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. 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 fulfilled 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. 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; 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"—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 scrutinizes himself and, if possible, helps others (insofar as one can help another, for God is the true helper) 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 relationship 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 poetry, 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 sky of cleverness, then he is not a poet. Nor is it 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. Furthermore, 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 cannot 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 idealises 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 devalues 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 love 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 proximities 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 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 clef between body and spirit, despised love as sensuality. But this was a misunderstanding, an extravagance of spirituality. Moreover, it may easily be shown that Christianity is far from unreasonably wishing to turn the sensuals against a man by teaching him extravagance. Does not Paul say it is better to marry than to burn? No, for the very reason that Christianity in truth is spirit, it understands the sensual 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 desire 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, egocentricty, 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 inklings 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 inductively 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." 44

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, discovers 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 I 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 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 willfulness about it—unconsciously so far as it is in the power of natural predispositions, consciously so far as it utterly surrenders itself to this power and consents to it. However hidden, however unconscious this willfulness 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
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, 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 being being recognized 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 by 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. 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 characterized 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, 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. It 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. 48 He who in describing Christianity as the highest omits the middle term, offence, sins against it: he commits an
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.