

Not Only The Actuality But Also The Possibility

It is a fault of our theology that it does not inquire into the nature of God's love, and that the term is supposed to carry with it nothing more than the emotional sentiment which we are accustomed to associate with affection. And yet the nature of God's love yields to analysis. Here again, the analogy of human fatherhood holds. As a father's love is something more than a mere effusion of sentiment, so is God's; and a juster appreciation of the true quality of God's love will throw a flood of light upon the central doctrine of Christian theology.

First, then, we find that God's love involves the singling out of the individual, the recognition of each in the rights of his personality. To believe in God's love means primarily to believe that I am not lost in an indistinguishable mass of humanity, but that God has singled me out, that God's eye is ever upon me, that my individual life has, in his sight, its own value.

But it means more than this: it means that God sees me not only as I am, but also as I may be, not only the actuality, but also the possibility, and that he longs to make that possibility real. He recognizes the purpose and the ideal of each man's life, and that purpose and ideal he has taken up into his own thought and purpose.

To have learned to know myself the object of God's love, to have become conscious of the divine eye singling me out and resting upon me, and to have awakened to the fact that God looks upon me not only as I am, but also as I may be, that God is ever comparing me with my ideal: what stronger motive could ever come into the life of man than this?

Could any representation of future judgment have softened the heart of Zacchaeus as did the sudden revelation flashed into his soul when Jesus singled him out in the crowd, that even he, the outcast among men, was an object of care and love to Jesus? How different the idea he must from that moment have had of his own life, of his value before God. This is the motive that Christianity brings into the life of man: the appreciation of his own humanity.

(The Kingdom of God: An Essay in Theology (The Bohlen Lectures, 1897), by Laurence Henry Schwab, New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1897, 170-171; Paragraph Structure Modified)