cherish dwindles into nothingness. There are no more tragic instances of the neglect of the love of God than are to be found in religious conflicts and separations. That the name of the loving Savior should be the occasion for so much strife and bitterness through history is a mystery of suffering almost as great as that of the cross itself. Yet why have these things happened? It is because we have not loved God enough, and not loved Christ enough, and not loved each other enough. How can the broken body of Christ on earth be healed, if not by love? Will not notions of God, and notions of Christ, and theories, and theologies, necessary as they are, lead us into contention, and bitterness, if we have not much love? And can we not draw our sundered parts together in a common love for God, for Jesus, and for one another?

If our lives, our homes, and our churches but imperfectly express the love of God, what can we say of our

If our meetings for worship grow dry, and our meetings for business contentious, is it not because we do not visit each other in our homes, in the spirit of worship? If we meet only for a brief time on Sunday, how can we truly get to know and to love one another? Let a few concerned people invite members of the Meeting to their homes, for a simple meal, and a period of worship, and of reading together, and of sharing the food of the spirit, and see how the life of the meeting will spring up. Are any of us in a position where it would embarrass us to bring up matters of religion in our home among our guests? Have we relegated the love of God to a part of our time, a part of our life? Have we tried to shut God up in a Meeting House? If so, let us look to our life, and that quickly, for the Lord is not to be fobbed off with polite entertainment in the parlor; if any room in our house is closed to Him he will not visit us for long. Let us see that He is welcome everywhere, in our social relationships as well as in Meeting. Let us “walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every man,” and not rest content until we have shared the deeper life and joy with all our neighbors. Within our own Society let us revive the noble practice of the “religious opportunity,” and visit in the homes of Friends in the conscious exercise of the love of God. Let us each make our own home the Lord’s house, where it is easy and natural to find opportunities for worship and spiritual fellowship. Let us make our table the Lord’s table, from which none of his children can be excluded by reason of race, color, or social position. Then if we sit thrice daily at His table, can we long endure to be served by those who do not sit at meat with us, or to feed on elaborate dishes in rich settings? For in His house we are all servants, and at His table the food is good bread, not kickshaws and spices.

Not only do we often fail to bring the life of our home under God’s love, but – strange paradox – we fail to bring

figment of our personal imagination, but is the Father of all creation. We seek Him, therefore, not only in ourselves, but in His other children. In a large family some are more, and some are less like the father, and so in the world of men we see a better likeness of our other Father in some than in others. There are some who live close to the Father, and daily take on more of His likeness, while others busy themselves with affairs of dust, and continually dilute their heavenly part with dross. Let us then mind that which is pure, not only in ourselves but in those greater than us, and it will lead us to God.

Nor should we confine ourselves to our own times. We who are alive at this moment are but a tiny part of the great host of God’s children, and indeed bear less of His likeness than many who have gone before. In the records and writing of the saints there is a great treasure of coins minted fresh from the golden fires of the King’s treasury. Read Woolman, Fox, and Penington; go further afield and dwell with Brother Lawrence and Saint Francis; go even to the poor in spirit, the agnostics and wrestlers in vain, the Huxleys and Arnolds, and see how they are all minted from the same die. There are at least ten books written in the past three or four hundred years which can hardly be read without experiencing a vision of God. Go back further, to Augustine and to Paul; read the Epistles as if they were written yesterday – as in God’s time they were – and see the Lord wrestling with a day even more terrible than ours.

And then, when we have finished with the saints, we find that they have one testimony, that brightly as the light of God shines in their faces, there is one greater than they: an elder brother, so like indeed to his father that they can hardly be told apart. “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,” came the Word to Fox; “and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.” We return, after

wandering in many a spiritual wilderness, to the Gospels, and find there a Christ without who answers to the Christ within, a spirit so full of life and power and truth that as we walk with Him we come to know the Father of us all. As we follow him in his ministry, in his teachings, parables, and actions, so simple that a child can understand them, yet so profound that the wisest philosopher often but confuses their meaning, something in us goes out to something in him, in a strange electric spark of recognition. Follow him further, as he sets his face towards Jerusalem, and feel the eternal weight of the Passion story, where each word moves in majesty to the terrible doom, writ in time and yet out of time. Follow him even to the foot of his cross where the broken heart of God pours forth in water and blood, and discover yourself strangely not only in Jerusalem, but in falling Babylon, in burning Rome, in bombed London, in starving France, in the reeking slums of the City of Brotherly Love itself. Unveil the picture in your mind, if you dare of the massed sin and suffering of the world, past, present and future, this terrible ocean of tortured bodies and tormented minds, of suffering innocence and triumphant stupidity on which our middle-class ark floats so insecurely. See the way of God rejected, the laws of God flouted, the love of God perverted, the purpose of God thwarted. Descend, if you dare, to that Hell where all faith is self-deceit, all love is lust, all honor is trickery, all purpose is illusion, where the black waters of universal chaos sweep unhindered through the unhinged windows of the mind. Cry the last despairing cry of the sinking soul: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Say, with George Fox, that you are "in a measure sensible of Christ's sufferings, and what he went through." You can go no further than Christ has gone. There is a bottom to all despair, and He has touched it. Incredible miracle, that God is to be found where we think

and to set a high value on those things which no man can take from us – our integrity, our righteousness, our love for all men, and our communion with God.

The love of God expresses itself not only in individual life, but in family life. A man and wife whose love for each other is part of their love for God, discover a more splendid love and a more exuberant life than those who love each other only. The popular books and films of today teach us that the most important question a man can ask about the lady he wants to marry is, "Does she love me?" It would be considered a most improper infringement of individual rights to ask, "Does she love God?" But no marriage is secure if it is based on purely self-contained affection. We are discovering to our cost that the romantic molasses on which our young people feed is a poor substitute for the nourishing food of God's love.

Our relationship with our friends and neighbors also can be trivial or fruitful, according to whether they are based on the love of self or the love of God. That is not to say that we must always go about with serious faces and black Bibles. There is a large place in life for the pure occasion of fellowship – the dance, the convivial company, the hike, the swim, the game. There may even be a place for the bleak complexities of the suburban bridge party, or the manufactured elegance of a formal dinner. But if all our social relationships are of this kind, how poor we are! If we never know our friends "in that which is eternal," if our friendship is confined to polite pleasantries and physical exercise, how bodiless it is! Perhaps the greatest source of spiritual weakness of our day is that we have not subjected our social relationships to the discipline of God's Love. In reacting against the formal "family prayers" and the black-visaged religion of a day that feared God too much and loved Him too little, we have cast aside many practices of great value to the perfecting of our love.

and bitterness that generations will hardly fill up? How can we love the Japanese, who threaten to destroy the balance of the world that forms our particular environment? How can a German love the English and the Americans, who are threatening to starve him for a second time into submission, and who are exposing him to a defeat that will bring revenge, desolation and chaos to his homeland?

There is only one answer to these questions: we can only love our enemies, we can only truly forgive a wrong, by the overflow of the love and forgiveness of God. Forgiveness is more difficult than many of us realize, especially those who have not had much to forgive. When someone does us a desperate injury, or what is worse, when someone does such an injury to something or to someone that we love, forgiveness comes hard. We may recognize, intellectually, that forgiveness is desirable, we may even try to persuade ourself that we have forgiven, but underneath there will be a hard lump on our hearts and a scar in our memory. True forgiveness comes only in a flood of divine love, that wells up in our souls from places too deep to be hurt by mortal injury, love that draws us together with God and with our enemy in a healing, uniting experience. Perhaps the greatest fruit of the love of God for the individual soul is the ability to be born again each moment, in a world newly created and set free from the clinging bondage of the past through love and forgiveness. In such a world there is no fear, for fear is not innate, but is built on the experience of past defeats unresolved and past injuries unforgiven. Perfect love indeed drives out fear, because it breaks the cruel thread of history, and sets us above the hideous determinism of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a revenge for a defeat. The love of God again makes us free, for it draws us to set a low value on those things wherein we are subject to others – our wealth, our position, our reputation, and our life –

Him to be most absent. “If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.”

It is the testimony, not only of the Gospels but of all the saints, that after the horror of Good Friday comes the incredible splendour of Easter Morn. After the ocean of darkness and death, there comes indeed an infinite ocean of light and love which flows over the ocean of darkness. After the veil of the temple is rent and darkness has covered the earth the stone is rolled away, the risen Christ appears, the spirit of God descends as a flame of fire, the band of scattered and disillusioned fishermen become the seed of the living Church, the new body of Christ. Whatever doubts the higher criticism may cast upon the details of the gospel story, its historic and spiritual truth speaks to the Christ within us, for Christ is risen not only in the Jerusalem of Caesar’s empire, but in the heart of everyone who comes by suffering and love into fellowship with creation. These days are teaching us what in the fat days of the past we had forgotten – that creation comes not by wishing, not by easy words or polite formulas, but by agonizing love and blessed suffering. So a child is born, so a poem is written, so the Kingdom of Heaven is founded, and by no other means. To share in creation, this indeed is to be a child of God, for as we love and suffer ourselves, so we share in the love and suffering of God, and so we come to know Him and to love Him.

Brother Lawrence gives us this extraordinary account of his conversion: “That in the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit appear, he received a high view of the Providence and Power of God which has never since been effaced from his soul. That this view had set him perfectly loose from the world, and had kindled in him such a love for God, that he

could not tell whether it had increased in above forty years that he had lived since." If, with Brother Lawrence, we could really see a tree, in all its intricate relationships with the whole of creation, we should indeed see God, and be inflamed with love for Him. For every created thing is stamped in some measure with the image of its creator, were we sensitive enough to perceive it, and from the winter and spring of a tree, from the contemplation of its complex ancestry, its birth, its nourishment, its death, and its descendants, and from the love of its strength and beauty we might indeed come to have a "high view" of God. But not many of us are Brother Lawrences, not many of us are at once simple and sensitive enough to see God's image in a living tree, nor even in the living men and women that we see around us. For our hard hearts and insensitive spirits God has given a plainer manifestation of the quality of his love, that those who cannot see Him in a living tree may perceive Him hanging from a dead one.

The love of God exhibits many of the phases of human love. In the beginning there is frequently an experience of intense excitement, which may be repeated from time to time, corresponding to that type of human love called by the fleshly-minded psychologists, "cardiac-respiratory." It is analogous to the first excitement of the young couple in love, and may be accompanied by the same quickening of the heart and breath. It comes upon us when we are in the presence of a "high view of God," that commands all our adoration and wonder. It is accompanied by a strange sense of *invasion*, of mutuality, of the love of God for us going out towards us as our love goes out towards Him. This sense of mutuality is the secure evidence, for those who possess it, that the God they love is indeed without as well as within, a being whose existence depends on us in no way, however much our existence depends on Him. The joy of such an

shake His love. In primitive times men thought that they could please God by making sacrifices and burnt offerings. But the prophet soon discerns that God desires mercy, and not sacrifice, and that the thousands of rams, the ten thousands of rivers of oil, the costly churches, the elaborate ritual, where they are devoid of justice and mercy, are an insult to the integrity and righteousness of God Himself. But we cannot show justice and mercy to God! He is above our justice, and we are not in a position to show Him mercy. We can only truly express our love for God, then, in expressing our love for his family, for His creation. By no direct act can we do anything for God, except as we show our love towards those whom He loves. The love of God, therefore, leads us directly into the love of our neighbor, and even into the love of our enemies; for our neighbor and our enemies are beloved of Him, and as we exclude them from the circle of our concern, so we exclude Him also. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Indeed, the love of God is the only sure foundation for the love of neighbor. Without the love of God the command to love our neighbor is a monstrous sarcasm, the imposition on mankind of impossible conflict between the moral sense and the will. For even though we may agree, intellectually, that the height of morality is to love our neighbor, how can we do this if our neighbor is not lovable, and more, if our neighbor is also our enemy? How can I love the Germans, who with seeming wantonness have destroyed the prim, spinsterish suburb in which I first grew, who have unroofed the chapel in which I first learned the things of God, and the meeting house in which I joined the Society of Friends? How can we love those who out of the lust for power have crushed under foot the tender plant of European liberty and cooperation, and made of Europe a hell of hatred, hunger,

body of the past, without which we cannot grow. If we confine our spiritual fellowship to this thin skin of things we call the present, we are in grave danger of spiritual death. The surface of a body is nourished from below, and if cut off from the deeper layers it will die. So does our spiritual life decay if it is cut off from the past. If we neglect the records of those who have been close to God, and especially if we neglect the greatest record of all, the Bible, we cannot hope to maintain a full and conscious love of God.

If love is to grow, it must not only be nourished, it must be expressed. Love that is one-sided is not perfect, and to be complete, love must be mutual and must find expression. If we never show our love to each other, how can love grow into mutual unity? It is a poor marriage in which a man never kisses his wife. Unless love is expressed, it turns in on itself, and becomes cancerous. Unless we allow our vision of God, and our love for God, to overflow in all directions, into every corner of our life and activity, it will harden into religiosity and hypocrisy. There is nothing that brings religion more justly into disrepute than the man whose religion feeds entirely on itself, who lives within a world of abstract notions about God and His plan of salvation.

“To be good only, is to be
A God, or else a Pharisee.”

says Blake. And to be “religious” only, in the narrow sense, to be shut up in a little world of purely personal experience and belief, is to be a Pharisee.

But how can we express our love for God? We express our love for earthly friends by doing things which will give them satisfaction. But what can we do for God? Surely there is nothing that we can do for Him, who is so far above us. No word of ours can affect His majesty, no deed of ours can

experience is too great to be borne for very long, so that for most of us these experiences are rare, and some of us perhaps hardly experience them at all. But this peculiar exalted state is not of course the only, nor is it the most important manifestation of the love of God. Just as the love of man and wife is more constantly and perhaps more truly expressed in the quiet devotion of everyday life than in the ecstasies of courtship, so the love of God also is expressed in a constant devotion and obedience, seated as much in the will as in the emotions. There is the wine of God’s love, as expressed in the exalted experience. But there is also the bread of His love, the daily bread without which we could not live, the devotion and obedience which we give to Him in the commonplace tasks of life. Brother Lawrence again says “that our sanctification did not depend upon changing our works, but in doing that for God’s sake, which commonly we do for our own.” If therefore we are a sober, businesslike, unemotional person, as little given to celestial visions as Benjamin Franklin, let us not say that the practice of the love of God is something which does not concern us. We can still eat His bread, even if he withholds for a time His wine. And let those who are otherwise inclined beware a little of spiritual intoxication, and remember that the surest remedy for the deadly sin of spiritual pride is to take bread as well as wine in our spiritual sacrament.

Love, wherever it appears, is a living, growing thing, and follows the laws of life rather than of machines. It must therefore be nourished, or it will die. It is nourished by attention to the object that inspires it, and it dies by forgetfulness and neglect. Love feeds on the presence of the loved one. We have all had the experience of losing a friend by neglect. Someone, perhaps, who has been very dear to us, removes to a distant place where we cannot visit them. At first the friendship is kept up by correspondence, but

gradually other interests crowd in upon the attention, letters become fewer, and finally cease, and the very thought of our friend drops out of our life. So it is too often with our love for God. In youth perhaps we are privileged to receive a "high view of God" which commands our love and service. But as the years go by the vision fades, the cares of business and of social life crowd in upon us, we take up bridge and golf, we come to move in a circle in which it is unfashionable to be religious, our attendance at worship and our practice of prayer become formal and spasmodic, and the bright flame of our early devotion cools to a little brief ash of occasional nostalgia. It is tragically easy to exchange the eternal treasure for a stale mess of earthly pottage, for our love cools by imperceptible degrees if it is not renewed. The renewal, this constant new birth, is accomplished in the way that all love is renewed: by contact with the object of love. It is the principal task of the *discipline* of the life of Godly love to keep us constantly aware of God's presence, and His love-inspiring attributes, and of His great love for us. It is a light and gracious discipline, but it requires a certain conscious attention, particularly in its early stages, before its observances have become habitual, and also in its later stages, when habit may degenerate into formality. It is bar each person to find for himself those observances which are most helpful, but there are certain broad experiences that we cannot afford to neglect. We must allot some time for the conscious lifting-up of the soul to God. Some find it necessary to allot a specific time each day, for instance on retiring, or on rising. Some find it possible to set their face Godward at all manner of odd moments – in the street, in a moment of waiting, in the midst of reading, conversation, or business, or even, like Brother Lawrence, when washing dishes. There is a quiet, open place in the depths of the mind, to which we can go many times in the

day and lift up our soul in praise, thankfulness and conscious unity. With practise this God-ward turn of the mind becomes an almost constant direction, underlying all our other activities. As a compass swings towards the north immediately after each disturbance, so we swing towards the Pole that draws the life of our being the moment a temporary distraction is removed.

Another essential part of the discipline of the nourishment of love is the refreshment to be obtained from fellowship with the family of God, that is, with His creation, both that which is here present with us, and that which lies in the past. There is a renewal of the love of God to be found in nature, in the unbelievable drama of beauty and order that lies all about us, and as we consider the lilies of the field and the sparrows of the city street we too can receive a "high view of the Providence and Power of God." The pure love of truth is but a colder version of the love of God, and when the selfless pursuit of truth leads us to awe and wonder, the most critical scientist may be led into an experience which is essentially religious. But for those of us who browse only on the foothills of natural knowledge, the love of God is most clearly revealed in those who have known Him best. It is as we hold converse with the Saints, both the spoken word of the living and the written record of the departed, that our love is renewed. This renewal of love should be the great task of our Meeting for Worship; it should be the central theme of all our ministry, and the prime object of our devotional reading. We have perhaps relied too much in our day on intercourse with the present only. We read only the book of the month, we listen only to the speaker of the hour, and we forget that we are but a small band of newcomers to the great Family of God. It is a peculiar disease of the modern mind to think that the present supersedes the past, and we need to recapture a sense of unity with the