

On Loving and Being Loved

1. My general thesis about what it means to love another is so to act as to optimize the limits of the other's freedom, just as I maintain that to be loved by another is so to experience the action of the other as to have the limits of one's freedom thus optimized.

2. But, then, one must ask how it is possible for one human being to love another, or to be loved by another, in the absolutely basic matter of our *optio fundamentalis* as human beings, i.e., our fundamental choice between an authentic and an inauthentic existence. The answer, it would seem, can only be the one Bultmann gives in the concluding pages of *Jesus*, when he argues that the only possibility of forgiveness being given and received is through the *word*. In other words, to love another in this absolutely basic matter of her or his own decision simply as a human being can be nothing other than to confront her or him with her or his own authentic possibility. Correspondingly, to be loved by another in this respect can only be to be thus confronted by the other.

3. There is every good reason, then, why, as Bultmann once explained to Karl Barth, one can be confronted by the gospel, or by the grace proclaimed by the gospel, only by being confronted with the law and the promise, which is to say, with one's own original possibility of authentic existence. The "*that*" of being thus confronted, as distinct from the "*what*" of the possibility itself, is precisely the event of being loved, although one can actually experience and speak of the event as such only insofar as one actualizes the possibility with which one is thereby confronted.

4. If one can speak, then, of "the remembered love of Jesus for his disciples," in the sense that he was responded to and remembered by his followers as one who loved them, this in no way entitles one to speak of "the moral greatness of Jesus" or of his "having been good and great beyond what we should otherwise have dreamed possible for man," in the sense in which such language would normally be understood (John Knox, *The Church and the Reality of Christ*: 105, 54, 86). Rather, all that one can mean by such speaking is that Jesus is responded to and remembered by all members of his

church as the one through whom they have been decisively confronted with their own authentic possibility—the *that* or event of this confrontation being the event of his love for them.

5. This much, however, one clearly has every good reason to mean. For it is just this that the Fourth Gospel evidently has in mind when it speaks of Jesus' having loved his disciples. If what it means to abide in his love is to keep his commandment(s), then evidently his commandment to the disciples that they love one another is itself, in its *that*, as distinct from its *what*, his love for them (15:10 ff.). And so, too, as Bultmann has shown, in the case of Paul, whose talk about the "love" and "obedience" of Christ has precisely this meaning.

6. It may be worth asking whether it is not just this that Wilhelm Herrmann also intended to refer to when he spoke, however misleadingly, of "the inner life of Jesus." At any rate, if Hans Grass is right in his interpretation of Herrmann's intention—according to which, his whole conception of Jesus is in terms of his meaning for us, as distinct from his being in himself—it would appear that this is indeed what Herrmann was concerned to lift up.

7. Still more certain, I think, is that this is what Marxsen very much has in mind when he says that, for the earliest community, Jesus not only *taught* a possibility but also *actualized* it (*Das Neue Testament als Buch der Kirche*: 109 f.). Jesus not only founded a religion that others could join him in practicing and teaching, according to which the general truth about being human is that one has the possibility of faith working through love, but Jesus' having done precisely this—the *that* of his having done it—confronted and confronts his hearers with the love that frees them to actualize that very possibility.