

places the utterance of tenderest piety that seeks after God, and finds him, and is aglow with warmest love for him; can not do without him; of itself thinks of him; is continually busy with him; and directs every utterance of the soul to him and to him alone. And in this love there is a knowledge of God, which no analytical study, no work of the imagination, and no power of the will can bring us. It is to love, and in this love itself to enjoy eternal life. And thus to know God with an intimacy such as you would deem would not be seemly in a creature. Until in the hereafter every wall of separation shall fall away, and God in us and we in him shall be the perfection of highest Love.

“THOU HAST NOT LAID ME UPON  
THINE HEART.”

To the superficial mind nothing seems so easy as to love. Of course, one loves himself. It is not at all difficult to love God. The only trouble sometimes is to love one's neighbor as oneself. Even this is not because there is no will and no power to love, but because at times this neighbor makes it almost impossible.

This is altogether a mistaken view. To love God is far more difficult than to love one's neighbor. It can safely be said that where there are ten who love their neighbor, there is at most only one who is consumed with love for God.

Jesus, therefore, has put love for God in the

foreground as the first and great commandment. There is less complaint in the Bible about lack of brotherly love than about forgetfulness of God. The Apostle shows that this was no Jewish exaggeration, when in his epistle to the Romans he reiterates the bitter complaint of the Psalmist that: "There is none that seeketh after God, no, not one." This does not exclude the fact that love for God can be poured out in the soul. It is frequently observed that this Divinely-outpoured love which at first was small and weak, afterwards became stronger and more tender. But take a man by himself, as he grows up by nature, not only among good-for-nothings and criminals, but equally much among cultivated and honorable people, there is no love in that man for God. He does not seek God. Indeed, there is no one who really loves God in the way in which God requires it.

For a long time this seemed to be different, but it was appearance only. Even at the beginning of the last century it was still the rule among the rank and file of our people to favor religion and to abhor every form of atheism. Without willing to be called pious, no one desired to be known as irreligious, and on solemn occasions the name of the Lord was always remembered. Are people worse now than formerly? By no means. They have emancipated themselves more generally. But on the whole people now are what they were before. Only with this difference, that now unbelief is preached more boldly from the pulpit and university chairs, in the press and in open meetings. Has this practice provoked a

single protest? Not at all. On the contrary, in the course of an ordinary lifetime the faith has been abandoned in ever widening circles, and there is almost no more shame now in being credited with atheism. Even this is nothing new. The selfsame condition prevailed in Israel in the days of its spiritual apostacy. This is convincingly shown when God himself through Isaiah utters this reproach against his people: "Thou hast lied, for thou hast not laid Me upon thine heart" (Is. 57:11, Dutch version).

It is very necessary therefore to examine still more closely what it is to love the Lord. Necessary also for believers, since even among them there glitters much that seems like the gold of love, but which is no gold. The first step is to realize that "to love God" is not the easiest, but the hardest thing to which faith calls us. Ordinarily love is taken as willingness to consider others and to do all we can to make them happy. This is seen on every side where philanthropy awakens. Love there directs itself first, most generously and easily, to the unfortunate, and it is a matter of congratulation that this generously interpreted philanthropy is carried, in these days, on such large scales. This teaches us to bring offerings, it invites devotion, it lessens much suffering.

But with this aspect of love, we make no advances with God. He is blessed forever more. He is not in need of anything. In nothing is he in need of us. We can furnish him no supply. Pity, which gives rise to philanthropic love, can

never inspire us when it concerns the ever Blessed One. Here another kind of love is required. A love which springs from the perception that we belong with God by reason of our origin and manner of existence; that we are his creatures; and that therefore we can have no reason for being, no object for existence, and no future destiny except in him. The hollow idea that we have a reason for existence in ourselves is robbery committed against God. It is the wheel which detached from the wagon wants to roll on by itself. And when a man has thus actually detached himself from God, and from the heights of his imagined independence has turned himself to God, to love him as an outside something, and calls that love, it is worse than caricature and mockery. It is the outrage of love, which does not make us holy, but accuses and condemns us before God.

To love God is to abandon everything that separates us from God, and every moment of our life to live wholly for God. To love God is to reconsecrate to God what became separated from God. It is a motion in the soul which is born in us, when magnetizing power goes out from God, and draws us to God. A pressure and an inclination in us, which leaves us no rest for a moment; and every time pushes aside, or back everything that separates or draws us away from God, and thus leaves us free to hold communion with God.

This is first observed in prayer. Take heed, says the Apostle (I Pet. 3:7) that your prayers

be not hindered. You feel this yourself when you want to pray, and cannot, because of the things that stand between you and God. Your thoughts, inclinations and feelings must first be detached from them all. They must be driven out from the mind. And then God comes back to you, and you can pray again. And what happens in prayer one moment must happen in every particular of your whole life; for only then will true love for God begin to awaken in you.

Jesus had this in view when he said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." These four together constitute the inner organization of our spirit. These four get implicated every time in egotistical or worldly interests. And therefore they operate wrongly. They separate us from the Holy One. And this is love, that we detach all four from these wrong connections and turn them, not in part, but entirely, to God.

This is not really an offering. An offering is something of our own, which we could keep for ourselves, but which we freely give up to another. Nothing is said of this here, and never can be. Our heart is from God, our soul is from God, our mind is from God, and all our powers are his property. Hence we bring God nothing. We but return what belongs to him. And when we do this, and do it in such a way that our heart and soul and mind and strength, all four, direct themselves to him, and serve him altogether, the separation is ended and love celebrates her triumph.

Then it becomes the shamefacedness of the thief, who returns what he had stolen and makes no boast of merit; but prays to be forgiven.

This is what the prophet calls "to lay God upon the heart." Love is a tender, touching emotion, which needs symbols. This gave rise in olden times to the custom among lovers to wear each other's picture on the heart. It meant that one had given the other heart and hand, and that now one wears this symbol on the heart as a continual warning not to let the heart, thus sealed, for a moment go out to another, but to keep it faithfully for the one that is loved. And to lay God upon the heart means that the choice has been made, that the heart has been given to God, and that now the symbol of God's name is placed upon it, to seal the heart for God, and closely to guard the heart for God and God alone.

The case remains always the same. It is not to love God in order to bring him something, but to lose self in God because we belong to him, and because by this consecration of ourselves to him alone, can the end of our existence be realized. To do all this, not in the mechanical form of a calculation, but through the losing of self in the ecstasy of tenderest love, is the first and great commandment; this is to know the Lord, to feel oneself as a child with his Father, and to be inwardly consumed by the love of God which is poured out into our hearts. The question remains, how many there are, even among the pious in the land, who in this way have laid God upon their heart?

## "WITH ALL."

The commandment that we shall love our neighbor as ourselves is so strongly emphasized in these days, that among the rank and file of people the first and great commandment is more and more forgotten. That it is everyone's calling first of all not only to serve the Lord, but to love him—who thinks of this?

This substitution of the second in the place of the first commandment has captivated the popular mind to such an extent, that even among believers love for God has lost much warmth and tenderness. Appeals in the house of prayer for charitable and philanthropic work get more eager hearing than the far higher call of love for God. This changing and turning about of the order here is fatal. He who loves God will also love his brother. But it does not hold true in every case that he who loves his brother also loves God. The first commandment guarantees the second, but not the second the first. To be warmly affectioned toward God, and cold toward a brother, is unthinkable. But many men and women are prominent in all sorts of charitable and philanthropic works who are stone-cold toward God, and who at times even deny his existence.

It is necessary, therefore, that the counterpoise be placed in the scale, and that throughout the church the great commandment to love God be solemnly impressed upon the heart. The voice of this call should everywhere be loudly heard again. And the preacher would have a right understanding of his duty if week by week he